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UNHCR POSITION ON RETURNS TO ETHIOPIA

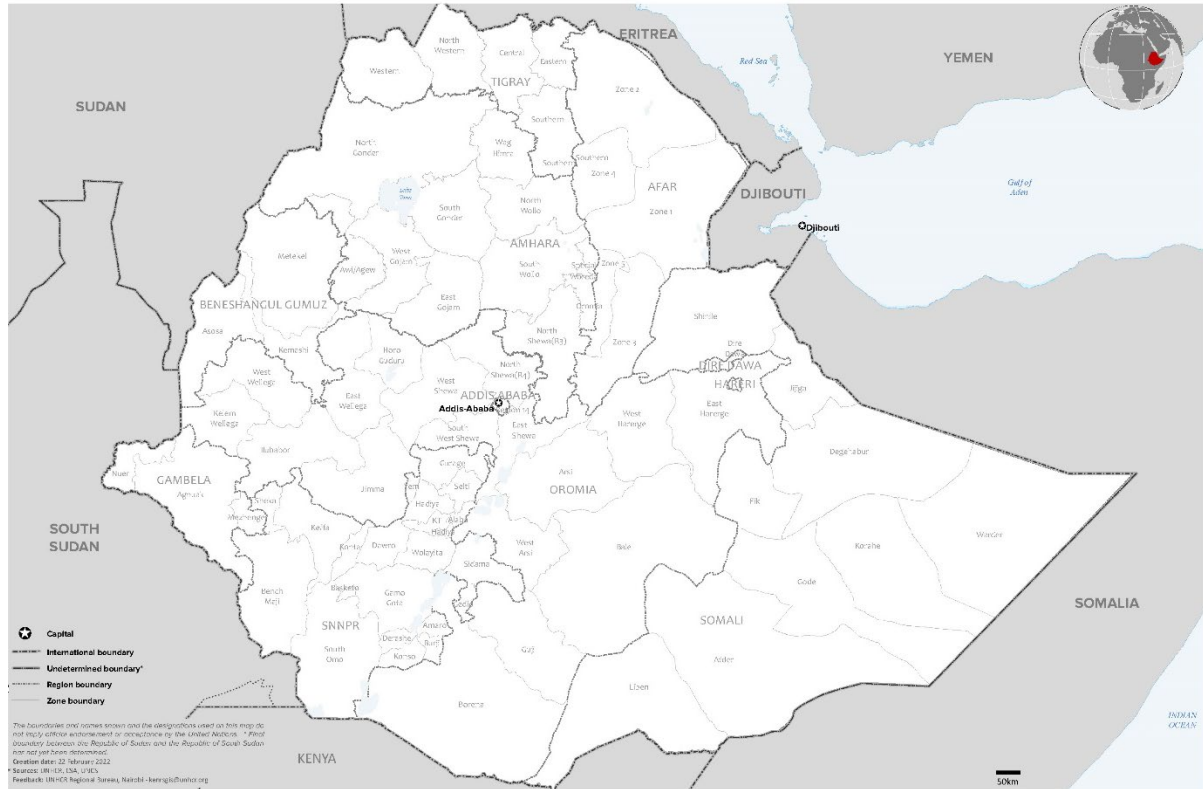
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Map of Ethiopia

Ethiopia: Administrative boundaries

as of February 2022



Introduction

1. Several regions of Ethiopia are affected by conflict and violent unrest as a result of political and ethnic tensions, conflict over land and access to resources, and intercommunal disputes.¹ In addition, the country is impacted by a range of natural disasters, including droughts, flooding, and locust infestations.²
2. Between 1 January 2021 and 1 February 2022, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) documented 1,099 battles, 352 incidents of violence against civilians, and 8,894 reported fatalities in Ethiopia. While the majority of these were in the Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions, the security situation outside of these regions remained highly volatile, with 237 battles, 214 incidents of violence against civilians, and 3,114 reported fatalities recorded in other parts of the country during the

¹ ACAPS, *Ethiopia: Understanding Humanitarian Concerns Across the Country*, 24 January 2022, www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20220124_acaps_thematic_report_ethiopia_understanding_humanitarian_concerns_across_the_country.pdf (see maps on pp. 1, 3); Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World Report 2022: Ethiopia – Events of 2021*, 13 January 2022, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2066492.html; ACCORD, *Ethiopia, Third Quarter 2021: Update on Incidents According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)*, 16 December 2021, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2065659/2021q3Ethiopia_en.pdf; IDMC, *Ethiopia*, undated, www.internal-displacement.org/countries/ethiopia; The New Humanitarian, *Ethiopia's Other Conflicts*, 23 November 2020, www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/11/23/ethiopia-tigray-fuel-conflict-hotspots-ethnic-politics.

