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IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Ethiopia: Ethnic groups [nationalities], including regional distribution, socio-cultural characteristics, and perceived political affiliations; the relationship between perceived ethnicity and political affiliation; the kebele card and whether it identifies an individual's ethnic group (2020–September 2022) [ETH200541.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

Sources estimate Ethiopia's population in 2022 at 105,166,000 (Ethiopia July 2013, 28) or 120,800,000 (UN 2022). Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) reports that the country's population is "concentrated in the north and centre" of Ethiopia, known as the "Ethiopian highlands," and that "approximately" 80 percent of the population resides in rural areas (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 2.6).

Sources report that Ethiopia's political system is known as an "ethnic federation" (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 2.31) or "ethnic federalism" (Wilson Center 28 July 2021). Ethiopia's 1995 Constitution provides the following:

Article 46. States of the Federation

1. The Federal Democratic Republic shall comprise of States.
2. States shall be delimited on the basis of the settlement patterns, language, identity and consent of the people concerned. (Ethiopia 1995)

Australia's DFAT also specifies that Ethiopia's ethnic federal system allocates to "the largest ethnic groups" the administration of "their own states" under "considerable autonomy from the federal government" (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 2.31).

According to sources, a "war" broke out in the Tigray region in November 2020 (Al Jazeera 6 July 2022; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022, 6; CFR 12 May 2022). The main warring parties are reported to be the federal government's military forces against the regional Tigrayan security forces (ACLED n.d.; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022, 6; CFR 12 May 2022).

1.1 Ethnic Groups

The country's latest census conducted in 2007 identifies 95 ethnic groups, traced through the individuals' "national or tribal origin," and accounts for the following 10 most populous ones, each with over one million self-identifying members:

Ethnic Groups	National Population	Urban Population	Rural Population
Oromo	25,363,756	3,008,496	22,355,260
Amhara	19,878,199	4,374,568	15,503,631
Somali [Somalie]	4,586,876	676,627	3,910,249
Tigrayan [Tigray, Tigrie]	4,486,513	1,060,528	3,425,985
Sidama [Sidamo]	2,951,889	143,821	2,808,068
Gurage [Gurage]	1,859,831	784,927	1,074,904
Welaita	1,676,128	281,462	1,394,666
Afar [Affar]	1,276,867	105,551	1,171,316
Hadiya	1,269,382	150,087	1,119,295
Gamo	1,104,360	139,308	965,052

(Ethiopia 2007, 71, 73–74)

Sources provide the following estimates (in percentages) for Ethiopia's ethnic composition:

	<i>Encyclopaedia Britannica</i> (2012 estimate)	<i>CIA World Factbook</i> (2022 estimate)	<i>Bertelsmann Stiftung</i> (2022 estimate)
Oromo	35.3	35.8	34
Amhara	26.2	24.1	27
Somali	6	7.2	–
Tigrayan	5.9	5.7	6
Sidama	4.3	4.1	–
Guragie	2.7	2.6	–
Welaita	2.3	2.3	–
Afar	–	2.2	–
Silte	–	1.3	–
Kefficho	–	1.2	–
Other	–	13.5	–

(Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022, 3; *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [2012]; US 23 Aug. 2022)

According to Australia's DFAT, Ethiopia's largest and capital city, Addis Ababa, has a population of 4.5 million and "a multi-ethnic character" (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 2.8). The same source notes that "[i]nter-ethnic marriage is common" in Addis Ababa and other urban centres but "less common" in rural areas (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 2.8). However, Al Jazeera reports that Ethiopia's ethnic groups "have intermarried and integrated into communities far beyond the frontiers of their region" (Al Jazeera 6 July 2022).

According to Australia's DFAT, most political parties in Ethiopia are "organised along ethnic lines" (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 2.31). Similarly, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression indicates that political parties, in addition to the government administration at both the national and regional levels, engage in "ethnic representation" (UN 29 Apr. 2020, para. 34).

1.2 Languages

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) characterizes Ethiopia as a "federation of minority groups including ethnic, language, religious, and regional minorities," and notes that the "greatest diversity" in languages spoken in the country exists in the southwest (MRG June 2019). *Encyclopaedia Britannica* notes that the "most important differences" among Ethiopia's "ethnically diverse" population pertain to the "linguistic categorization" of the country's approximately 100 languages into broad groups (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 13 Aug. 2022).

Sources report that Oromo and Amharic languages are the two most spoken languages in Ethiopia (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 13 Aug. 2022; Ethiopia 2007, 91), while Amharic is recognized as the "working language" of the central government (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 13 Aug. 2022). According to MRG, Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya and Somali languages are spoken by "two-thirds" of the country's population (MRG June 2019).

