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Monitoring COVID-19 Impact on Refugees in Ethiopia

REPORT NO. 2
3 / March / 2021

Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement
WORLD BANK GROUP UNHCR

Results from the High-Frequency Phone Surveys of Refugees

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BACKGROUND

The World Bank Group, the Ethiopia Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (JDC) collaborated to integrate *refugees* in the ongoing High-Frequency Phone Surveys (HFPS)[2] . The World Bank-led HFPS of households seek to monitor the economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic among Ethiopian nationals and refugees. The main objective is to inform timely and adequate policy and program responses. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ethiopia, two rounds of data collection of refugees were completed between September and November 2020. The first round of the joint national and refugee HFPS was implemented between the 24 September and 17 October 2020[3] and the second round between 20 October and 20 November 2020.

Ethiopia reported its first case of COVID-19 on 13 March 2020. The number of reported cases reached 88,434 by the completion of the first round of data collection and further increased to 104,879 cases at the end of the second round with 1,620 deaths recorded. In addition to virus containment measures, recent political events impacted the data collection phase of the HFPS. About two weeks into the second round of data collection, on 4 November, violent conflict erupted in the regional state of Tigray between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the federal Government of Ethiopia. This affected data collection, primarily by disrupting internet and phone connectivity. Consequently, the response rate from the Eritrean refugee population in the Tigray region was low at 79 percent.

The refugee samples for both the first and second rounds are representative for refugees with a working phone number for three survey domains[4]: (i) Refugees in Addis Ababa; (ii) Eritrean refugees; and (iii) Somali refugees.[5] The total number of completed interviews were 1,676 refugee households in the first round and 1,429 refugee households in the second round. Due to the connectivity disruptions in the second round of the survey, we obtained 87 percent total response rate – 93 percent for refugees in Addis Ababa, 89 percent among Somali refugees, and 79 percent among Eritrean refugees. This Survey Brief focuses on comparing the first and second rounds of HFPS data collected on the following topics: Access to food and medicines, school enrollment and educational activities during the pandemic, employment dynamics, income loss, and assistance received.

HIGHLIGHTS OF IMPACTS ON REFUGEES – ROUND 2

The HFPS findings reveal that households' ability to buy medicines and staple food items has slightly improved among Eritrean refugees and refugees in Addis Ababa in the month between the first and second round of data collection. However, access to food items declined among Somali refugees between the two rounds, likely the result of the acute loss of income observed for this group.

[1] The team would like to thank the Ethiopian Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (JDC) for their vision, commitment to this work, and collaboration in the efforts of data collection and reporting. In particular, the team would like to thank Ato Addisu Kebenessa (ARRA), Ato Kiros Kinfe (ARRA), Mathijs le Rutte (UNHCR), Charlotte Ridung (UNHCR), Carolyn Ndawula (UNHCR) and Cleve Massamba (UNHCR) for their contributions and support. Particular mention goes to Theresa Beltramo and Ibrahima Sarr, who contributed to the sampling of this study.

[2] In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face surveys were not feasible due to mobility restrictions and the risk of infection between respondents and enumerators.

[3] Results of this round can be accessed on https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/brief/phone-survey-data-monitoring-covid-19-impact-on-firms-and-households-in-ethiopia

[4] For more detailed information on the survey methodology, please refer to https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/281721608634113218/monitoring-covid-19-impacts-on-refugees-in-ethiopia-survey-methodology-document

[5] More precisely, Eritrean refugees are those served by UNHCR Sub-Office Shire (99.9 percent of whom are of Eritrean origin), and Somali refugees are refugees served by the UNHCR Sub-Office Jijiga (97.7 percent of whom are of Somali origin). Refugees served by the UNHCR Representation in Addis Ababa include all refugees registered in Addis Ababa with 87 percent of Eritrean origin, 7 percent of Yemeni origin, and 2 percent of Somali origin.