² ACAPS, *Ethiopia: Understanding Humanitarian Concerns Across the Country*, 24 January 2022, www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20220124_acaps_thematic_report_ethiopia_understanding_humanitarian_concerns_across_the_country.pdf; ACAPS, *Ethiopia: Complex Crisis - Overview*, 28 December 2021, www.acaps.org/country/ethiopia/crisis/complex-crisis.

same period. While recorded incidents in the northern regions appeared to be on the decline in the first month of 2022, ACLED noted a 66 per cent increase in incidents in other parts of the country during the same timeframe.³

Security and Human Rights Situation

Tigray and the Neighbouring Regions of Afar and Amhara

3. On 4 November 2020, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia announced a military operation against the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and its forces. This followed the escalation of tensions after regional elections held in the Tigray region on 9 September 2020 in defiance of a federal order postponing balloting nationwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In early October 2020, the Federal Government cut ties with the Tigray region, and the Upper House of Parliament voted to suspend budgetary aid to Tigray's executive.⁴
4. By July 2021 the conflict had spread beyond the Tigray region to neighbouring parts of the Afar and Amhara regions.⁵ Between August and November 2021, the conflict continued to expand further into southern parts of Amhara and into eastern parts of Afar.⁶
5. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) conducted a joint investigation covering the period between 3 November 2020 and 28 June 2021.⁷ Their findings, published in November 2021, detail a series of human rights violations and abuses, including unlawful killings and extra-judicial executions, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, attacks against refugees and violations of *non-refoulement* obligations, and forced displacement of civilians.⁸ The joint investigation concluded that there are "reasonable grounds to believe [that] all parties to the Tigray conflict have committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law", some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁹
6. On 2 November 2021, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced a State of Emergency in Ethiopia, after the TPLF and Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) claimed to have captured several towns on the highways to Addis Ababa.¹⁰ The State of Emergency Proclamation No. 5/2021 allowed authorities to arrest anyone without a court warrant if they had a reasonable suspicion that an individual had links to

³ This data is available on the ACLED website: ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 10 February 2022, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

⁴ See, for example, New York Times, *Why Is Ethiopia at War With Itself?*, 26 November 2021, www.nytimes.com/article/ethiopia-tigray-conflict-explained.html; BBC, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: The short, Medium and Long Story*, 29 June 2021, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54964378; Deutsche Welle, *Ethiopia: A Timeline of the Tigray Crisis*, 17 November 2020, www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-a-timeline-of-the-tigray-crisis/a-55632181.

⁵ Financial Times, *Ethiopia's Conflict Intensifies: 'This Is Not a War in Tigray Any More'*, 5 November 2021, www.ft.com/content/93c614e6-3714-44dc-840b-9da0a6dff459.

⁶ "In June [2021], Tigrayan fighters invaded the neighbouring regions of Afar and Amhara, pushing so far south that by the end of November [2021] they were fighting near a town just 190 kilometres (118 miles) from Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa." Reuters, *As Government Offensive Pushes Forward, Scars of War Dot Ethiopia's Amhara Region*, 11 December 2021, www.reuters.com/world/africa/government-offensive-pushes-forward-scars-war-dot-ethiopia-amhara-region-2021-12-10/. See also, OCHA, *Ethiopia: Northern Ethiopia Access Snapshot*, 13 December 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ocha_ethiopia_211210_access_snapshot_northern_november_2021.pdf.

⁷ OHCHR and EHRC, *Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, 3 November 2021, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2063259/OHCHR-EHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-5, 83-85.

⁹ OHCHR, *Ethiopia: Bachelet Urges End to 'Reckless' War as Tigray Conflict Escalates - Impact of the Armed Conflict on Human Rights Situation in Tigray and Neighbouring Regions since June*, 3 November 2021, www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27757&LangID=E; OHCHR and EHRC, *Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, 3 November 2021, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2063259/OHCHR-EHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf, para. 125.

¹⁰ The Guardian, *Ethiopia Declares State of Emergency as Tigrayan Rebels Gain Ground*, 2 November 2021, www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/02/ethiopia-declares-state-of-emergency-as-tigray-rebels-gain-ground.

