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Introduction

This Country of Origin Information Report was drawn up on the basis of the questions asked and points for attention mentioned in the Terms of Reference (ToR) compiled by the Ministry of Justice and Security. The ToR for this Country of Origin Information Report were adopted on 10 August 2023. The ToR, together with the report, are available at the Dutch Government's website.

This General Country of Origin Information Report describes the situation in Ethiopia insofar as this affects the assessment of asylum applications from persons originating from Ethiopia, and for decision-making regarding the repatriation of Ethiopian asylum seekers who have been rejected. The last General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia is dated November 2022. The reporting period for the present Country of Origin Information Report covers the period from December 2022 to December 2023. The Country of Origin Information Report is a factual, neutral and objective representation of the findings that were made during the period under consideration. It is not a policy document, nor does it reflect the government's vision or policy in relation to any given country or region. It also does not contain any conclusions concerning immigration policy.

This Country of Origin Information Report has been compiled on the basis of public and confidential sources, using carefully selected, analysed and verified information. In the compilation of this report, use was made of information from various sources, including non-governmental and international organisations, specialist literature, media reporting and relevant government agencies. Except where the facts are generally undisputed or unless stated otherwise, the content in this report is based on multiple sources. The public sources that were consulted are listed in the appendices of this Country of Origin Information Report.

Some of the information used was obtained during a fact-finding mission to Ethiopia in 2023. This Country of Origin Information Report draws on information from interviews held on-site during this mission with relevant expert sources. In addition, some of the information used was obtained through channels including the diplomatic representation of the Netherlands for Ethiopia, along with information originating from conversations and correspondence outside the context of the fact-finding mission. Such information was used primarily to support and complement passages based on publicly available information. Each of these sources is marked as a 'confidential source' in the footnotes and accompanied by a date.

Section 1 addresses the political context and developments, in addition to setting out the security situation in Ethiopia. Section 2 concerns Ethiopian documents. Section 3 describes compliance with and violations of human rights. Section 4 describes the position of refugees and displaced persons. Section 5 addresses the potential risks faced by Ethiopian citizens when returning to Ethiopia (including instances of forced repatriation).

1. Political developments and security situation

1.1. Political developments

1.1.1. Territorial reorganisation

Ethiopia is a federal state made up of states — known as regions — that were created in 1995 along ethno-linguistic lines.¹ During the reporting period, two new regional states were established: Central Ethiopia and Southern Ethiopia. These areas were previously part of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region. Southern Ethiopia became a state as a result of a referendum in February 2023. In June 2023, the referendum was repeated in Wolaita, as the results there were declared invalid due to voting fraud. Wolaita was a zone whose people had expressed a desire to have their own region, rather than being part of the new Southern Ethiopia region with other zones and groups. After the referendum, Wolaita nevertheless became part of that region. The creation of Central Ethiopia was the outcome of a decision by the federal parliament.²

During the reporting period, the federal government announced that the status of West Tigray, a disputed area between Amhara and Tigray, would be determined through a referendum. See also 1.1.5.

1.1.2. Tigray ceasefire agreement

On 2 November 2022, at the end of the previous reporting period, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian federal authorities in Pretoria, South Africa, signed a ceasefire agreement (Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, CoHA).³ This agreement marked a turning point in the two-year civil war that had resulted in hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths and widespread human rights violations, including rapes, killings and the denial of humanitarian aid, particularly to the people of Tigray.⁴ On 12 November 2022, the agreement was supplemented by a statement containing further details on the ceasefire.⁵ Amongst other elements, this statement noted that the disarmament of the fighters in the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF)⁶ would be accompanied by the withdrawal from Tigray of foreign

¹ Ethiopia Insight, *Under Ethiopia's federal system, Western Tigray belongs in Tigray*, 3 August 2022; Berihun Adugna Gebeye, 'The Four Faces of Ethiopian Federalism' in *Between Failure and Redemption The Future of the Ethiopian Social Contract*, 12 April 2023, p. 159.

² Addis Standard, *News: Ethiopia House of Federation officiates creation of new state in Southern Ethiopia*, 5 July 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Two new regions formed in Ethiopia*, 19 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn, no 455*, 20 June 2023; Addis Standard, *News: Voters casting ballots in rerun referendum to decide Wolaita zone's fate*, 19 June 2023.

³ African Union, *Agreement for lasting peace through a permanent cessation of hostilities between the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front*, 2 November 2022, [Download the signed agreement here.pdf \(igad.int\)](#).

⁴ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea A/HRC/53/20*, 1 May 2023; Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, p. 4; Financial Times, *War in Tigray may have killed 600,000 people, peace mediator says*, 15 January 2023.

⁵ *Declaration of executive plan of the Pretoria peace agreement*, [Executive-Declaration.pdf \(addisstandard.com\)](#), consulted on 6 November 2023; OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea A/HRC/53/20*, 1 May 2023, p. 6; Human Rights Watch, *Eritrea: Crackdown on Draft Evaders' Families*, 9 February 2023.

⁶ The TDF was the Tigrayan military group that fought against the federal government and its allies. In addition to members of the TPLF, the TDF included Tigrayans from Tigrayan opposition parties. Tigrayans with no political

troops and those not belonging to the federal army (Ethiopian National Defence Force, ENDF).⁷

Parties to the conflict other than the federal authorities and the TPLF — such as Eritrea, the Amharic special forces (for an explanation of special forces, see 1.1.6) and militias, and the Afar special forces — were neither involved in the negotiations in Pretoria nor signatories to the agreement. Amharic politicians had opposed the negotiations, fearing that too little consideration would be given to the interests of Amhara.⁸ President Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea would purportedly also have preferred a complete surrender or destruction of the TPLF to a ceasefire.⁹ This rendered the peace fragile and resulted in new conflicts and human rights violations (see also 1.3).¹⁰

1.1.3. Implementation of/compliance with the Tigray ceasefire agreement

Several important developments have taken place since the signing of the agreement. For example, a Interim Regional Administration (IRA) was appointed, and the federal army handed over large parts of Tigray to that interim government.