- Access to primary and secondary school are highest among Somali refugees, followed by refugees in Addis Ababa, and lowest among Eritrean refugee children. However, the 2020 school registration was lowest among Somali refugee households.
- Refugee children's engagement in distance learning activities in primary and secondary schools have deteriorated by 13 and 30 percentage points, respectively, between the first round and second round, across the total refugee households.
- Refugees lost jobs as a result of the pandemic. About 28 percent of refugee respondents had a job before the pandemic. Yet, 7 months into the pandemic, employment dropped was 10 percentage points.
- Assistance received by refugee households during the pandemic has increased by 41 percentage points for *free food*, 26 percentage points for *food or cash for work*, and 35 percentage points for *direct cash transfers* in the month preceding the second round relative to the same reference period in the first round.

ACCESS TO NECESSITIES

Access to basic necessities, such as food and medicine is an important indication of wellbeing. We assessed refugees' access to food and medicine by asking households, if they were able to buy enough medicine and enough of the most important food items during the week preceding the survey. The HFPS findings reveal that refugee households' ability to buy medicines and staple food items has slightly increased between round 1 and round 2 of the survey a month later (Figure 1) and are able to access most of the essential items compared to the national population.

Among refugee households, which were not able to access basic necessities, Somali refugees seemed to be most affected. Compared to the first round, the inability of Somali refugee households to buy teff and maize during the second round period declined by 11 and 6 percentage points respectively (Figure 2). Among refugee households, which could not access food items and medicine, there was a 29 percentage point increase between the first and second round in the number of households reporting income loss as the primary reason for not purchasing food.

Figure 1: Households' ability to buy items in the past seven days, percent

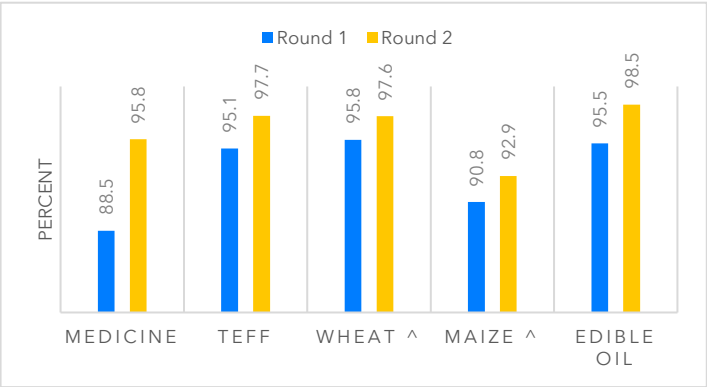
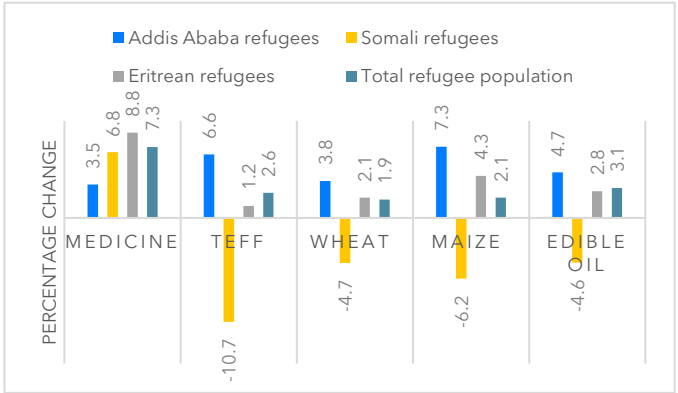


Figure 2: Households' ability to buy certain items by refugee sub-group, percentage point change (Round 2 relative to Round 1)



Note: Values indicated with ^ indicate that results in R2 are not statistically different between R2 and R1 at the 90 percent confidence interval based on a paired t-test.