“terrorist groups” and to detain them for the duration of the state of emergency.¹¹ OHCHR expressed concern about the Proclamation’s provisions as “extremely broad”, including vaguely-worded prohibitions on giving “indirect moral support” for “terrorist groups”.¹² On 26 January 2022, Ethiopia’s Cabinet proposed to lift the state of emergency; a decision that was approved by Parliament on 15 February 2022.¹³

7. According to OHCHR, between 22 November 2021 and 28 February 2022 more than 15,000 people were arbitrarily arrested and detained in connection with the state of emergency; mostly ordinary citizens of Tigrayan ethnicity.¹⁴ On 16 November 2021, OHCHR reported mass arbitrary arrests targeting people reportedly of Tigrayan origin in Addis Ababa, Gondar, Bahir Dar and elsewhere with at least 1,000 people detained in a one-week period.¹⁵ According to OHCHR, individuals were believed to have been detained by police officers on suspicion of being linked to the TPLF, but many detainees were not informed of the reasons for their arrest, were not brought before a court of law, and were not formally charged with an offence.¹⁶ Among the detainees were UN staff.¹⁷ OHCHR expressed its concern about reports of ill-treatment in detention.¹⁸ In December 2021, OHCHR reported the detention of some 83 people, including four women, in the Guji zone in the Oromia region, in connection with the state of emergency.¹⁹ On 8 and 9 December 2021, about 1,500 people of Tigray and Gumuz ethnicity were reportedly detained in Asosa, Benishangul-Gumuz region, under the state of emergency.²⁰
8. UN human rights experts have also expressed grave concern about widespread and documented incidents of sexual and gender-based violence committed against women and girls in the Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions of Ethiopia by parties to the conflict.²¹
9. In December 2021, Tigrayan forces announced they had withdrawn from the neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions back into Tigray, while the Federal Government stated that they would pause any further advance against the Tigrayan forces.²² Also in December 2021, an 11-member National

¹¹ The proclamation is in effect for six months from the date of its adoption (4 November 2021). Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Sweeping Emergency Powers and Alarming Rise in Online Hate Speech as Tigray Conflict Escalates*, 5 November 2021, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/ethiopia-sweeping-emergency-powers-and-alarming-rise-in-online-hate-speech-as-tigray-conflict-escalates/.

¹² UN News, *Ethiopia: Mass Arbitrary Arrests Target Tigrayans, Says UN Rights Office*, 16 November 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/11/1105892>.

¹³ France 24, *Ethiopia Lifts Wartime State of Emergency, Three Months Earlier than Expected*, 15 February 2022, www.france24.com/en/africa/20220215-ethiopia-lifts-wartime-state-of-emergency-three-months-earlier-than-expected; Reuters, *Ethiopia’s Cabinet Approves Lifting of State of Emergency*, 26 January 2022, www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-cabinet-approves-lifting-state-emergency-2022-01-26/.

¹⁴ OHCHR, *UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet’s Statement on Tigray at 49th Session of the Human Rights Council*, 7 March 2022, www.unognewsroom.org/story/en/1195/2022-03-05-hc-michelle-bachelet-2022-03-07-hrc49-tigray-final-hc-approved-mp4-1080p.

¹⁵ OHCHR, *Press Briefing Notes on Ethiopia*, 16 November 2021, www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?LangID=E&NewsID=27816.

¹⁶ UN News, *Ethiopia: Mass Arbitrary Arrests Target Tigrayans, Says UN Rights Office*, 16 November 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/11/1105892>. “[M]ost of those detained are reported to be people of Tigrayan origin, arrested often on suspicion of being affiliated to or supporting the [TPLF]. There are worrying reports that many of those detained have not been informed of the reasons for their detention, nor have they been brought before a court of law or other tribunal to review the reasons for their detention, and have not been formally charged.” OHCHR, *Press Briefing Notes on Ethiopia*, 16 November 2021, www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?LangID=E&NewsID=27816.

¹⁷ Reuters, *U.N. Says at Least 16 Staff, Dependents Detained in Ethiopia*, 10 November 2021, www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-says-least-nine-staff-dependents-detained-ethiopia-2021-11-09/.

¹⁸ UN News, *Ethiopia: Mass Arbitrary Arrests Target Tigrayans, Says UN Rights Office*, 16 November 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/11/1105892>.

¹⁹ OHCHR, *Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the Grave Human Rights Situation in Ethiopia: Statement by Nada Al-Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 17 December 2021, www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27975&LangID=E.

²⁰ OHCHR, *Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the Grave Human Rights Situation in Ethiopia: Statement by Nada Al-Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 17 December 2021, www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27975&LangID=E.

²¹ OHCHR, *Tigray Conflict: UN Experts Call for Urgent Action to Stop Violence Against Women*, 3 December 2021, www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27899&LangID=E.