Ethiopia's 2007 census identifies 89 "mother tongues," referring to "the language used by the respondent for communication with his/her family members or guardians during his/her childhood," and accounts for the following 10 most-spoken languages that have over one million speakers, including their urban and rural distributions:

"Mother Tongues"	National Population	Urban Population	Rural Population
Oromo [Oromigna; Oromiffa]	24,930,424	2,548,461	22,381,963
Amharic [Amarigna]	21,634,396	5,707,362	15,927,034
Somali [Somaligna]	4,609,274	679,660	3,929,614
Tigrigna [Tigrinya]	4,324,933	954,696	3,370,237
Sidamigna	2,981,471	141,251	2,840,220
Guragie [Guragiegna]	1,481,836	421,024	1,060,812
Welaitigna	1,627,955	239,535	1,388,420
Afarigna	1,281,284	101,233	1,180,051
Hadiyigna	1,253,894	125,399	1,128,495
Gamogna	1,070,626	105,869	964,757

(Ethiopia 2007, 71, 91–92)

1.3 Religions

Regarding religious affiliation in Ethiopia, the census identifies six groups, and reports that 32,092,182 Ethiopians self-identify as Orthodox Christians; 13,661,588 as Protestants; 532,187 as Catholics; 25,037,646 as Muslims; 1,956,647 as belonging to a "[t]raditional" [Indigenous] religious group; and 470,682 to "[o]ther" religious groups (Ethiopia 2007, 71, 109). In terms of percentages, MRG indicates that approximately 43.5 percent of Ethiopians are "Ethiopian Orthodox Christians," while 33.9 percent are Muslim and the rest are "Protestant, Roman Catholic or followers of traditional religious" (MRG June 2019). The same source notes that while Orthodox Christians such as the Amhara and Tigrayan live in the northern highlands of the country, "most" Muslims and "followers of [I]ndigenous beliefs" are located in "lowland areas" in southern and eastern Ethiopia (MRG June 2019).

2. Regional Distribution, Sociocultural Background, and Perceived Political Affiliation of Ethnic Groups

The information in the following paragraph was provided by an associate professor at an American university whose research focuses on post-conflict governance and ethnic political relations in African states, including Ethiopia, in correspondence with the Research Directorate:

"In general," ethnic groups across Ethiopia have "distinctive styles in regional dress and language" which facilitate the recognition of ethnic identity. However, should individuals be "wearing Western clothing," distinguishing their "ethnic affiliation" becomes more challenging "without listening to them speak." For instance, Muslim communities have both "distinctive dress and dialect patterns," and individual's names can be specific to "tribal" affiliation. Finally, "various" ethnic and tribal groups across Ethiopia "are geographically concentrated in the country," aligning cultural distinctions such as language and dress with the regional location (Associate Professor 18 Sept. 2022).

According to *Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2022*, which "assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries" and covers the period from February 2019 to January 2021, historically, all Ethiopian governments have faced "structural ethnopolitical, ethno-cultural conflict between diverse ethnic groups" (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022, 5). According to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), an "independent" and "nonpartisan" US-based think tank and publisher on international affairs (CFR n.d.), while the armed conflict in Tigray region has continued, "peaceful contracts among ethnic groups and between ethnic groups and the government appear to be unwinding" in areas of Ethiopia (CFR 12 May 2022). Sources report that in 2021 the armed conflict has claimed the lives of civilians based on their ethnic identity (Amnesty International 29 Mar. 2022, 163; HRW 13 Jan. 2022). Amnesty International recorded the loss of "at least 1,500 lives in the Oromia, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Afar and Somali regions" due to ethnic violence (Amnesty International 29 Mar. 2022, 165).

2.1 Oromo

Sources report that the Oromo are the "largest" ethnic group in Ethiopia, constituting "more than one-third" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2 Mar. 2018) or "between 25 and 40 per cent" (MRG Jan. 2018a) of Ethiopia's population (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2 Mar. 2018; MRG Jan. 2018a). The 2007 census states that most of the Oromo population [93 percent of the national total of 25,363,756 Oromos] lives in the [southern-central] Oromia region (23,708,767 out of a total regional population of 26,993,933 [88 percent]), and that most (21,499,026) are concentrated in rural areas (Ethiopia 2007, 78, 79). According to the same source, in Harari region and Dire Dawa, Oromos are the most populous ethnic group, while in Amhara region, they are the third largest ethnic group (Ethiopia 2007, 77, 85, 88). The census further indicates that 534,547 Oromos live in Addis Ababa, which has a total population of 2,739,551 (Ethiopia 2007, 87).