EDUCATION

During November 2020, schools across Ethiopia reopened in a phased manner. Prior to schools reopening, households had the opportunity to register their children for the EC2013[6] school year. We asked, whether schools reopened during round 2 of data collection: For nearly 10 percent of refugee school-attending children, schools had reopened during round 2 of the survey. Despite schools reopening for the EC2013 school year, only 32 percent of all refugee households registered their children to go to school with a slightly higher school registration of

[6] The 2013 school year of the Ethiopian calendar refers to the school year of 2020/2021 in the Gregorian calendar.

refugee children in Addis Ababa, the majority of which are Eritrean refugees, compared to Eritrean refugees who live in-camps and Somali refugees. Although school access was highest among Somali refugees prior to COVID-19 at 65 percent, 70 percent of Somali households did not register their children for the EC2013 school year (Figure 3). Still, more Somali refugee households with school-attending children reported that schools resumed in-school learning (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Households that registered children for the EC2013 school year, percent

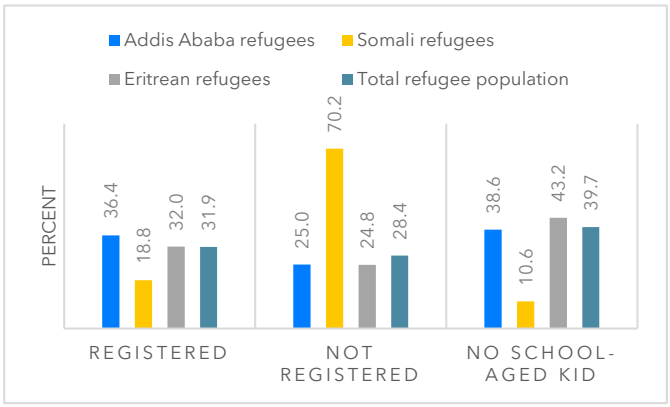
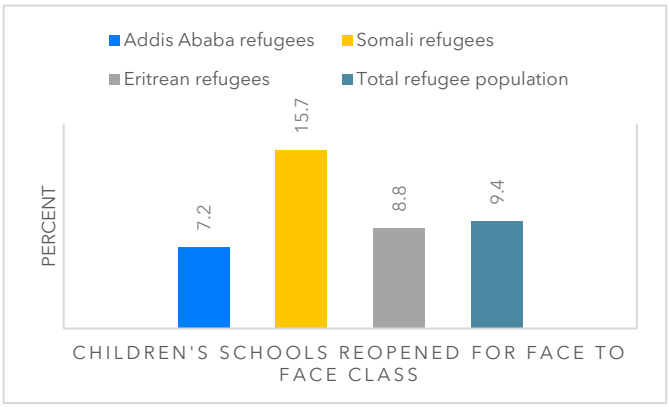


Figure 4: Households with school-attending children, whose schools reopened for the EC2013 school year, percent



The HFPS highlights refugee children's access to primary and secondary education and distance learning engagement during school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the total primary and secondary school-age refugee population in Ethiopia, only 20 percent of refugee children were attending primary school and 5 percent secondary schools in the pre-COVID-19 era. This is more than three times less than the rate of national households among whom almost 70 percent of primary-school aged children and 20 percent of secondary school-aged children attended school.[7] Of the three groups represented in these surveys, the HFPS results from both rounds show that primary and secondary school access is highest among Somali refugees. For instance, we find that 65 percent of children in Somali refugee households access primary school compared to 18 percent among refugees in Addis Ababa and 16 percent among Eritrean refugees in round 2 of the survey.

Among refugee households, whose children had been attending school prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, only 38 percent of primary school age children and 51 percent of households with secondary school age children participated in distance learning activities at the time of the first round between mid-September and mid-October 2020 (Figure 5), when schools in Ethiopia were still closed. Just four weeks later, students' engagement in distance learning activities for primary and secondary school, whose schools have not reopened, have drastically dropped by a further 13 and 30 percentage points, respectively (Figure 6). Among households with children engaged in distance learning, the most attended activity was "meeting with lesson teachers or tutors", which increased by 31 percentage points between the two rounds for both primary and secondary levels. However, fewer students in both education levels completed their "lesson assignments" provided by the instructors between the first and second rounds (Table 1).