²² Aljazeera, *Ethiopia Gov’t Says Army Will Not Go Deeper into Tigray, for Now*, 24 December 2021, www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/24/ethiopia-govt-says-army-will-not-go-deeper-into-tigray-for-now; Aljazeera, *Tigrayan*

Dialogue Commission was established. It excludes both the TPLF and OLA.²³ On 24 March 2022, the Federal Government announced a humanitarian truce to allow aid delivery to the Tigray region.²⁴

10. In January 2022, several airstrikes in the Tigray region, allegedly carried out by the Ethiopian airforce, killed at least 108 civilians and wounded 75 others, including 59 civilians, who were killed in an airstrike on a site for internally displaced people in Dedebeit in the Tigray region, and three Eritrean refugees, who died in an airstrike on the Mai-Aini refugee camp.²⁵ In the same month, fresh fighting between the TPLF and pro-government forces was reported along the Afar and Tigray border.²⁶
11. In the Amhara region, ongoing clashes and new displacements were reported in North Gondar, Wag Hemra, and North Wollo in February 2022.²⁷
12. Conflict and violence in Amhara and Afar are not limited to events related to the Tigray conflict. Violence between Amhara and Qemant communities in April 2021, and intercommunal violence in North Shewa and Oromia special zone in May 2021, resulted in displacement in Amhara.²⁸
13. Between late April and July 2021, inter-communal violence between Afar and Somali communities over disputed regional borders intensified, with the reported involvement of regional armed forces on both sides, killing hundreds of civilians and displacing thousands.²⁹

Oromia Region

14. In December 2021, OHCHR noted that the conflict in the Tigray region had, in recent months, extended to other areas of the country and involved an even wider range of actors, with serious impact on civilians.³⁰ In July 2021, there were reports that regular and irregular combatants from six regions not previously involved in the Tigray conflict were mobilizing in support of the Federal Government, including from the Oromia, Sidama, Somali, and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) regions.³¹
15. The OLA was declared a terrorist organization by the Federal Government in May 2021.³² In August 2021, it entered into an alliance with the TPLF.³³ Scaled up OLA attacks against government officials and security forces, particularly in the Guji and West Guji zones in southern Oromia, resulted in the displacement of over 100,000 people by October 2021.³⁴ In southern and western Oromia, it was reported that in 2021 counter-insurgency campaigns by the government against armed rebel groups led

Forces Announce Retreat to Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 20 December 2021, www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/20/tplf-rebels-announce-retreat-to-ethiopia-tigray-region.

²³ Deutsche Welle, *Ethiopia to Create National Dialogue Commission*, 30 December, 2021, www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-to-create-national-dialogue-commission/a-60290708.

²⁴ BBC, *Ethiopia's Tigray war: TPLF agrees to humanitarian truce*, 25 March 2022, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-60861900. The impact of this development was not clear at the time of drafting. UNHCR will continue to monitor the situation, including in relation to this development, and changes will be reflected in future updates.

²⁵ **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**; UN News, *Guterres Calls for End to Conflict in Ethiopia after Deadly Attacks*, 10 January 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/01/1109422>.

²⁶ Al Arabiya, *Ethiopia's Tigray Rebels Announce Push into Neighbouring Afar Region*, 25 January 2022, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2022/01/25/Ethiopia-s-Tigray-rebels-announce-push-into-neighbouring-Afar-region>.

²⁷ OCHA, *Northern Ethiopia - Humanitarian Update, Situation Report*, 17 February 2022, www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/ethiopia/document/ethiopia-bi-weekly-humanitarian-bulletin-17-feb-2022-en.

²⁸ OCHA, *Ethiopia: Humanitarian Access Snapshot, January – June 2021*, 30 July 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ocha_210809_access_ethiopia_snapshot_jan-june_2021_final.pdf.

²⁹ HRW, *World Report 2022: Ethiopia – Events of 2021*, 13 January 2022, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2066492.html.

³⁰ OHCHR, *Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the Grave Human Rights Situation in Ethiopia: Statement by Nada Al-Nashif*, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, 17 December 2021, www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27975&LangID=E.

³¹ Deutsche Welle, *Ethiopia: Fear Tigray Conflict Could Trigger All-Out War*, 20 July 2021, www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-fear-tigray-conflict-could-trigger-all-out-war/a-58566874.

³² Aljazeera, *Ethiopia to Designate TPLF, OLF-Shene as 'Terror' Groups*, 1 May 2021, www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/1/ethiopia-to-designate-tplf-olf-shene-as-terror-groups.

³³ Aljazeera, *Ethiopia Armed Group Says it Has Alliance with Tigray Forces*, 11 August 2021, www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/11/ethiopia-armed-group-says-it-has-alliance-with-tigray-forces.