1.1.3.1. Interim Regional Administration

As part of the implementation of the ceasefire agreement, the Ethiopian federal parliament removed the TPLF from the list of terrorist organisations on 22 March 2023.¹¹ However, only 280 of the 547 members of parliament (MPs) were present in parliament for the vote on this matter. One explanation was that a large proportion of Amharic members of Prime Minister Abiy's Prosperity Party (PP)¹² opposed the bill and preferred to be absent rather than vote against it. Opposing votes were cast by the Amharic opposition party National Movement of Amhara (NaMA) and the liberal party Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA). Oromo members of the PP voted in favour of the proposal to remove the TPLF from the list of terrorist organisations, but wanted the armed group Oromia Liberation Army (OLA) to be removed from the list as well.¹³

The ceasefire agreement provided for an Interim Regional Administration to be established through dialogue between the parties. The TPLF's initial proposal to appoint the TPLF leader Debretsion Gebremichael as chair of the interim government was rejected by Prime Minister Abiy. In response, the TPLF proposed spokesperson Getachew Reda, who had less support within the TPLF. Abiy agreed to this proposal.¹⁴ The interim government consisted for 49% of parties other than the

affiliation were also part of the TDF. The TPLF, as the ruling party in Tigray, did head the TDF. The Ethiopian federal government opposed the use of the name TDF and called on the international media not to use it.

⁷ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea A/HRC/53/20*, 1 May 2023, p. 6; Human Rights Watch, *Eritrea: Crackdown on Draft Evaders' Families*, 9 February 2023.

⁸ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 4; Al Jazeera, *What's behind the crisis in Ethiopia's Amhara region? A simple guide*, 10 August 2023; BBC News, *Ethiopia's Amhara region hit by protests over move to dissolve regional forces*, 10 April 2023.

⁹ Martin Plaut, *The Horn of Africa faces another potential armed conflict*, 17 October 2023; Confidential source, 15 December 2023.

¹⁰ Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, p. 5, 19; Al Jazeera, *What's behind the crisis in Ethiopia's Amhara region? A simple guide*, 10 August 2023.

¹¹ France24, *Ethiopia's parliament removes Tigray rebel party from terror list*, 22 March 2023; Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia removes 'terrorist' tag from Tigray regional party*, 22 March 2023.

¹² The Prosperity Party (PP) was the successor to the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of regional political parties that had ruled Ethiopia between 1991 and 2019. The PP was established by PM Abiy in 2019. The party was a merger of parties that had previously been part of the EPRDF and other regional parties, except the TPLF.

¹³ Reuters, *Ethiopia takes Tigray's TPLF party off terrorism list*, 22 March 2023; Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia removes 'terrorist' tag from Tigray regional party*, 22 March 2023; Confidential source, 29 March 2023.

¹⁴ Reuters, *Ethiopia establishes Tigray interim administration as part of peace plan*, 23 March 2023; Confidential source, 29 March 2023.

TPLF.¹⁵ None of the Tigrayan political parties that had sided with the federal government during the conflict had a seat in the interim government.¹⁶

1.1.3.2. Transfer of territories to the Interim Regional Administration

At the time the ceasefire was signed, Tigray was under the control of four different parties: the federal government, the TPLF, the Eritrean army and Amharic troops. Following the establishment of the Tigray Interim Regional Administration, the federal government transferred the administration of the areas under its control to the Interim Regional Administration. Amharic and Eritrean troops nevertheless remained present in parts of Tigray (see also 1.3.2).¹⁷

According to the Interim Regional Administration, it was the responsibility of the federal authorities to ensure that these troops also left Tigray.¹⁸ According to a confidential source, the TPLF accused the federal government of avoiding political dialogue on these issues. The continued presence of Amharic and Eritrean troops made it almost impossible to make progress on the humanitarian front in certain parts of Tigray (see also 1.3.3.5).¹⁹ In December 2023, following the intervention of the African Union (AU), the federal government and the TPLF agreed to enter into a political dialogue on outstanding issues relating to the ceasefire agreement.²⁰

Earlier the AU had, through the team responsible for monitoring the ceasefire agreement, confirmed that the TPLF had surrendered heavy weapons and that some of the TPLF fighters had been disarmed.²¹ At the end of the reporting period, however, the process of demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of TPLF fighters was far from complete. According to a confidential source, positions had hardened, and there was talk in political circles in Tigray of once again taking up arms.²²

1.1.3.3. No political recognition of the TPLF

In June 2023, the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) rejected the request from the TPLF to be registered as a political party. The Board's reasoning for this was that a political party known as the TPLF had already existed, and that this would lead to confusion.²³ In January 2021, the Board had dissolved the TPLF as a political party, due to the party's involvement in an armed conflict. After the ceasefire was signed, the TPLF asked to be re-registered as a political party. This request was refused, however, as the electoral law did not provide for the restoration of dissolved political parties.²⁴ The Tigrayan transitional authorities argued that this decision by the Election Board had undermined the ceasefire and made it impossible to recognise the participation of TPLF leaders in the transitional authority.²⁵ According to the TPLF, it was not a matter for the Election Board. They said it was a political matter, just like the decision to remove the TPLF from the list

¹⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Tigray ex-rebel group renews call for recognition*, 30 October 2023.

¹⁶ Confidential source, 29 March 2023.

¹⁷ The Reporter, *Eritrean forces still occupy several woredas and kebeles in Tigray, officials*, 22 April 2023.

¹⁸ Addis Standard, *News: Tigray interim president sets out regional territorial integrity, justice, IDPs as priorities as interim administration assume power*, 25 March 2023; Addis Standard, *News: Amhara region says activities kicked off to resolve identity, boundary issues with Tigray region through referendum*, 8 July 2023; Confidential source, 13 June 2023.

¹⁹ Confidential source, 13 June 2023.

²⁰ Borkena, *Ethiopian Federal Government, TPLF agree to hold political dialogue*, 7 December 2023; AU, *The AU Convenes the 3rd Joint Committee Meeting of the Ethiopian Peace Process*, 2 December 2023.

²¹ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 15-16.

²² Confidential source, 6 October 2023.

²³ Addis Standard, *News: Election board declines new requests for TPLF as regional party*, 13 June 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn No. 457, 26 June 2023*; Addis Standard, *ASDailyScoop: Court upholds NEBE ruling declining request to establish TPLF as new regional party, 7 August 2023*; Confidential source, 13 June 2023.

²⁴ Addis Standard, *News: Election Board declines to restore TPLF's legal registration as political party*, 13 May 2023; Confidential source, 13 June 2023.