[7] Wieser, Christina; Dampha, Nfamara K; Ambel, Alemayehu A.; Tsegay, Asmelash Haile; Mugera, Harriet Kasidi; Tanner, Jeffery.2020. Monitoring COVID-19 Impact on Refugees in Ethiopia : Results from a High-Frequency Phone Survey of Refugees (English). Monitoring COVID-19 Impact on Refugees in Ethiopia Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group.

Figure 5: Children, who attended school pre-pandemic, who are currently engaged in distance learning during school closure, percent

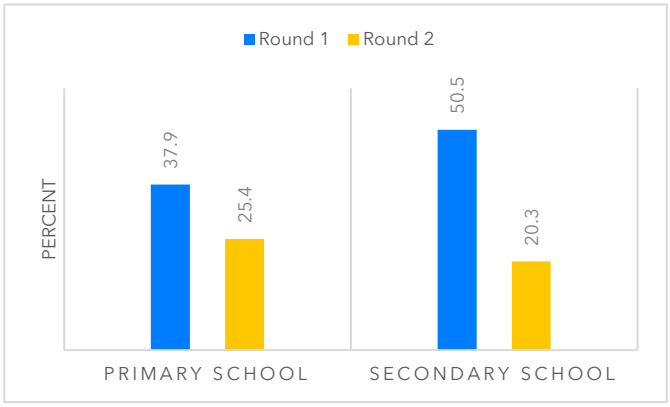


Figure 6: Children, who attended school pre-pandemic, who are currently engaged in distance learning during school closure, percentage point change (Round 2 Relative to Round 1)

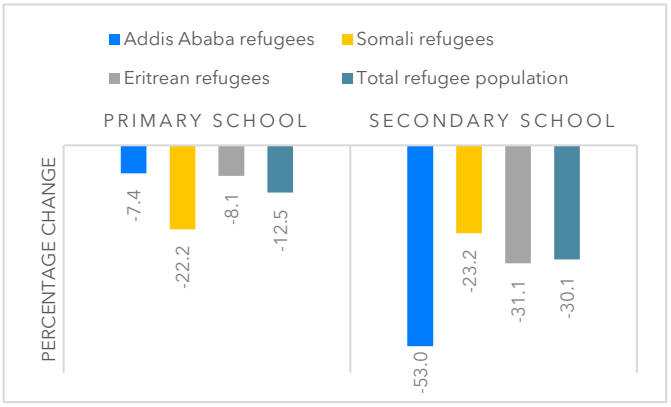


Table 1. Engagement in different learning activities during school closures for children engaging in distance learning activities, primary and secondary levels, percentage point change, Round 2 relative to Round 1

Learning activity	Primary School level				Secondary School level			
	Addis Ababa Refugees	Somali Refugees	Eritrean Refugees	Total Refugees	Addis Ababa Refugees	Somali Refugees	Eritrean Refugees	Total Refugees
Completed assignments provided by the teacher	-35.2	-40.8	-17.6	-27.9	-13.18	-36.40	-62.45	-51.97
Session/meeting with lesson teacher (tutor)	20.3	31.6	30.6	31.8	40.07	15.64	36.42	31.36
Watched educational TV programs	-8.8	-14.7	-3.7	-6.9	-33.35	-27.47	33.46	5.49
Used mobile learning apps	-4.8	-3.8	-1.0	-1.4	1.82	2.53	0.00	-4.26

EMPLOYMENT

Across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected employment and job security[8]. Though Ethiopia has fared better than other countries in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of job losses during the pandemic and has shown a recovery of employment rates to pre-COVID levels in recent months, jobs were lost at the onset of the pandemic, particularly affecting casual laborers and workers in the services sector[9]. The HFPS provides evidence about employment dynamics in refugee households during the pandemic. The findings reveal that the employment rate is significantly lower among refugee respondents compared to Ethiopian nationals. In the pre-COVID-19 era, 28 percent of refugee respondents had a job (Figure 7). At the time of round 1 and round 2, employment among refugee respondents dropped by 10 percentage points[10] and remained below 22 percent overall. Comparison of the sub-groups indicates that the employment rate is highest among Somali refugees (32 percent), followed by refugees in Addis Ababa (22 percent), and Eritrean refugees (17 percent) (Figure 7).