³⁴ OCHA, *Ethiopia: Access Snapshot Southern Oromia, Guji and West Guji Zones*, 25 October 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-access-snapshot-southern-oromia-guji-and-west-guji-zones-15-october-2021>.

to serious human rights violations and abuses against local communities committed by all sides.³⁵

16. The International Crisis Group reported the expansion of security offensives against the OLA to the West and East Hararghe zones, Jimma Zone, Kellem Wollega zone and all zones of Shewa in early to mid-January 2022.³⁶ There were also reports of aerial drone attacks in the Oromia region in January 2022.³⁷ In a report released in February 2022, the EHRC called for criminal investigations into alleged extrajudicial killings committed by security forces in Oromia region in December 2021.³⁸ There were reports of killings and abduction of civilians by the OLA and unverified reports of forced conscription by the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) in the Oromia region.³⁹
17. Inter-communal violence between Oromo and Amhara communities reportedly increased in 2021.⁴⁰ The EHRC reported the death of over 210 people due to ethnic violence in Western Oromia in August 2021.⁴¹ The EHRC reported further violence causing displacement in East Wollega zone in October 2021.⁴²

Benishangul-Gumuz Region

18. In September 2021, the conflict between the ENDF and the TPLF expanded into the Benishangul-Gumuz region, with forces affiliated with the TPLF entering Metekel zone.⁴³
19. The control over Kamashi zone by the Benshangul People's Liberation Front, a separatist group, came to an end when the ENDF entered Kamashi zone at the end of September 2021.⁴⁴
20. Intercommunal tensions increased in 2021 in Benishangul-Gumuz, particularly in Metekel zone.⁴⁵ In the final months of 2021, the violence expanded into Kamashi and Assosa zones, as well as to Mau Komo Special Woreda.⁴⁶ OCHA reported that hundreds of thousands of people were displaced inside Metekel zone, while others fled to the neighbouring Amhara and Oromia regions in search of safety and assistance.⁴⁷ By the end of 2021, large parts of the region remained inaccessible, limiting information on the humanitarian needs of the growing number of internally displaced people.⁴⁸
21. On 18 January 2022, a refugee camp hosting 10,300 refugees was looted and burned, following an

³⁵ HRW, *World Report 2022: Ethiopia – Events of 2021*, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2066492.html.

³⁶ International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch: Ethiopia*, January 2022, www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/february-alerts-and-january-trends#ethiopia. For earlier CrisisWatch updates on Ethiopia, see www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/database.

³⁷ BBC, *Tigray Conflict: What Do We Know about Drone Strikes in Ethiopia?*, 31 January 2022, www.bbc.com/news/60045176.

³⁸ Addis Standard, *"Reasonable Ground to Believe" Karrayyu Gadaa Leaders' Killing Constitutes "Extrajudicial Killing" by Security Forces: EHRC*, 2 February 2022, <https://addisstandard.com/news-killing-detention-of-karrayyu-gadaa-leaders-extrajudicial-killing-ehrc/>.

³⁹ Addis Standard, *Members of Karrayyu Gadaa Leadership Killed, Several Others Missing Amid Conflicting Narratives in East Showa Zone*, 3 December 2021, <https://addisstandard.com/news-members-of-karrayyu-gadaa-leadership-killed-several-others-missing-amid-conflicting-narratives-in-east-showa-zone-oromia/>.

⁴⁰ HRW, *World Report 2022: Ethiopia – Events of 2021*, 13 January 2022, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2066492.html.

⁴¹ Aljazeera, *More than 210 Killed in Violence in Western Ethiopia: Commission*, 26 August 2021, www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/26/ethiopia-rights-commission-says-150-killed-in-attack-in-oromiya.

⁴² Addis Standard, *EHRC Warns Against Communal Violence in East Wollega, Horoguduru Zones, Calls for Permanent Deployment of Security Forces, Immediate Assistance to IDPs*, 19 October 2021, <https://addisstandard.com/news-ehrc-warns-against-communal-violence-in-east-wollega-horoguduru-zones-calls-for-permanent-deployment-of-security-forces-immediate-assistance-to-idps/>.

⁴³ ACLED, *Ethiopia Peace Observatory: September at a Glance*, 13 October 2021, <https://epo.acleddata.com/2021/10/13/epo-monthly-september-2021/>; see also, Addis Standard, *Benishangul Gumuz Regional State Vows to Take 'Final Measures' Against 'TPLF Agents'*, 9 September 2021, <https://addisstandard.com/news-benishangul-gumuz-regional-state-vows-to-take-final-measures-against-tplf-agents/>.

⁴⁴ ACLED, *Ethiopia Peace Observatory: September at a Glance*, 13 October 2021, <https://epo.acleddata.com/2021/10/13/epo-monthly-september-2021/>.

⁴⁵ HRW, *World Report 2022: Ethiopia – Events of 2021*, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2066492.html.