²⁵ Addis Standard, *News: Election board declines new requests for TPLF as regional party*, 13 June 2023.

of terrorist organisations.²⁶ In August 2023, the decision of the Election Board was upheld by a court.²⁷

1.1.3.4. Tensions within the TPLF

The reporting period was characterised by tensions within the TPLF. The ceasefire had led to divisions between the reformers and the opponents of the ceasefire, who had links to sections of the TDF that did not wish to disarm.²⁸ Part of the TPLF, as a signatory to the ceasefire agreement, also wanted more say in the governance of the region.²⁹ The Election Board's decision led to additional tensions, not least because it would invalidate the TPLF's claim to its share of the property of the former Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF³⁰).³¹ Even though, as indicated above, the Interim Regional Administration was chaired by Getachew Reda, a senior TPLF official, almost half consisted of other political parties.³²

Since the signing of the ceasefire, the number of political parties (including opposition parties) in Tigray has increased substantially, as the TPLF has somewhat lost its centralist grip on the political landscape due to the conflict.³³

1.1.4. Oromia

1.1.4.1. OLA/OLF-Shene

The Oromia Liberation Army (OLA) was established in 2018 by members of the Oromia Liberation Front (OLF) who refused to disarm when Prime Minister Abiy recognised the OLF as a legal political party.³⁴ The Ethiopian authorities gave the OLA the name OLF-Shene, a designation which the OLA opposed.³⁵ At the end of the previous reporting period, the violence in Oromia and in the Oromo Special Zone in the Amhara regio³⁶ had increased.³⁷ The focus of federal authorities and the army on Tigray allowed the OLA to expand its insurgency.³⁸

1.1.4.2. Negotiations between the federal government and the OLA

Despite a 2021 cooperation agreement between the OLA and the TPLF, the OLA was not involved in the peace negotiations in Pretoria. The Ethiopian authorities gave as their reason that the OLA had no clear political agenda.³⁹ In the aftermath of the ceasefire agreement with the TPLF, pressure increased on the federal government to negotiate with the OLA as well. In early 2023, Oromia MPs from Abiy's Prosperity

²⁶ Ethiopian Citizen, *Ethiopia's Chief of the Electoral Board Resigns Amid Row with TPLF*, 26 June 2023.

²⁷ [Addis Standard, ASDailyScoop: Court upholds NEBE ruling declining request to establish TPLF as new regional party, 7 August 2023.](#)

²⁸ Confidential source, 13 June 2023.

²⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Tigray state leader fires more TPLF officials amid row*, 8 November 2023.

³⁰ The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was a coalition of regional political parties that had ruled Ethiopia between 1991 and 2019. It was the predecessor of the Prosperity Party, which is currently in power.

³¹ Confidential source, 13 June 2023.

³² BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Tigray ex-rebel group renews call for recognition*, 30 October 2023.

³³ Confidential source, 13 June 2023.

³⁴ OLA, *A brief political manifesto. From armed struggle to the prospect of peace*, January 2023; The Reporter, *Oromia in dire straits*, 3 December 2022; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³⁵ EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 417*, 25 April 2023; Ethiopia Insight, *Is peace finally coming to Ethiopia's Oromia region?*, 30 April 2023; Africa Intelligence, *Ethiopia: OLA and Addis open preliminary talks in climate of mistrust*, 27 April 2023.

³⁶ *Oromia Special Zone* is an area in Amhara mainly inhabited by Oromo.

³⁷ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 14-15.

³⁸ The New Humanitarian, *As violence subsides in Tigray, Ethiopia's Oromia conflict flares*, 12 January 2023; Agenzia Fides, *Controversial trials over the effects of the truce in Tigray, while the conflict in Oromia reopens*, 19 January 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³⁹ Africa Intelligence, *Ethiopia: OLA and Addis open preliminary talks in climate of mistrust*, 27 April 2023; The Reporter, *Oromia in dire straits*, 3 December 2022.

Party wrote several appeals to this effect to the prime minister, parliament and the AU.⁴⁰

In January 2023, OLA leader Jaal Marro (see also 1.3.4.2), published a manifesto outlining the OLA's demands: political autonomy, economic sovereignty and protection of Oromo socio-economic rights against the Ethiopian federal state. He also denied that the OLA was guilty of ethnic violence.⁴¹

In 2023, two rounds of peace negotiations took place between the federal authorities and the OLA. The first round took place from 25 April to 3 May 2023 in Zanzibar, Tanzania.⁴² The talks did not lead to an agreement.⁴³ The second round, which took place in November 2023, also failed to produce an agreement.⁴⁴ The OLA accused the Ethiopian authorities of trying to entice the OLA leadership with promises of positions of power to ignore the underlying issues.⁴⁵

1.1.5. West and South Tigray

By 2020, Amharic forces (which had worked closely with the federal army during the Tigray conflict) had occupied parts of western and southern Tigray: the Welkait-Tegede, Tselemt and Raya areas.⁴⁶ These areas had been allocated to Tigray in 1995 in the then-new constitution, which created autonomous regions along ethno-linguistic lines.⁴⁷ According to the Amhara living in the area, they had been marginalised and discriminated against by the TPLF from that time onwards. The TPLF is also said to have sent masses of Tigrayans to the sparsely populated area in the past, as the farmland there was fertile. This had the side effect of making them the majority there. Amhara had claimed the territory throughout that time. During the occupation by Amharic forces during the Tigray conflict (November 2020–November 2022), they had committed serious human rights violations against the civilian population in the area.⁴⁸ Conversely, the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF)⁴⁹ had also committed serious human rights violations, including ill treatment, detention,

⁴⁰ The New Humanitarian, *As violence subsides in Tigray, Ethiopia's Oromia conflict flares*, 12 January 2023; Addis Standard, *News: Lawmakers from Oromia urge AU to "intervene and negotiate" to end conflict in Oromia, repeat call for warring parties*, 20 March 2023.

⁴¹ OLA, *A brief political manifesto. From armed struggle to the prospect of peace*, January 2023.

⁴² EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 416*, 24 April 2023; Addis Standard, *NewsAlert: Negotiations between government, Oromo Liberation Army to start in Tanzania: PM Abiy*, 23 April 2023; Addis Standard, *Updated: Ethiopia says "constructive" talks with OLA concluded today with no agreement; OLA says understandings reached "on some outstanding issues" but not on "key political matters"*, 3 May 2023.

⁴³ EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 416*, 24 April 2023; Addis Standard, *NewsAlert: Negotiations between government, Oromo Liberation Army to start in Tanzania: PM Abiy*, 23 April 2023; Addis Standard, *Updated: Ethiopia says "constructive" talks with OLA concluded today with no agreement; OLA says understandings reached "on some outstanding issues" but not on "key political matters"*, 3 May 2023.

⁴⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia, Oromo rebels resume peace talks in Tanzania*, 8 November 2023; Addis Standard, *Update: US, IGAD, Kenya & Norway key peace talk facilitators; OLA southern command chief arrives in Dar es Salaam*, 8 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Second round of talks between Ethiopia, rebel OLA end without deal*, 21 November 2023.