According to the HFPS results, the main sectors of employment among refugees are the service and industry sectors (approximately 70 and 25 percent). Among the total working refugee population, 67 percent of respondents report being self-employed during the second round of data collection, 13 percent are incentive workers , and 7 percent work in the private sector (Figure 8).

[8] Vishwanath T, Alik-lagrange A, Aghabarari L. Highly vulnerable yet largely invisible Forcibly displaced in the COVID-19-induced recession 2020.
[9] Ambel, Alemayehu A.; Cardona Sosa, Lina Marcela; Tsegay, Asmelash Haile; Wieser, Christina.2020. Monitoring COVID-19 Impacts on Households in Ethiopia : Results from Six Rounds of High-Frequency Household Phone Surveys (English). Monitoring COVID-19 Impacts on Households in Ethiopia Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group.
[10] Results on the current employment status are not statistically different between R2 and R1 at the 90 percet confidence interval based on a paired t-test.

Figure 7: Currently employed refugees, percent

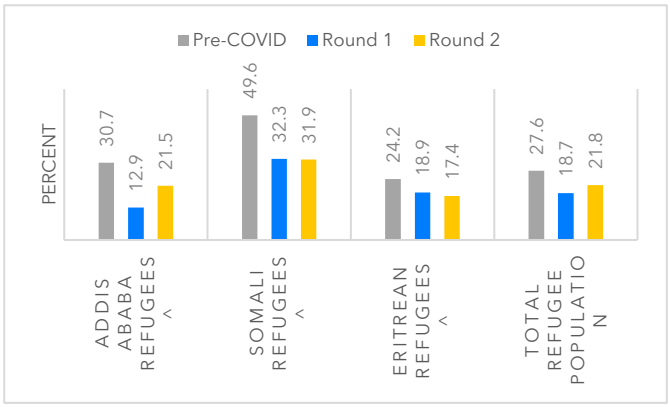
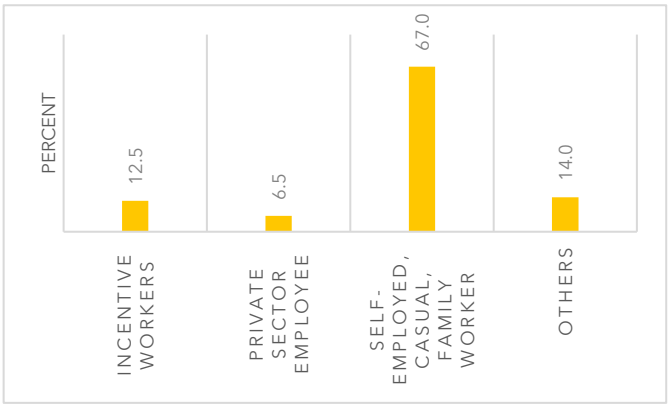


Figure 8: Type of employment in current work, R2, percent



Note: Values indicated with ^ indicate that results in R2 are not statistically different between R2 and R1 at the 90 percent confidence interval based on a paired t-test.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Job loss often reduces household income, especially among refugees with limited access to other non-labor sources of income, including national safety net programs.[11] The primary income sources for refugees include wages (especially for refugees in Addis Ababa), remittances, NGO assistance, and government support. The HFPS asked refugee households about non-farm business income changes in the four weeks preceding the first and second rounds of data collection. The results shows that the percentage of households which indicate non-farm business income as "the same as usual" increased by 39 percentage points in the second round relative to the first (Figure 9). Income from refugee-owned businesses is limited with less than 6 percent of the total refugee population owning a non-farm household business (Figure 10). Somali refugees are most likely to own a business (9 percent).