⁴⁶ OCHA, *Ethiopia Humanitarian Bulletin*, 31 January 2022, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/220131_humanitarian_bulletin_final.pdf.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ ACAPS, *Ethiopia: Understanding Humanitarian Concerns Across the Country*, 24 January 2022, www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20220124_acaps_thematic_report_ethiopia_understanding_humanitarian_concerns_across_the_country.pdf.

outbreak of fighting in the town of Tongo between unknown armed groups and federal forces.⁴⁹

Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR)

22. Between the end of 2020 and early 2021, an estimated 120,000 people were displaced due to inter-communal violence in SNNPR, including 70,000 in Konso zone and 50,000 in Bench Sheko zone.⁵⁰ In November 2021, conflict in Segen Zuria woreda of Konso zone resulted in the displacement of over 27,000 people.⁵¹ In April 2021, armed groups killed at least 12 civilians in Amaro Special Woreda, leading to the displacement of almost 11,000 people; by early 2022 violence against civilians continued.⁵²

Humanitarian Situation

23. In December 2021, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) warned of record levels of humanitarian assistance needs in Ethiopia in 2022.⁵³ That same month the World Food Programme (WFP) reported that it was facing a major funding shortfall over the next six months, threatening its ability to meet the critical food and nutrition needs of millions of food insecure Ethiopians and refugees. The combined effects of conflict, drought, flooding, desert locust invasions, market disruptions, currency depreciation, high food prices and the COVID-19 pandemic have left an estimated 13.6 million people across the country food insecure.⁵⁴ A total of 22.3 million people in Ethiopia will be targeted for humanitarian assistance in 2022.⁵⁵
24. In northern Ethiopia, humanitarian access and the delivery of humanitarian assistance remain a challenge due to insecurity, including for humanitarian workers and the limited presence of humanitarian partners on the ground.⁵⁶ The lack of fuel has also affected water trucking and movement

⁴⁹ UNHCR, *UNHCR, Partners Rush to Aid Thousands of Refugees in Benishangul Gumuz Region of Ethiopia*, 4 February 2022, www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2022/2/61fcf1f04/unhcr-partners-rush-aid-thousands-refugees-benishangul-gumuz-region-ethiopia.html; UN News, *Ethiopia: UNHCR Rushing Aid to 20,000 Refugees Fleeing Clashes*, 4 February 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1111322>.

⁵⁰ OCHA, *Humanitarian Access Snapshot: January-June 2021*, 30 July 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ocha_210809_access_ethiopia_snapshot_jan-june_2021_final.pdf. See also, Addis Standard, *Security Forces Killed, Thousands Displaced in Fresh Attacks in Bench Sheko Zone*, 8 June 2021, <https://addisstandard.com/news-security-forces-killed-thousands-displaced-in-fresh-attacks-in-bench-sheko-zone/>; Addis Standard, *Dozens of Civilians Killed in Sustained Konso Zone Violence, More than 94,000 Displaced*, 23 November 2020, <https://addisstandard.com/news-dozens-of-civilians-killed-in-sustained-konso-zone-violence-more-than-94-000-displaced/>.

⁵¹ UNICEF, *Ethiopia Humanitarian Situation Report No. 10: November 2021*, 21 December 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/unicef-ethiopia-humanitarian-situation-report-no-10-november-2021>.

⁵² Addis Standard, *"Hundreds" Killed, Thousands Displaced in Recurring Armed Attacks in Amaro Special Woreda, Southern Region; Latest Attack Leaves Three Dead, Four Injured*, 10 February 2022, <https://addisstandard.com/analysis-hundreds-killed-thousands-displaced-in-recurring-armed-attacks-in-amaro-special-wereda-southern-region-latest-attack-leaves-three-dead-four-injured/>.

⁵³ These needs are estimated to be nearly 40 per cent higher compared to the previous record levels of 2021 and 2016, when the country was impacted by the historic 2015 El Niño drought FEWS NET, *Amid Conflict and Drought, Ethiopia Faces One of the World's Most Extreme Food Security Emergencies*, 22 December 2021, <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia/alert/december-22-2021>.

⁵⁴ FEWS NET, *Ethiopia Food Security Outlook: October 2021 to May 2022*, 15 December 2021, https://fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/FEWS%20NET%20Ethiopia%20Food%20Security%20Outlook_Oct%2021%20to%20May%2022_Final.pdf; World Food Programme (WFP), *Millions Could Fall Deeper into Hunger as WFP Faces Unprecedented Funding Gap in Ethiopia*, 6 December 2021, www.wfp.org/news/millions-could-fall-deeper-hunger-wfp-faces-unprecedented-funding-gap-ethiopia.

⁵⁵ OCHA, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2022*, December 2021, <https://gho.unocha.org/>; OCHA, *Ethiopia Humanitarian Bulletin*, 20 December 2021, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2065780/211220_humanitarian_bulletin_final.pdf.