⁴⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: OLA blames Ethiopian government for failed peace talks*, 25 November 2023.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia, November 2022, pp. 63-64; Financial Times, *Ethiopia's plan to rebuild in the wake of a 'brutal' war*, 4 October 2023; Addis Standard, *News: Amhara region says activities kicked off to resolve identity, boundary issues with Tigray region through referendum*, 8 July 2023; NRC, *Nieuw etnisch conflict in Ethiopië*, 9 August 2023.

⁴⁷ Ethiopia Insight, *Under Ethiopia's federal system, Western Tigray belongs in Tigray*, 3 August 2022.

⁴⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia, November 2022, pp. 63-64; Financial Times, *Ethiopia's plan to rebuild in the wake of a 'brutal' war*, 4 October 2023; Addis Standard, *News: Amhara region says activities kicked off to resolve identity, boundary issues with Tigray region through referendum*, 8 July 2023; NRC, *Nieuw etnisch conflict in Ethiopië*, 9 August 2023; Confidential source, 15 December 2023.

⁴⁹ In open sources, there is no consistency in the use of the terms TPLF and TDF. Although the abbreviations are used interchangeably, the TDF was the Tigrayan military branch that fought against the federal government and its allies. In addition to members of the TPLF, the TDF included Tigrayans from Tigrayan opposition parties (such as Baytona and the TIP). Tigrayans with no political affiliation were also part of the TDF. The TPLF was at the head of the TDF.

summary executions and sexual violence against civilians during offensives in Afar and Amhara regions in 2021.⁵⁰

It followed from the ceasefire agreement of November 2022 that the status of the disputed areas in Tigray would be determined in accordance with the constitution.⁵¹ According to Amharic politicians, this put the Amhara region at a disadvantage. According to them, the interests of Amhara had not been sufficiently considered in the negotiations, with the result that the Amhara people felt inadequately protected or supported.⁵² In November 2023, the federal government announced that it was working on a referendum to resolve the border disputes between Tigray and Amhara. By seeking to address the dispute through a referendum, the timing of the return of internally displaced people (IDPs) to those areas came to be of major importance, as the composition of the population could have a major impact on the outcome of the referendum.⁵³ In response to the Defence Minister's August 2023 statement that Tigrayan displaced persons could soon return to the disputed areas, the Amharic rulers in those areas had said they would 'defend themselves against invaders'.⁵⁴ The Tigray Interim Regional Administration also rejected the referendum proposal, saying it was in contradiction with the ceasefire agreement.⁵⁵

1.1.6. Disbanding of special forces

Ethiopia's constitution provides for regional governments to establish their own regional police forces. Over the years, however, and especially since Prime Minister Abiy took office in 2018, some member states had established regional security structures resembling small armies. These special forces gave the regions a certain degree of autonomy as regards their security policies.⁵⁶ On 6 April 2023, the federal government announced that all regional special forces would be disarmed and integrated into the regional and federal police and the federal army.⁵⁷

The decision to centralise the regional special forces was received relatively calmly in most regions, including in Oromia, Afar and Somali where the special forces played an important role.⁵⁸ In contrast, resistance was strong in the Amhara region. According to Amharic politicians and public opinion, the interests of Amhara were not sufficiently considered in the negotiations with the TPLF, with the result that the Amhara people felt inadequately protected and supported.⁵⁹ In addition, in the decision to disband the special forces, the Amhara saw a plan by the — in their view — Oromo-dominated federal authorities to reduce Amhara's political and military

⁵⁰ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, pp. 7-8.

⁵¹ Al Jazeera, *What's behind the crisis in Ethiopia's Amhara region? A simple guide*, 10 August 2023; African Union, *Agreement for lasting peace through a permanent cessation of hostilities between the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front*, 2 November 2023, [Download-the-signed-agreement-here.pdf \(igad.int\)](#), Article 9.

⁵² International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, p. 16; Ethiopia Peace Observatory, *Ethiopia Peace Observatory weekly: 29 July-4 August 2023*, 10 August 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁵³ Addis Standard, *News: Amhara region says activities kicked off to resolve identity, boundary issues with Tigray region through referendum*, 8 July 2023; Financial Times, *Ethiopia's plan to rebuild in the wake of a 'brutal' war*, 4 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia says referendum to decide Tigray-Amhara dispute*, 6 November 2023; Confidential source, 13 June 2023.

⁵⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Amhara reject minister's remarks on disputed areas*, 28 August 2023.

⁵⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Tigray rejects proposed referendum on border row*, 6 December 2023.

⁵⁶ Confidential source, 28 April 2023.

⁵⁷ Reuters, *Ethiopia to dismantle regional special forces in favour of 'centralized army'*, 6 April 2023; Crisis24, *Ethiopia: Increased tension likely in Amhara Region through at least mid-April amid officials' call to dismantle regional special forces units*, 7 April 2023; BBC News, *Ethiopia's Amhara region hit by protests over move to dissolve regional forces*, 10 April 2023; Confidential source, 28 April 2023.

⁵⁸ Confidential source, 28 April 2023.

⁵⁹ Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

power, as well as to return the disputed territories of Welkait and Raya to Tigray.⁶⁰ It was incorrectly claimed that the special forces were disarmed only in Amhara.⁶¹

At the end of the reporting period, the demobilisation and reintegration of the various regional special forces was underway. According to one confidential source, the speed at which this happened varied by region.⁶² Another confidential source said it was difficult to estimate progress because it was unclear how many troops the various special forces comprised.⁶³

1.1.7. Amhara

Against a background of rising tensions between the federal authorities and the Amhara, beginning in late April 2023, ethnic extremists reportedly assassinated several political and security leaders who had supported the demobilisation of the special forces. The victims included the leader of the PP's Amhara faction.⁶⁴ Members of the Amharic special forces who did not want to demobilise joined Amharic militias, also known as Fano. In August 2023, violence escalated between Amharic militias and the federal army.⁶⁵ This is discussed in detail in 1.3.4.

1.1.7.1. Restructuring of the Amhara regional government

The deteriorating situation in Amhara led to a restructuring of the regional government. A new president, the fifth since Prime Minister Abiy took office, and twelve new councillors were appointed. Despite the reforms, the killings of local civilian and security officials continued, leaving the local government in the Amhara region non-functional in many places.⁶⁶

1.1.7.2. State of emergency

On 2 August 2023, regional authorities in Amhara shut down the internet, invoking the help of federal authorities.⁶⁷ Following this, on 4 August, the federal government declared a state of emergency for a period of six months (i.e. until early February 2024).⁶⁸ The emergency order covered the conflict in the Amhara region, but was declared applicable throughout the country by the authorities, in an effort to stop activities that would further deteriorate the regional or national security situation.⁶⁹

⁶⁰ BBC News, *Ethiopia's Amhara region hit by protests over move to dissolve regional forces*, 10 April 2023; Crisis24, *Ethiopia: Increased tension likely in Amhara Region through at least mid-April amid officials' call to dismantle regional special forces units*, 7 April 2023; Al Jazeera, *What's behind the crisis in Ethiopia's Amhara region? A simple guide*, 10 August 2023; Confidential source, 28 April 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁶¹ Ahram Online, *Ethiopian PM vows to dismantle all paramilitary forces in country*, 6 July 2023; Confidential source, 28 April 2023.