According to *BTI 2022*, Oromos are "a diverse heterogeneous population of farmers, pastoralists, professionals, Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Protestants and traditional leaders" (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022, 5). Similarly, MRG indicates that the Oromo are "socially, economically, and religiously diverse" (MRG Jan. 2018a). *Encyclopaedia Britannica* reports that Oromos' settlement across "physically disparate areas" in the country, in addition to their assimilation and intermarriage with other ethnic groups, have resulted in the loss of "much of their original cultural cohesiveness" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2 Mar. 2018). The census notes that there are 12,835,410 people in the Oromia region who self-identify as Muslim [48 percent], 8,204,908 as Orthodox Christian [30 percent], and 4,780,917 as Protestant Christian [18 percent] (Ethiopia 2007, 112).

MRG reports that the Oromo share a common language which is also "widely spoken in northern Kenya and parts of Somalia" (MRG Jan. 2018a). According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, within Ethiopia, the Oromo language is "native" to the western, eastern, southern, and southwestern parts of the country (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 13 Aug. 2022).

According to sources, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is the country's first Oromo prime minister (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 2.3; Wilson Center 28 July 2021). According to Australia's DFAT, the ruling political coalition prior to his appointment was the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), an alliance of the following four political parties: Tigray People's

Liberation Front (TPLF), Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), and Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM) (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 2.39). The same source indicates that the EPRDF was disbanded and replaced with the Ethiopian Prosperity Party (PP [or EPP]) in December 2019 and is made up of the ODP, ADP and SEPDM (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 2.39). The source also indicates that, while the PP is also comprised of "the former Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP), the Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front (BGPDUF), the Ethiopian Somali People's Democratic Party (ESPDP), the Gambela People's Democratic Movement (GPDM) and the Harari National League (HNL)," the TPLF refused to join the coalition (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 2.39). For further information on political parties and the treatment of opposition political parties and their members, see Response to Information Request ETH200764 of September 2021.

BTI 2022 reports that the "political coalition" between the Oromo and Amhara peoples is a "fragile power alliance" aimed "against the Tigray minority" (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022, 5). Al Jazeera indicates that the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a group which aims to "fight for the self-determination of ethnic Oromos," was decriminalized and permitted to become a political party in 2018; however, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) [OLF-shene; OLF-shane], a "breakaway armed wing," continues "fighting" and is in conflict with the Ethiopian authorities who accuse them of carrying out "kidnappings, assassinations of officials and other crimes across Oromia" (Al Jazeera 20 Mar. 2021). According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), "reports" that security forces arrested, detained, and carried out "summary executions of Oromo civilians accused of supporting the armed rebel group, the [OLA]," continued throughout 2021 (HRW 13 Jan. 2022). According to a resident of Jardega Jarte district interviewed for an Al Jazeera article, "[OLA fighters] are easily identifiable by their hairstyles," and the article describes social media images of the group's fighters as typically showing "camouflage-clad youths with hair worn in dreadlocks" (Al Jazeera 20 Mar. 2021).

Sources report that there is also conflict in the Amhara region (Ethiopia 8 July 2022; HRW 9 Dec. 2021). According to Al Jazeera, a state of emergency was declared in Amhara region in April 2021 following armed violence that had killed "more than 300 people over several days in March" in the southern parts of the region along the Oromo special zone, "populated mainly by Oromos" (Al Jazeera 19 Apr. 2021). The same source notes that the violence has caused "sniping" within the prime minister's ruling political coalition, which includes Oromo and Amhara parties, who "have publicly accused each other of responsibility" (Al Jazeera 19 Apr. 2021).

2.2 Amhara

According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the Amhara ethnic group is the second largest in Ethiopia, constituting "more than one-fourth" of the population (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 4 Oct. 2018). The 2007 census indicates that most of the Amhara population [79 percent of the national total of 19,878,199 Amhara] lives in the [north-western] Amhara region (15,752,992 out of a total regional population of 17,221,976 [91 percent]), and that most (13,799,736) are concentrated in rural areas (Ethiopia 2007, 73, 77). According to the same source, 1,288,895 Amhara live in Addis Ababa, representing the largest ethnic group in the city (Ethiopia 2007, 86). The census further indicates that Amhara are the second largest ethnic group in Oromia, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Harari regions (Ethiopia 2007, 78, 79, 81, 85).

According to *BTI 2022*, the Amhara ethnic group is the country's "rather homogenous majority population of smallholder farmers and Orthodox Christians" (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022, 5). MRG notes that the Amhara are "of the northern highlands," and are "largely" Orthodox Christians (MRG June 2019). The census indicates that 14,214,635 people in the Amhara region [83 percent] self-identify as Orthodox Christians (Ethiopia 2007, 111).