Figure 9: Change in household non-farm business income in past four weeks, percent

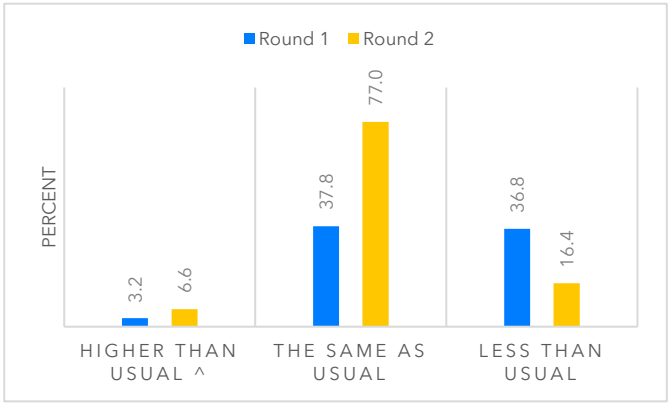
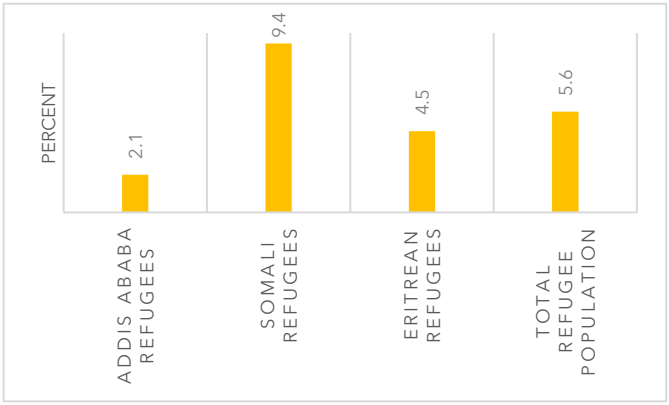


Figure 10: Refugee households owning businesses in the past four weeks, R2, percent



Note: Values indicated with ^ indicate that results in R2 are not statistically different between R2 and R1 at the 90 percent confidence interval based on a paired t-test. A t-test determines if there is a significant difference between the means of two groups.

ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected Ethiopians, nationals and refugees alike. By nature of their refugee status, refugee households tend to receive assistance from government, international organizations, and NGOs. The HFPS data shows that assistance received by refugee households significantly increased by 41 percentage points for *free food,* 26 percentage points for *food or cash for work*, and 35 percentage points for *direct cash transfer*, in the month preceding the second round of data collection relative to the same reference period in the first round (Figure 11, 12). Not surprisingly, Eritrean and Somali refugees, nearly all of whom live in camps, received more assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic than out-of-camp-based refugees in Addis Ababa. Out-of-camp refuges, those in Addis Ababa, do not receive food assistance or cash-based assistance as refugees in camp-based settings do. We should discuss this Interestingly, although twice as many Somali refugee households reported to

[11] Vishwanath T, Alik-lagrange A, Aghabarari L. Highly vulnerable yet largely invisible Forcibly displaced in the COVID-19-induced recession 2020.

have received assistance in the first round compared to Eritrean refugees. In the second round, the opposite is true. We find that assistance to Eritrean refugees increased by 43 percentage points for free food and 45 percentage points for cash transfers. In contrast, assistance to Somali refugees only increased by 29 percentage points for free food and 21 percentage points for cash transfers (Figure 12). For refugees in Addis Ababa, free food recipients increased by 8 percentage points between the first and the second rounds. Unlike for the Somali and Eritrean refugees, direct cash-based interventions to refugees in Addis Ababa is shown to decrease in the second round compared to the first. Across all sub-groups, food or cash for food has declined between the two periods.