⁶² Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

⁶³ Confidential source, 22 January 2024.

⁶⁴ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 17-18; Ethiopia Peace Observatory, *EPO weekly: 29 July-4 August 2023*, 10 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 420*, 28 April 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 422*, 2 May 2023; Confidential source, 28 April 2023.

⁶⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia blocks internet in Amhara amid clashes*, 3 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia heightens restrictions on six Amhara towns amid unrest*, 9 August 2023; Al Jazeera, *What's behind the crisis in Ethiopia's Amhara region? A simple guide*, 10 August 2023; Confidential source, 28 April 2023.

⁶⁶ Addis Standard, *News: Crisis-hit Amhara state capital gets new mayor, administrative leadership*, 15 September 2023; Confidential source, 6 October 2023.

⁶⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia blocks internet in Amhara amid clashes*, 3 August 2023.

⁶⁸ Ethiopia Peace Observatory, *EPO weekly: 29 July-4 August 2023*, 10 August 2023; Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 4; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia to impose state of emergency on restive region*, 4 August 2023; Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia declares state of emergency following clashes in Amhara*, 4 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia heightens restrictions on six Amhara towns amid unrest*, 9 August 2023; Al Jazeera, *What's behind the crisis in Ethiopia's Amhara region? A simple guide*, 10 August 2023; Confidential source, 28 April 2023.

⁶⁹ Ethiopian Monitor, *Council Declares State of Emergency in Amhara Region*, 4 August 2023; Ethiopia Peace Observatory, *EPO weekly: 29 July-4 August 2023*, 10 August 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

Those who did not comply with the terms of the emergency order risked three to ten years in prison.⁷⁰

As usual for emergency orders in Ethiopia, a command post⁷¹ was set up. It was headed by the director-general of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). The state of emergency allowed the authorities to disregard certain elements of the rule of law. For example, no arrest warrant was required and the obligation to bring detainees before a court within 48 hours was waived. The command post had the power to arrest people without a court order, impose a curfew, restrict freedom of movement and assembly, and suspend services and transport.⁷² In addition to the curfew, the command post issued a ban on public gatherings, the carrying of weapons by civilians and the use of motorbikes and motorised tricycles in traffic. Companies and government agencies were ordered to return to work starting 10 August 2023.⁷³ The ban on motorised tricycles in traffic was lifted again on 15 August 2023.⁷⁴ The command post's jurisdiction extended beyond law and order. According to one source, all major policy decisions had to be submitted to the command post first.⁷⁵

Despite a recommendation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission to bring the state of emergency into line with human rights standards, the parliament passed the bill without amendments.⁷⁶ The commission had called for the state of emergency to be reduced from six months to one month and for it to apply only to the Amhara region.⁷⁷ In October 2023, the commission and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights wrote to federal authorities that the state of emergency was incompatible with transitional justice,⁷⁸ and called for dialogue.⁷⁹

1.1.8. National dialogue and transitional justice

As described in the previous Country of Origin Information Report, a National Dialogue Committee was established in February 2022. The objective of the committee was to resolve differences on fundamental issues (e.g. border disputes) and to build a national consensus.⁸⁰ Observers were nevertheless concerned about the degree of inclusiveness in the process.⁸¹ In addition to the National Dialogue,

⁷⁰ VOA Africa, *Ethiopia Announces Arrests In Tense Amhara Region*, 7 August 2023; Al Jazeera, *What's behind the crisis in Ethiopia's Amhara region? A simple guide*, 10 August 2023.

⁷¹ A command post is a committee of military personnel that effectively holds power in the area covered by the state of emergency. Besides the command posts, the army also controls areas on many inter-regional borders. According to Ethiopia Insight, more than half of Ethiopia is under the de facto control of the federal army.

⁷² BBC Monitoring, *Command centre set up to coordinate security operation in Ethiopia's Amhara*, 4 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia admits losing areas in Amhara region to militia*, 6 August 2023; Ethiopian Monitor, *Council Declares State of Emergency in Amhara Region*, 4 August 2023; Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 4; Addis Standard, *News: Intelligence chief Temesgen Tiruneh to lead command post overseeing SoE in Amhara region, ministry of justice reveals further details*, 5 August 2023; Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Authorities must grant independent investigators, media unfettered access to Amhara region to probe violations under state of emergency*, 18 August 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁷³ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia heightens restrictions on six Amhara towns amid unrest*, 9 August 2023.

⁷⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia lifts ban on tricycles in six Amhara towns*, 15 August 2023.

⁷⁵ Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

⁷⁶ Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Authorities must grant independent investigators, media unfettered access to Amhara region to probe violations under state of emergency*, 18 August 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁷⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia asked to reduce period of Amhara region state of emergency*, 12 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 473*, 24 August 2023.

⁷⁸ Transitional justice is how a country decides to account for human rights violations committed in previous periods, often in times of war. Source: Amnesty International, [Transitie en transitionale justitie \(overgangsjustitie\) - Amnesty International](#)

⁷⁹ EHRC/OHCHR, *Advisory note on the next steps towards the development of a human rights compliant Transitional Justice Policy for Ethiopia*, 11 October 2023.

⁸⁰ Institute for Security Studies, *Ethiopia's National Dialogue needs greater credibility and inclusivity*, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁸¹ Institute for Security Studies, *Ethiopia's National Dialogue needs greater credibility and inclusivity*, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

Ethiopian federal authorities worked to develop ideas for transitional justice during the reporting period (see also 3.1.1.3). In January 2023, Ethiopia's Ministry of Justice released a memorandum containing options for doing so.⁸² Although the two processes would apparently be linked, the authorities had not made it clear how they related to each other.⁸³

1.1.9. Sidama

In the Sidama region, which was created in 2020 to meet the desire of the Sidama people to have their own region, there were tensions between the regional government, which was dominated by the PP, and the opposition Sidama Federalist Party (SFP). This party accused the regional government of mismanagement and corruption. In late 2023, the Sidama regional government arrested more than twenty leaders of the party for damaging relations with neighbouring regions (see also 3.2.2.4).⁸⁴

1.2. Relations with neighbouring countries

1.2.1. Claim to access the Red Sea

Ethiopia has no borders that give access to the sea. During the reporting period, tensions arose between Ethiopia and its neighbours — notably Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti — after Prime Minister Abiy announced in October 2023 that Ethiopia needed a port on the Red Sea.⁸⁵ During the Army Day celebrations on 26 October 2023, the army sang 'The sea is ours'.⁸⁶ The state media gave wide coverage to the Prime Minister's utterances for weeks.⁸⁷ On 1 January 2024, Ethiopia and Somaliland signed an agreement that would give Ethiopia access to a port and a military base.⁸⁸ In return, Ethiopia would recognise Somaliland. Although Somaliland unilaterally seceded from Somalia in the 1990s, neither Somalia nor the international community recognises Somaliland as independent.⁸⁹ In reactions to the agreement, Somalia indicated it was seen as an act of aggression⁹⁰ and the

⁸² Institute for Security Studies, *Ethiopia's transition depends on both dialogue and transitional justice*, 1 September 2023.