According to MRG, the Amhara have historically "dominated political life" in the northern highland region alongside the Tigray (MRG June 2019). However, *BTI 2022* reports that the "political coalition" between the Amhara and the Oromo today represents a "fragile power alliance" aimed "against the Tigray minority" (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022, 5). In "recent years," Al Jazeera reports that although Amhara have "intermarried and integrated" into communities outside of the Amhara region, "mass killings have regularly targeted them in western Ethiopia," including, for instance, in a series of "similar attacks" between February and March 2021, which killed over 50 civilians and, in November 2020, an attack by "gunmen" in which "at least 54 civilians" were killed at a school compound (Al Jazeera 6 July 2022). The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020* indicates that in a case of "targeted ethnic killings" that took place in November 2020 in Tigray, "Tigrayan militias and regional security services" verified the identity documents of ethnic Amhara residing in Mai-Kadra and other nearby towns ahead of targeting them (US 30 Mar. 2021, 33). The attack claimed the lives of "approximately 600-1,200" individuals (US 30 Mar. 2021, 33). According to HRW, Tigrayan forces in northern Amhara region have also "summarily executed dozens of civilians in two towns" from 31 August 2021 to 9 September 2021, including in the case of a "70-year-old man [who] said that two Tigrayan fighters killed his son" and nephew at his home in Chenna's Agosh-Mado neighborhood, after asking for the identity cards of the man, his son, and his nephew, and "accus[ing them] of being members of the local defense forces" (HRW 9 Dec. 2021).

Also according to HRW, OLA members were reported to be responsible for the killings of "at least 28 Amhara civilians" and "over a dozen" injured in the Oromia region throughout 2021 (HRW 13 Jan. 2022). With regards to how the OLA has targeted civilians from minority ethnic groups within Oromia region, such as the Amhara, an Al Jazeera article cites an Amhara resident of Oromia who fled the region in 2020, who noted that

"[i]n my village, the Amhara and Oromo intermarry. I speak both languages, which is common[.]"

...

"But for the shene, it won't be enough," the 30-year-old said, using a term commonly used by some Ethiopians to refer to the OLA.

"Even if you speak their language [Oromo], they'll take your phone and check if you listen to Amharic or Oromo music. That's all it takes for them to kill you." (Al Jazeera 20 Mar. 2021)

2.3 Somali

The 2007 census states that most of the Somali population [94 percent of the national total of 4,586,876 Somali] lives in the [southeastern] Somali region (4,320,478 out of a total regional population of 4,445,219 [97 percent]), and that most (3,753,147) are concentrated in rural areas (Ethiopia 2007, 79, 80). According to the same source, 5,695 Somali live in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia 2007, 87). The census further indicates that Somali are the second-largest ethnic group in Dire Dawa city administration (Ethiopia 2007, 88).

According to the census, 2,434,785 people in Somali region self-identify as Muslims [98 percent] (Ethiopia 2007, 113).

MRG indicates that Somali and Muslim organizations in the Somali region have "limited influence" and that the Ogaden [1] National Liberation Front (ONLF), is "pushing for rights of self-determination" (MRG Jan. 2018b). Information on the perceived political affiliation of Somalis in Ethiopia could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.4 Tigrayan

The 2007 census reports that most of the Tigrayan population [93 percent of the national total of 4,486,513 Tigrayans] lives in the [north-western] Tigray region (4,167,813 out of a total regional population of 4,316,988 [97 percent]), and that most (3,368,802) are concentrated in rural areas (Ethiopia 2007, 74, 75). According to the same source, 169,182 Tigrayans live in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia 2007, 87).

MRG reports that the Tigray are "largely" Orthodox Christians from the country's northern highlands (MRG June 2019). The census notes that 4,125,497 people in the Tigray region [96 percent] self-identify as Orthodox Christians (Ethiopia 2007, 109). According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, while Tigrayans and the Amhara share "religious and cultural similarities," "linguistic differences and political rivalry" have divided these groups (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 19 Jan. 2015).

Sources note that the conflict [that began in the Tigray region in November 2020 between the federal government's military forces and the regional Tigrayan security forces] has led to allegations of "ethnic cleansing" in Western Tigray of ethnic Tigrayans at the hands of Amhara regional security forces allied with the federal government's forces (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect 1 Sept. 2022; *The New York Times* 26 Feb. 2021). Sources further note that the war has killed "thousands" of individuals (AP 4 May 2021; Reuters 10 Nov. 2021) and displaced "more than two million people" (Reuters 10 Nov. 2021).