Figure 11: Assistance type received in the past four weeks, percent

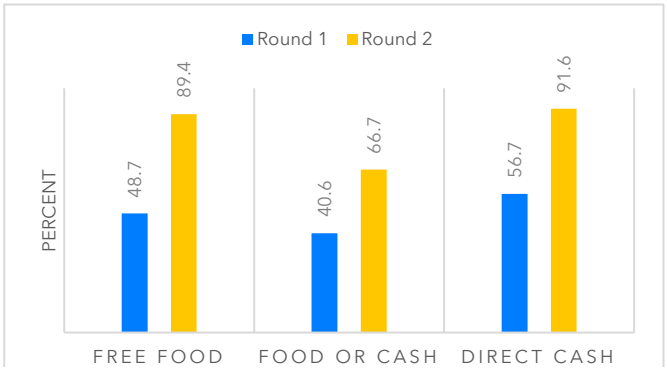
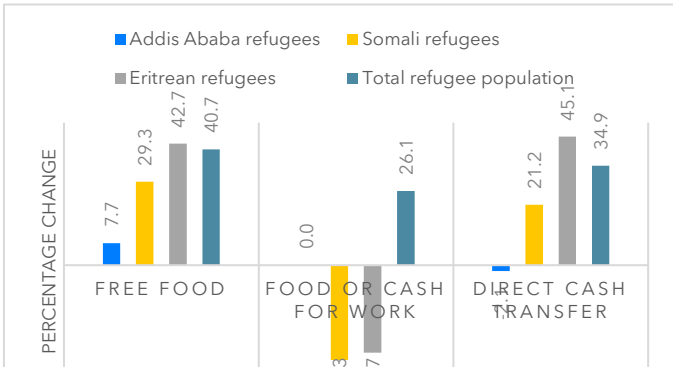


Figure 12: Assistance type received in the past four weeks, unconditional, percentage point (Round 2 relative to Round 1)



Note: Values indicated with ^ indicate that results in R2 are not statistically different between R2 and R1 at the 90 percent confidence interval based on a paired t-test.

BOX: SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The high-frequency phone survey of national and refugee households monitors the economic and social impact of and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic on households in terms of topics such as access to food staples, access to educational activities during school closures, employment dynamics, household incomes and livelihoods, income losses and coping strategies, as well as external assistance. The final datasets for round 1 and round 2 cover a panel of about 1,650 refugees that is representative for refugee households with access to a mobile phone.

Recent political events impacted the data collection phase of the HFPS. About two weeks into the second round of data collection, on 4 November, violent conflict erupted in the regional state of Tigray between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the federal Government of Ethiopia. This affected data collection, primarily by disrupting internet and phone connectivity. Consequently, the response rate from the Eritrean refugee population in the Tigray region was low at 79 percent compared to 93 percent among refugees in Addis Ababa, and 89 percent among Somali refugees.

To the extent possible, the same households and respondents were tracked with selected respondents completing phone-based interviews every four weeks. This high-frequency follow-up allows for a better understanding of the effects of and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic on households in order to inform interventions and policy responses and monitor their effects. The respondent is typically the head of household; where that person cannot be reached despite numerous call-backs, another knowledgeable household member will be selected as the respondent.

The HFPS sample of refugees is based on ARRA/UNHCR's proGres database, which contains a list of all registered refugees in Ethiopia. Only refugees living in Addis Ababa, Somali refugees served by the UNHCR Sub-Office in Jijiga, and Eritrean refugees served by the UNHCR Sub-Office in Shire have phone penetration rates above 10 percent; therefore only these populations can be included in the HFPS.

Phone-owning households are better off in terms of many socio-economic dimensions (i.e. total consumption, educational attainment, access to services, access to assets). Though a reweighting procedure was applied, the sample of the HFPS is likely to represent an upper bound on refugee welfare.

Survey brief, table of indicators, and microdata for the HFPS-R will be available at https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/brief/phone-survey-data-monitoring-covid-19-impact-on-firms-and-households-in-ethiopia.