⁵⁶ OHCHR, *UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet's Statement on Tigray at 49th Session of the Human Rights Council*, 7 March 2022, www.unognewsroom.org/story/en/1195/2022-03-05-hc-michelle-bachelet-2022-03-07-hrc49-tigray-final-hc-approved-mp4-1080p; OCHA, *Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update Situation Report*, 17 February 2022, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2068273.html; FEWS NET, *Amid Conflict and Drought, Ethiopia Faces One of the World's Most Extreme Food Security Emergencies*, 22 December 2021, <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia/alert/december-22-2021>; OCHA, *Ethiopia: Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update Situation Report*, 2 December 2021, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2064785.html, p. 1; FEWS NET, *Key Message Update: Expanding Drought and Conflict are Expected to Drive Severe Food Insecurity in 2022*, November 2021, <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia/key-message-update/november-2021>.

of supplies.⁵⁷ Humanitarian needs have surged across northern Ethiopia as a result of looting and destruction of health centres and farming infrastructure, including irrigation systems that are vital to agricultural production.⁵⁸ Large numbers of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from the Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, SNNP and Gambella regions with significant humanitarian needs have been recorded in the Amhara region, with numbers notably rising since October 2021.⁵⁹

25. The ongoing hostilities in the Benishangul-Gumuz region have led to an increase in humanitarian needs, but access to the conflict-affected population is hampered by the unstable security situation. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced inside Metekel zone.⁶⁰ Kamashi zone remains hard to reach for humanitarian agencies due to ongoing insecurity and the presence of unidentified armed groups.⁶¹ Following the outbreak of fighting in and around Tongo in December 2021 and January 2022, humanitarian staff have been evacuated and have not been able to access two camps – Tongo and Gure-Shambola – hosting over 20,000 refugees.⁶²
26. As water sources continue to dry up, it is estimated that at least 6.8 million people are affected by drought in the Oromia, SNNP and Somali regions. Death of livestock and loss of livelihoods have impacted food security and nutrition, with women and children disproportionately affected.⁶³ Hundreds of thousands of conflict-affected people in East and West Wollega zones of the Oromia region require food assistance, and many households also require emergency shelter and non-food item support.⁶⁴
27. Ethiopia has been affected by a desert locust infestation since mid-2019, leading to an increase in humanitarian needs.⁶⁵ In December 2021, swarms were reported in the Oromia, SNNP and Somali regions.⁶⁶ In 2021, floods displaced hundreds of thousands of people across the Afar, Amhara, Gambella, Harari, Oromia, SNNP and Somali regions.⁶⁷

Refugees and Internal Displacement

28. Since the start of the conflict in Ethiopia in November 2020, over 68,500 Ethiopian nationals have sought asylum in countries in the East, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region, including at least 59,000 who have

⁵⁷ Devex, *Fuel Shortage Leaves Ethiopia's Tigray 'Running on Fumes'*, 17 February 2021, www.devex.com/news/fuel-shortage-leaves-ethiopia-s-tigray-running-on-fumes-102702; OCHA, *Ethiopia: Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update Situation Report*, 10 February 2022, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2067938.html; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *UNFPA Ethiopia Response to the Northern Ethiopia Crisis: Situation Report (15-31 October 2021)*, November 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/unfpa_situation_report_15_to_31_october_northern_ethiopia_response_0.pdf.

⁵⁸ UN News, *Guterres Calls for End to Conflict in Ethiopia After Deadly Attacks*, 10 January 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/01/1109422>.

⁵⁹ OCHA, *Ethiopia Bi-weekly Humanitarian Bulletin*, 17 February 2022, www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/ethiopia/document/ethiopia-bi-weekly-humanitarian-bulletin-17-feb-2022-en.

⁶⁰ OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin: Ethiopia*, 31 January 2022, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/220131_humanitarian_bulletin_final.pdf. OCHA, *Northern Ethiopia - Access Map, as of 10 January 2022*, 12 January 2022, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2066612.html.

⁶¹ OCHA, *Ethiopia: Benishangul Gumuz Region (BGR) Access Snapshot (January – October 2021)*, 19 November 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-benishangul-gumuz-region-bgr-access-snapshot-january-october-2021>.

⁶² UNHCR, *UNHCR, Partners Rush to Aid Thousands of Refugees in Benishangul Gumuz Region of Ethiopia*, 4 February 2022, www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2022/2/61fcf1f04/unhcr-partners-rush-aid-thousands-refugees-benishangul-gumuz-region-ethiopia.html.

⁶³ OCHA, *Ethiopia Bi-weekly Humanitarian Bulletin*, 17 February 2022, www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/ethiopia/document/ethiopia-bi-weekly-humanitarian-bulletin-17-feb-2022-en;

OCHA, *Ethiopia: Drought Update No. 1*, January 2022, 7 February 2022, www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/ethiopia/document/ethiopia-drought-update-no1-jan-2022.

⁶⁴ OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin: Ethiopia*, 31 January 2022, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/220131_humanitarian_bulletin_final.pdf.

⁶⁵ ACAPS, *Ethiopia: Understanding Humanitarian Concerns Across the Country*, 24 January 2022, www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20220124_acaps_thematic_report_ethiopia_understanding_humanitarian_concerns_across_the_country.pdf, p. 6.