In a statement released by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the OHCHR joint investigation in the Tigray region from November 2021 to February 2022, 15,000 arbitrary arrests and detentions of individuals, "most" of whom appeared to be "ordinary citizens of Tigrayan ethnicity," were said to have been recorded (UN 7 Mar. 2022). According to sources, throughout 2021, authorities in Addis Ababa [and other cities (Amnesty International 29 Mar. 2022, 165)] "arbitrarily" detained "thousands" (Amnesty International 29 Mar. 2022, 165) or "scores" of Tigrayans (HRW 13 Jan. 2022). Sources note that ["systematic" (HRW 18 Aug. 2021)] verifications of identity documents have preceded the ["ethnically motivated" (Amnesty International 29 Mar. 2022)] arrests (Amnesty International 29 Mar. 2022, 165; HRW 18 Aug. 2021). Additionally, International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) reports that federal officials verified the "local identity cards" of Ethiopian travellers "before they [were to] fly abroad, and then blocked some Tigrayans from leaving" (Crisis Group 11 Feb. 2021, 6). According to Reuters, a state of emergency declared by the federal government in Tigray in November 2021 required citizens in the region to "carry ID cards that can indicate ethnic origin" (Reuters 10 Nov. 2021). In an example based on interviews conducted by Amnesty International and reported in an article by the same organization,

[o]ne man, who was arrested in the Merkato area [of Addis Ababa] on Friday 2 July, told the organization that police raided his snooker game business at around 7pm. They began to harass and beat customers and employees and demanded to see their identity documents, before taking five people, all ethnic Tigrayans, to the nearby Woreda 6 police station. Identification cards in Ethiopia identify the ethnicity of the holder. (Amnesty International 16 July 2021)

According to HRW, a Tigrayan woman who was detained for a week by Addis Ababa police described in an interview that many of her fellow detainees were ethnic Tigrayans, "people who, like her, were accused of supporting the TDF [Tigray Defence Forces]: older people, former police, lawyers, and youth" (HRW 18 Aug. 2021). Similarly, the OHCHR reports that the arrests of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa and other cities are "often" based on "suspicion of being affiliated to or supporting the [TPLF]" [2] (UN 16 Nov. 2021).

In an interview with the Associated Press (AP), a midwife reflecting on accounts she had heard from Tigray women of sexual assault by "various fighters, including Ethiopian federal forces," reflected that the intent is "to harm the community psychologically," as "[m]ost of the people in Tigray support the (fugitive Tigray leaders)"; therefore "[t]o destroy them, you must destroy Tigrayans" (AP 7 Apr. 2021). A Tigrayan individual interviewed in a report by Crisis Group regarding the targeting of TPLF supporters and Tigrayans generally, noted that

"[t]his war is waged not against the TPLF only but against Tigrayan people in general. They are striving to liquidate [Tigray's] political identity and remove it from the map without due regard for whether or not the people get exterminated in the process". (Crisis Group 11 Feb. 2021, 6)

HRW documents the shut down of several Tigrayan-owned businesses in Addis Ababa, some "without any notice," and the targeting of "bars and venues featuring music in Tigrinya, the language spoken by Tigrayans" (HRW 18 Aug. 2021). In another AP interview, an individual of both Amhara and Tigrayan ethnic descent displaced in Tigray shared information on the treatment they faced by both ethnic groups:

"Everyone looks at you and points out the part of you that doesn't belong to them," said [the individual]. "So if I go to Tigray, they would pick up that I'm Amhara because Amhara is not a part of them. When I go to Amhara, they would pick up the part of Tigray because Tigray is not a part of them." (AP 28 Dec. 2020)

According to the article,

[s]uch differences have become deadly. Many ethnic Tigrayan refugees have accused ethnic Amhara fighters of targeting them, while survivors of one massacre last month in the town of Mai-Kadra say Tigrayan fighters targeted Amhara. Other attacks followed. (AP 28 Dec. 2020)

According to an annual report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) published in July 2022, an "independent national human rights institution" that is mandated to promote and protect human rights in Ethiopia, "nearly" 9,000 ethnic Tigrayans residing in Afar Region "were rounded up and removed from Kilbeti Resu Zone" in December 2021 and remain "held against their will in two camps in Semera city (Agatina and Semera Camps)" (Ethiopia 8 July 2022).

2.5 Sidama

The 2007 census reports that most of the Sidama population [98 percent of the national total of 2,951,889 Sidama] lives in the [south-eastern] Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's (SNNP) region (2,893,947 out of a total regional population of 14,929,548 [19 percent]), and that most (2,758,744) are concentrated in rural areas (Ethiopia 2007, 82, 83). According to the same source, 2,180 Sidama live in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia 2007, 87).

