



The levels of malnutrition among children fleeing Somalia's drought could lead to a "human tragedy of unimaginable proportions", the UN refugee head Antonio Guterres has said.

Young children are dying on their way to or within a day of arrival at camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, the UNHCR says. It estimates that a quarter of Somalis are either displaced within the country or living outside as refugees. The drought is compounded by the violence in south and central Somalia.

The warning comes as the UK aid agencies Oxfam, Save the Children, and the Red Cross launch emergency appeals in response to the food crisis which is affecting more than 12 million people in the Horn of Africa.

The agencies are collectively asking for nearly \$150m (£93m). The UNHCR says the need for food, shelter, health services and other life saving aid is urgent and massive. According the UN refugee agency, more than 50% of Somali children arriving in Ethiopia are seriously malnourished. In Kenya that figure is between 30% and 40%.

"What is the most tragic for us to witness, is that there are children who do arrive in such a weakened state that despite our emergency care and therapeutic feeding, they're dying within 24 hours," UNHCR spokeswoman Melissa Fleming told a press briefing in Geneva.

"We estimate that one quarter of Somalia's 7.5 million people are now either internally displaced or are living outside the country as refugees," she said.

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