⁶⁶ FAO, *Desert Locust Update: Small Swarms Form in NE Somalia*, 23 December 2021, www.fao.org/ag/locusts/common/ecg/562/en/211223DLupdateE.pdf.

⁶⁷ OCHA, *Ethiopia: Humanitarian Bulletin, Issue No. 12, 16 August – 5 September 2021*, 6 September 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/060921_humanitarian_bulletin_final.pdf.

been received in eastern Sudan.⁶⁸

29. As of September 2021, an estimated 85 per cent of the 4.2 million IDPs in Ethiopia had been displaced due to conflict.⁶⁹ Many of the IDPs in the northern regions have been displaced multiple times during the conflict.⁷⁰

International Protection Needs and Non-Return Advisory

30. As the situation in parts of Ethiopia remains fluid and uncertain, UNHCR calls on all countries to allow civilians fleeing Ethiopia access to their territories and to ensure respect for the principle of *non-refoulement* at all times.
31. All claims of nationals and former habitual residents of Ethiopia seeking international protection should be processed in fair and efficient procedures in accordance with international and regional refugee law. UNHCR considers that persons fleeing any of the conflict situations in Ethiopia are likely to be in need of international refugee protection in accordance with Article 1(2) of the 1969 OAU Convention.⁷¹ In addition, persons fleeing any of the conflicts in Ethiopia may also meet the 1951 Convention criteria for refugee status.⁷²
32. Depending on the individual profile and circumstances of the case, exclusion considerations may need to be considered.⁷³ Furthermore, to preserve the civilian character of asylum, States need to assess the situation of arrivals carefully so as to identify armed elements and separate them from the civilian refugee population.⁷⁴
33. As the situation in parts of Ethiopia may remain fluid and uncertain for some time to come, coupled with an unfolding humanitarian emergency in the country, UNHCR calls on States to suspend the forcible return of nationals and former habitual residents of Ethiopia originating from any areas that are affected by, or which remain fragile and insecure as a result of, military action and/or ensuing displacement, until the situation stabilizes. The bar on forcible return serves as a minimum standard and needs to remain in place, until such time, as the security, rule of law, and human rights situation has significantly improved to permit the safe and dignified return of those determined not to be in need of international protection.
34. In the current circumstances, with ongoing conflict and violence in parts of the country, large-scale internal displacement, and severe humanitarian needs, UNHCR does not consider it appropriate for States to deny persons from Ethiopia international protection on the basis of an internal flight or

⁶⁸ UNHCR, *Ethiopia Situation: Population Dashboard – 31 January 2022*, 2 March 2022, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/91133>. As of 31 January 2022, 51,207 individuals had arrived in Kassala and Gedaref, and another 8,304 had arrived in Blue Nile State. Almost 51,000 individuals and families had registered with UNHCR. UNHCR, *Ethiopian Emergency Situation Update – New Arrivals – East Sudan and Blue Nile – As of 31 January 2022*, 7 February 2022, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90807>.

⁶⁹ "The number of IDPs in the country has doubled from 2.1 million in December 2020 to 4.2 million in September 2021, largely because of the intensification of conflict and violence." ACAPS, *Ethiopia: Understanding Humanitarian Concerns Across the Country*, 24 January 2022, www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20220124_acaps_thematic_report_ethiopia_understanding_humanitarian_concerns_across_the_country.pdf, pp. 4, 12. See also, UNHCR, *Internally Displaced Persons Regional Overview: East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes Region*, 16 March 2022, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/1973>, p. 3; UNFPA, *UNFPA Ethiopia Response to the Northern Ethiopia Crisis: Situation Report (16-30 September 2021)*, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/unfpa_extsitrep_16_to_30_september_northern_ethiopia_response.pdf, pp. 2-3.

⁷⁰ OCHA, *Ethiopia: Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 18 Nov 2021*, 18 November 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-18-nov-2021>.

⁷¹ Organization of African Unity, *Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa* ("OAU Convention"), 10 September 1969, 1001 UN, Treaty Series 45, www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b36018.html.

⁷² UN General Assembly, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951, UN, Treaty Series, Vol. 189, p. 137, www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3be01b964.html and UN General Assembly, *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 31 January 1967, UN, Treaty Series, Vol. 606, p. 267, www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b3ae4.html.

⁷³ UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection No. 5: Application of the Exclusion Clauses: Article 1F of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, 4 September 2003, HCR/GIP/03/05, www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3f5857684.html.

⁷⁴ UNHCR, *Operational Guidelines on Maintaining the Civilian and Humanitarian Character of Asylum*, September 2006, www.refworld.org/docid/452b9bca2.html.

relocation alternative.

35. UNHCR's position will be reviewed as the situation evolves and will be updated as necessary.

UNHCR
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