According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the Sidama are "Cushitic-speaking peoples of southwestern Ethiopia who are not Oromo," and many Sidama follow traditional religious practices (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 29 Feb. 2016).

Information on the sociocultural background and perceived political affiliation of the Sidama could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.6 Guragie

The 2007 census reports that most of the Guragie population [61 percent of the national total of 1,859,831 Guragie] lives in the SNNP region (1,125,929 out of a total regional population of 14,929,548 [8 percent]), and that most (989,672) are concentrated in rural areas (Ethiopia 2007, 73, 82). According to the same source, 447,777 Guragie live in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia 2007, 86). *Encyclopaedia Britannica* reports that the Guragie reside are "mainly" Orthodox Christian and Muslim (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 3 Aug. 2015).

Information on the sociocultural background and perceived political affiliation of the Guragie could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.7 Welaita

The 2007 census reports that most of the Welaita population [98 percent of the national total of 1,676,128 Welaita] lives in the SNNP region (1,581,650 out of a total regional population of 14,929,548 [11 percent]), and that most (1,364,943) are concentrated in rural areas (Ethiopia 2007, 74, 82, 83). According to the same source, 18,824 Welaita live in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia 2007, 87).

Information on the sociocultural background and perceived political affiliation of the Welaita could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.8 Afar

The 2007 census reports that most of the Afar population [98 percent of the national total of 1,276,867 Afar] lives in the [north-eastern] Afar region (1,251,622 out of a total regional population of 1,390,273 [90 percent]), and that most (1,155,338) are concentrated in rural areas (Ethiopia 2007, 73, 75). According to the same source, 3,723 Afar live in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia 2007, 86).

MRG reports that the Afar are a "cross-border" ethnic group comprised of pastoralists who "live and head livestock in adjacent parts of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti" (MRG Jan. 2018c). The same source adds that the Afar are "primarily Sunni Muslim," and that they speak Afar and Arabic (MRG Jan. 2018c). According to the census, 1,324,584 people living in the Afar region [95 percent] self-identify as Muslim (Ethiopia 2007, 110).

MRG indicates that in addition to its "traditiona[l]" marginalization by the government, the Afar region is "one of the most remote and harsh" regions in the Horn of Africa, and residents have "minimal access to water" and other basic services (MRG Jan. 2018c).

Ethnic violence in early 2021 in Afar region was reported by Amnesty International, when a Somali militia group attacked a village in Afar in January and killed "at least 40 members of the Afar and federal police"; in another incident in April, "at least 30 people" were killed in the context of "armed violence between Afar and Somali people" (Amnesty International 29 Mar. 2022, 165). Information on the perceived political affiliation of the Afar could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.9 Hadiya

The 2007 census reports that most of the Hadiya population [94 percent of the national total of 1,269,382 Hadiya] lives in the SNNP region (1,191,549 out of a total regional population of 14,929,548 [8 percent]), and that most (1,073,451) are concentrated in rural areas (Ethiopia 2007, 73, 82). According to the same source, 16,863 Hadiya live in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia 2007, 86).

Information on the sociocultural background and perceived political affiliation of the Hadiya could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.10 Gamo

The 2007 census reports that most of the Gamo population [95 percent of the national total of 1,104,360 Gamo] lives in the SNNP region (1,044,589 out of a total regional population of 14,929,548 [7 percent]), and that most (961,269) are concentrated in rural areas (Ethiopia 2007, 73, 82). According to the same source, 45,985 Gamo live in Addis Ababa city administration (Ethiopia 2007, 86).

Information on the sociocultural background and perceived political affiliation of the Gamo could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Kebele Card and Ethnic Group Identification

Sources report that the kebele card is Ethiopia's "primary" (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 5.49), "most important" (World Bank 2016, 5), or "most widely used" (Ethiopia Dec. 2021, 3) identity document (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 5.49; Ethiopia Dec. 2021, 3; World Bank 2016, 5). According to a 2016 World Bank report on forms of identification in Ethiopia, despite a lack of official estimates, there is a "widespread perception" that the "vast majority of the adult population" of Ethiopia possess kebele cards, or over 40 million (World Bank 2016, 5).

Sources indicate that kebele cards are issued to individuals aged 18 and over [by the Vital Event Registration Agency (VERA) [3] (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 5.49)] through the applicant's corresponding kebele, the smallest unit of government administration in Ethiopia (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 2.32, 5.49; World Bank 2016, 6). The World Bank's 2016 report further notes that there are 16,475 kebeles across the country (World Bank 2016, 6). Australia's DFAT adds that kebeles maintain household records, including "when a house was acquired, the names of all individuals declared to be resident in the house and each resident's relationship with the head of the house" (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 5.52).