⁸³ Institute for Security Studies, *Ethiopia's transition depends on both dialogue and transitional justice*, 1 September 2023.

⁸⁴ Addis Standard, *News: Sidama Federalist Party accuses regional government of unlawful arrests, calls for release of detained members*, 4 October 2023; Addis Standard, *News: Sidama regional government counters SFP allegations, accuses party of spreading discord*, 5 October 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

⁸⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Ethiopian leader says ready to swap dam's shares for port*, 14 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Ethiopia seeks to allay fears as port access remarks alarm neighbours*, 26 October 2023; The Economist, *Ports in a storm*, 2 November 2023.

⁸⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian army chants "the sea is ours" in port access quest*, 27 October 2023.

⁸⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Ethiopian state media give wide coverage to demand for port access*, 19 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Ethiopia TV amplifies commentaries, programmes on Red Sea port quest*, 23 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Ethiopian state TV sustains coverage on port issue*, 6 November 2023.

⁸⁸ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia and Somaliland sign MoU on port access*, 1 January 2024; BBC Monitoring, *PM says Somaliland MoU to heal 'Ethiopia's heartbreak'*, 2 January 2024.

⁸⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia and Somaliland sign MoU on port access*, 1 January 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia alludes to Somaliland recognition for first time*, 3 January 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Somalia's president 'nullifies' Ethiopia-Somaliland pact*, 7 January 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian official says formal recognition part of Somaliland deal*, 20 January 2024.

⁹⁰ BBC News, *Somalia calls Ethiopia-Somaliland agreement act of aggression*, 2 January 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Somalia accuses Ethiopia of provocation over port deal with Somaliland*, 2 January 2024.

president of Somalia declared the agreement null and void.⁹¹ He later indicated that Somalia would not accept 'annexation attempts' by Ethiopia.⁹²

1.2.2. Eritrea

As indicated in previous Country of Origin Information Reports, during the Tigray conflict, cooperation between Eritrea and Ethiopia had largely amounted to a marriage of convenience.⁹³ As the conflict progressed, and especially after Ethiopia entered into a ceasefire agreement with the TPLF, relations between the two countries deteriorated. This was because Eritrea was not in favour of the ceasefire agreement.⁹⁴ In July 2023, during the summit on the situation in Sudan in Cairo, President Isaias of Eritrea and Prime Minister Abiy spoke to each other. This was reportedly the first time they had met since October 2020, a month before the conflict broke out in Tigray.⁹⁵

The relationship between Prime Minister Abiy and President Isaias was further strained by Prime Minister Abiy's statements on the need for access to the Red Sea.⁹⁶ During the reporting period, the usually isolationist Isaias strengthened ties with possible allies in opposition to Ethiopia, including Al-Burhan of the Sudanese army (see also 1.2.5), Egypt (see also 1.2.3), Somalia and Saudi Arabia.⁹⁷ Somalia sent an ambassador to Eritrea for the first time ever in November 2023.⁹⁸

1.2.3. Egypt

Tensions also rose again with Egypt around the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Located on Ethiopian territory, this dam also has a major impact on water flow through the Blue Nile to Sudan and, especially, to Egypt. In August 2023, Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia resumed talks on the dam after two years.⁹⁹ Egypt wanted a legally enforceable treaty on the dam, but Ethiopia continued to oppose it.¹⁰⁰ By the end of the reporting period, the countries concerned had not reached an agreement.

In October 2023, Ethiopia disclosed that it regularly faced cyber attacks on the dam. Without stating names, Ethiopia's deputy prime minister accused 'some' of not respecting the national interests of Ethiopia.¹⁰¹

⁹¹ BBC Monitoring, *Somali leader dismisses lease of territory to Ethiopia amid row*, 5 January 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Somalia's president 'nullifies' Ethiopia-Somaliland pact*, 7 January 2024.

⁹² BBC Monitoring, *Somali president warns Ethiopia against 'attempts at annexation'*, 12 January 2024.

⁹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea*, May 2022, p. 9.

⁹⁴ The Economist, *Ports in a storm*, 2 November 2023; Johannes Woldemariam, *Blog: Eritrean refugees face danger in Sudan and Ethiopia*, 25 May 2023; Makeda Saba, *One year since the Pretoria Ceasefire – where are we?*, 31 October 2023.

⁹⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Eritrean, Ethiopian leaders meet first time in over two years*, 13 July 2023.

⁹⁶ Chatham House, *Navigating the regionalization of Ethiopia's Tigray conflict*, 8 September 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Eritrean website reacts to Ethiopian PM's Red Sea comments*, 12 July 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Ethiopian leader says ready to swap dam's shares for port*, 14 October 2023; The Economist, *Ports in a storm*, 2 November 2023; Johannes Woldemariam, *Blog: Eritrean refugees face danger in Sudan and Ethiopia*, 25 May 2023, Martin Plaut, *President Isaias and PM Abiy divorce. War is likely: It is just a matter of timing*, 31 October 2023.

⁹⁷ Sahan Research, *The Horn Edition Issue 13*, 30 November 2023; African Business, *Eritrea: President Isaias Afwerki returned back home*, 15 November 2023.

⁹⁸ Garowe Online, *Somalia appoints first ever envoy to Eritrea*, 19 November 2023; Sahan Research, *The Horn Edition Issue 13*, 30 November 2023.

⁹⁹ The Independent, *Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan resume negotiations over a disputed dam*, 27 August 2023; Al Jazeera, *TV Reportage: Will Ethiopia compromise on its Grand Renaissance Dam?*, 28 August 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Al Jazeera, *TV Reportage: Will Ethiopia compromise on its Grand Renaissance Dam?*, 28 August 2023; Al Jazeera, *Second round of negotiations on Ethiopia's mega-dam wrap up*, 25 September 2023.

¹⁰¹ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia says facing 'frequent' cyber-attacks over Nile dam*, 16 October 2023.

1.2.4. Somalia

Ethiopia contributed troops to the African Union military operation in Somalia.¹⁰² In December 2023, Ethiopia and Somalia renewed their bilateral military cooperation treaty, which was first signed in 2014.¹⁰³

A new offensive against al-Shabaab has been taking place since 2022.¹⁰⁴ In September 2023, Al-Shabaab carried out an attack on an Ethiopian army convoy. According to Al Shabaab, 167 Ethiopian soldiers were killed in the process. Other sources say this number was exaggerated, but it was nevertheless a serious attack.¹⁰⁵ A few weeks later, fighting broke out between the Ethiopian army and Somali police in Somalia's Gedo region.¹⁰⁶

During the reporting period, about one hundred thousand Somalis fled from that area to Ethiopia's Somali region, due to violence in northern Somali Lascanood.¹⁰⁷

1.2.5. Sudan

On 15 April 2023, armed conflict broke out in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Ahead of that conflict, Ethiopia had strengthened ties with Al-Burhan, the leader of the Sudanese army, while Isaias, the president of Eritrea, had officially received the RSF leader Hemedti.¹⁰⁸ According to an East African think tank, coalitions shifted due to competition between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for influence over the Red Sea. Saudi Arabia sought to join the SAF, Egypt and Eritrea, thereby pushing Ethiopia towards the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the RSF.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the SAF's Al-Burhan visited Ethiopia in November 2023.¹¹⁰

In the months following the start of the Sudan conflict, large groups of people — up to a thousand a day — fled across the border from Sudan to Ethiopia.¹¹¹ Between April and December 2023, more than 91 thousand people had crossed the border between Sudan and Ethiopia.¹¹² According to one source, the border crossing was not an easy one. People were interrogated by Sudanese border guards, and they sometimes had to leave their belongings behind. Ethiopia required an e-visa costing eighty US dollars upon entry.¹¹³ When fighting broke out between the Ethiopian army and Amharic militias in August 2023, Ethiopian authorities temporarily closed the Metema crossing on the Amhara-Sudan border. This border crossing was widely used by people fleeing violence in Sudan. According to an Ethiopian press report,

¹⁰² BBC Monitoring, *Somalia, Ethiopia renew defence cooperation agreement*, 7 December 2023.

¹⁰³ BBC Monitoring, *Somalia, Ethiopia renew defence cooperation agreement*, 7 December 2023.

¹⁰⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Somalia, Ethiopia renew defence cooperation agreement*, 7 December 2023; Rift Valley Institute, *2023 This year in the Horn of Africa*, 18 July 2023.

¹⁰⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Al-Shabab claims 167 Ethiopian soldiers killed in fighting*, 17 September 2023; VOA, *Al-Shabab Attacks Ethiopian Military Convoys in Somalia*, 17 September 2023.

¹⁰⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian forces 'clash with local police' in Somalia's Dolow town*, 26 September 2023; VOA, *Al-Shabab Attacks Ethiopian Military Convoys in Somalia*, 17 September 2023.

¹⁰⁷ UN News, *New settlement opens for latest Somali refugees in Ethiopia*, 11 April 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Al Jazeera, *Will Ethiopia and Eritrea be dragged into Sudan's complex war?*, 6 May 2023; Sudan Tribune, *Afwerki, Hemetti discuss Eritrean Sudanese relations*, 13 March 2023; Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia's PM Abiy Ahmed in Sudan on first visit since 2021 coup*, 26 January 2023.

¹⁰⁹ Sahar Research, *The Horn Edition Issue 13*, 30 November 2023.

¹¹⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Sudanese military leader on official visit to Ethiopia*, 15 November 2023.

¹¹¹ The New Humanitarian, *Sudan refugees struggle to exit to Ethiopia, while aid workers trying to enter are turned back*, 7 June 2023.

¹¹² OCHA, *Flash Update #34: The Impact of the Situation in Sudan on Ethiopia (As of 1 December 2023)*, December 2023.

¹¹³ The New Humanitarian, *Sudan refugees struggle to exit to Ethiopia, while aid workers trying to enter are turned back*, 7 June 2023.

the border was closed to eliminate the risk of 'problem seekers' taking advantage of refugee flows to enter Ethiopia.¹¹⁴

1.2.6. South Sudan

On 7 August 2023, President Salva Kiir of South Sudan visited Prime Minister Abiy.¹¹⁵ On 31 October 2023, Ethiopia's foreign minister visited President Kiir.¹¹⁶ Despite regular attacks by South Sudanese armed groups on Ethiopian territory, relations between the countries were good.¹¹⁷

1.3. Security situation

The ceasefire agreement signed at the end of the previous reporting period greatly reduced violence in Tigray.¹¹⁸ This section explains how on the contrary, violence increased in other regions because ethnic groups there did not feel adequately represented in the negotiations for the ceasefire agreement.

The charts in this section are used to illustrate the security situation for a number of regions of Ethiopia. Information from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) data-export tool was used for these charts. Most of the data collected by ACLED comes from public, secondary reporting. Data on fatality numbers can be subjective and, according to the ACLED, are the least accurate component. The organisation declares that it uses the most conservative estimates available. In addition, ACLED records only fatalities. Information on injuries and victims of looting, kidnapping and sexual violence are not included.¹¹⁹

Ethiopian authorities restricted access to conflict zones in Tigray, Oromia and Amhara for investigators and independent journalists.¹²⁰ Authorities also regularly deliberately restricted internet and phone connections in conflict zones.¹²¹ In Amhara, the internet was down between August 2023 and the end of the reporting period, except for a few weeks in November 2023, and the mobile phone network was frequently down as well.¹²² This made information difficult to verify.¹²³ The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) regularly

¹¹⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia reportedly closes its north-western border with Sudan*, 9 August 2023.

¹¹⁵ BBC Monitoring, *South Sudan president discusses bilateral relations with Ethiopia PM*, 7 August 2023.

¹¹⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian foreign minister in South Sudan on official visit, 31 October 2023*.

¹¹⁷ BBC Monitoring, *South Sudan president discusses bilateral relations with Ethiopia PM*, 7 August 2023.

¹¹⁸ The New Humanitarian, *As violence subsides in Tigray, Ethiopia's Oromia conflict flares*, 12 January 2023.

¹¹⁹ ACLED, *ACLED Codebook*, January 2021, [ACLED Codebook v1 January-2021.pdf \(acleddata.com\)](https://www.acleddata.com/acleddata.com/), consulted on 8 September 2023, pp. 32-33.