According to sources, the kebele card is used to confirm citizenship (Ethiopia Dec. 2021, 3; Fassil Apr. 2020, 24). Sources also note that the kebele card is required to obtain other identity documents, including a passport and a driver's license (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 5.49; Ethiopia Dec. 2021, 3; World Bank 2016, 6), as well as the tax ID number and the public sector pension card (World Bank 2016, 6). According to the World Bank, the kebele card is also used

to register a SIM [card], open a financial account, travel internally, stay in a hotel ... and to enroll to vote. These forms of identification apply only to Ethiopian citizens. Foreigners and refugees are registered separately and have separate forms of identification. (World Bank 2016, 6)

Sources report that kebele cards are "paper-based" documents and lack a centralized registration system for all kebeles (Fassil Apr. 2020, 24; World Bank 2016, 6). According to a report by the Ethiopian Prime Minister's Office on the National Identity Program, while kebele cards are used to access public and private services, "there is no central registry to ensure its uniqueness," rendering it "an unreliable credential that can be easily faked or duplicated" (Ethiopia Dec. 2021, 3). An April 2020 report on citizenship legislation in Ethiopia, published by the Global Citizenship Observatory (GLOBALCIT) of the European University Institute (EUI) in collaboration with the Edinburgh University Law School, indicates that some individuals "can have" more than a single kebele card as they "cannot be traced due to filing problems and old archives" (Fassil Apr. 2020, 24).

Sources indicate that kebele cards are not "uniform" in their appearance across regions (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 5.50) or "may look different" (World Bank 2016, 9). Australia's DFAT further notes that kebele cards "issued in rural areas may be handwritten, and may appear as a small booklet or cardboard identification card" (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 5.50). Notwithstanding the differences, the World Bank reports that

kebele cards include a standard set of information: full name (including grandfather), mother's name, photo, dat[e] of birth, occupation, ethnic group, emergency contact details, kebele, woreda, date of issue, issuing officer, and kebele stamp. Cards also include the telephone number of the kebele to facilitate queries on the authenticity of the document. (World Bank 2016, 9)

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an analyst at the Danish National ID Centre (NIDC), an "independent administrative body" that is functionally part of the Danish Return Agency under the Ministry of Immigration and Integration (Denmark n.d.), stated, based on NIDC's fact-finding mission in Ethiopia in May 2018, as well as "a number of written sources," that kebele cards include "information about the ethnic affiliation" of the cardholder (Denmark 13 Sept. 2022). However, the same source added that there are "possib[ly]" "some versions" of the kebele card that "do not state ethnic affiliation" (Denmark 13 Sept. 2022). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of Ethiopia's National ID Program (NID), which reports to the Ethiopian Prime Minister's Office and was launched to address to the need for a national "foundation[al] ID system" that aims to deliver "digital ID to 95% of the adult population by the end of 2025" (Ethiopia n.d.a), stated that "these days," kebeles do not collect "ethnic information" and that kebele cards no longer include such information, though this "may vary from region to region" (Ethiopia 21 Sept. 2022). Australia's DFAT reports that as of late 2019, new kebele cards no longer included the cardholder's ethnic group (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 5.50).

According to Australia's DFAT, when cardholders relocate to a new city or region, their kebele card must be "relinquish[ed]" and they must register with the new corresponding kebele and apply for a new kebele card (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 5.51). The same source indicates that kebele cards require renewal every two years (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 5.49).

Samples of kebele cards are featured in a 2016 World Bank Identification for Development (ID4D) [4] report for Ethiopia (World Bank 2016, 9).

In the context of the armed conflict in Tigray, AP reports in April 2021, according to interviews with nine refugees who fled to Sudan, there is now "proof" of an attempt by Ethiopian authorities in Western Tigray to carry out "ethnic cleansing in the form of a new identity card that eliminates all traces of Tigray" and that is "[w]ritten in a language not their own [Amharic], issued by authorities from another ethnic group" (AP 7 Apr. 2021). In an op-ed published by Al Jazeera, citing the AP investigation, human rights lawyer Netsanet Tesfay indicates that the change in identity cards is "part of an effort to identify the region as Amhara, thereby erasing the existence of Tigrayans and Tigray

altogether" (Tesfay 17 June 2021). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. Samples of the identity document are featured in the AP article (AP 7 Apr. 2021).

3.1 Addis Ababa City Resident ID Card

According to Australia's DFAT, the kebele card system in Addis Ababa city has seen "[n]ew-style identification cards issued ... since the fourth quarter of 2019 [that] are computer-generated, and are similar in appearance to a credit card" (Australia 12 Aug. 2020, para. 5.50). The NIDC analyst reported that the 2019 electronic Addis Ababa City Resident ID Cards do not include "information about ethnic affiliation" of the cardholder (Denmark 13 Sept. 2022). A sample of an Addis Ababa City Resident ID Card is featured in the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo) January 2020 thematic report on civil registration and identity documents in Ethiopia (Norway 31 Jan. 2020).

3.2 NID

Ethiopia's NID program, according to its website, was launched to respond to challenges in "asserting" and "verifying" identity in Ethiopia, and related challenges faced by "various public and private sectors providing services to citizens and legal residents" (Ethiopia Dec. 2021, 3). The program involves the development of a new centralized identification system that issues a unique number to Ethiopian residents and that "integrate[s]" but "transition[s]" away from the existing kebele cards and the civil registration system currently in place (Ethiopia Dec. 2021, 3, 5). The same source provides the following issuance policy framework for NIDs:

This National ID program and the credential thereof will serve to eventually replace the Kebele ID and other foundational IDs such as the yellow card, expat ID, refugee/IDP IDs etc... The fields therein show minimal biographic and biometric data, one of which indicating citizenship status. (Ethiopia Dec. 2021, 8, ellipsis in original)

Regarding requirements to register for an NID number, the same source writes that "[f]our types of demographic[c]" information will be collected (full name, gender, physical address, and date of birth), in addition to an identity card such as "passport, kebele [ID], driving [licence] and so on" (Ethiopia n.d.b). According to the NID representative, the issuance of NID numbers do not include the collection of "ethnic information" and the authority for the collection of demographic and biometric data remains centralized under the NID program office (Ethiopia 21 Sept. 2022). Additionally, the same source noted that "[a]round 300,000 citizens" have been issued their unique NID numbers thus far (Ethiopia 21 Sept. 2022).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] Ogaden region was renamed the Somali region in accordance with the 1994 constitution of Ethiopia (MRG Jan. 2018b).

[2] The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), similarly to other parties in Ethiopia, "is an ethnic-based party" that represents the interests of the Tigray people (AP 4 May 2021).

[3] The Vital Event Registration Agency (VERA) of Ethiopia was established in 2016 and is responsible for "directing, coordinating and centrally keep[ing] the registration of vital events at national level such as birth, marriage, divorce and death" (Ethiopia 10 Aug. 2016).

[4] The Identification for Development (ID4D) project operates across the World Bank Groups' practices and units, and "uses global knowledge and expertise across sectors to help countries realize the transformational potential of digital identification systems to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals" (World Bank 2016, ii).

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: assistant professor at a university in Canada whose research focuses on development economics, and who has published articles on ethnic and gender relations and economic inclusion in Ethiopia; associate professor at a university in the US whose research focuses on citizenship, migration and political institutions in the Horn of Africa; director at a university in the US whose research focuses on cross-border ethnicity and religion in international relations, including in Ethiopia; Ethiopia – Embassy in Ottawa; professor at a university in the US whose research is focused on post-conflict politics and political parties in Ethiopia; researcher at a policy institute in the UK whose research focuses on the political economy of Ethiopia, including the politicization of ethnicity; researcher at a university in Ethiopia whose work focuses on identity, ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia; visiting assistant professor at a university in the US whose research focuses on international relations, peace and security, notably in Ethiopia; visiting lecturer at a university in the UK whose research focuses on religious and social relations in Ethiopia; World Bank.

Internet sites, including: *Addis Standard*; *African Journal of International and Comparative Law*; Anadolu Agency; Asylum Research Centre; Austrian Red Cross – [ecoi.net](#); BBC; Borkena; Brookings Institution; Canada – International Development Research Centre; Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems; Center for Strategic and International Studies; Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative; Ethiopia – Federal Negarit Gazette; EU – EU Asylum Agency; Ezega.com; Factiva; Freedom House; *The Guardian*; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre; The New Humanitarian; UK – Home Office; UN – Economic Commission for Africa, International Organization for Migration, UNICEF Data; US – Congressional Research Service; University of Maryland – Minorities at Risk; Voice of America; World Privacy Forum.

ecoi.net summary:



Query response on
Ethiopia: Ethnic groups,
including relationship between
ethnicity and political
affiliation; indication of
ethnicity on the kebele card
(2020 - September 2022)

Country:

Ethiopia

Source:

[IRB – Immigration and Refugee
Board of Canada](#)

Original link:

[https://irb-
cisr.gc.ca/en/country-
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Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien
T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583
F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589
Info@ecoi.net

Contact
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