¹²⁰ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 17; Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Authorities must grant independent investigators, media unfettered access to Amhara region to probe violations under state of emergency*, 18 August 2023.

¹²¹ US Department of State, *Ethiopia Human Rights Report 2022, 2023*, pp. 22-23; Access Now, *Open letter to the Ethiopian Government: urgently end ongoing internet shutdowns in all regions across the country*, 27 April 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

¹²² BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian Airlines reportedly suspends flights to Lalibela*, 9 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian Airlines cancels flights to Amhara region as fighting rages*, 4 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian Airlines extends flight cancellation to Amhara*, 8 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia reduces curfew hours in three Amhara towns*, 22 October 2023; Top10VPN, *Cost of internet shutdowns 2023*, <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LFsqFY3bzEgMKpnby3Kuf9sU0wxpmTHEReSCMBxYWZo/htmlview#gid=2117491235>, consulted on 21 January 2024; Confidential source, 6 October 2023.

¹²³ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

indicated that it had insufficient resources to conduct proper investigations.¹²⁴ According to confidential sources, violence by armed groups was probably underreported, for fear of reprisals.¹²⁵

It follows from the above that the charts below are intended only as an illustration of trends, and do not purport to be a reflection of reality. When consulting the charts, it is important to keep in mind that the scale varies from region to region.

1.3.1.

1.3.2. Developments in the security situation in Ethiopia

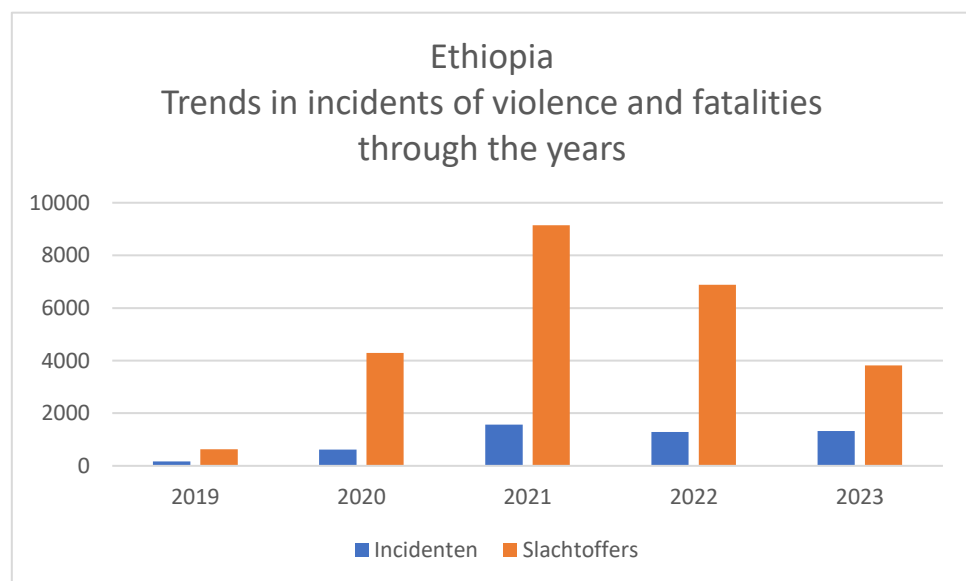


Figure 1: Ethiopia – Incidents of violence and fatalities by year 2019–2023. Source: ACLED

¹²⁴ OHCHR, *Oral Update of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia to the UN Human Rights Council, Geneva*, 30 June 2023; The Reporter, *Human rights investigators' commission on Ethiopia survives UN member states' vote*, 31 December 2022; NRC, *Ethiopië blokkeert gerechtigheid voor slachtoffers Tigray*, 12 August 2023.

¹²⁵ Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

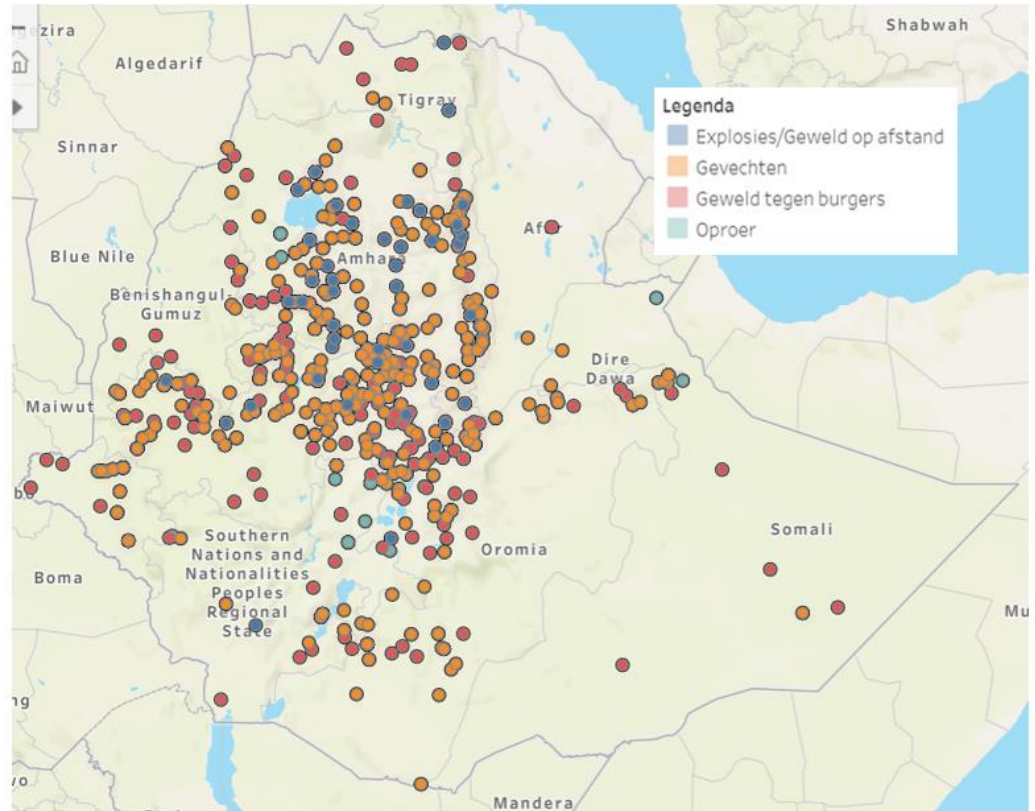


Figure 2: Map of Ethiopia showing incidents of violence during the reporting period (December 2022–December 2023). Source: ACLED and Open Street Map. [Legend: Explosions/Remote violence; Battles; Violence against civilians; Riots]

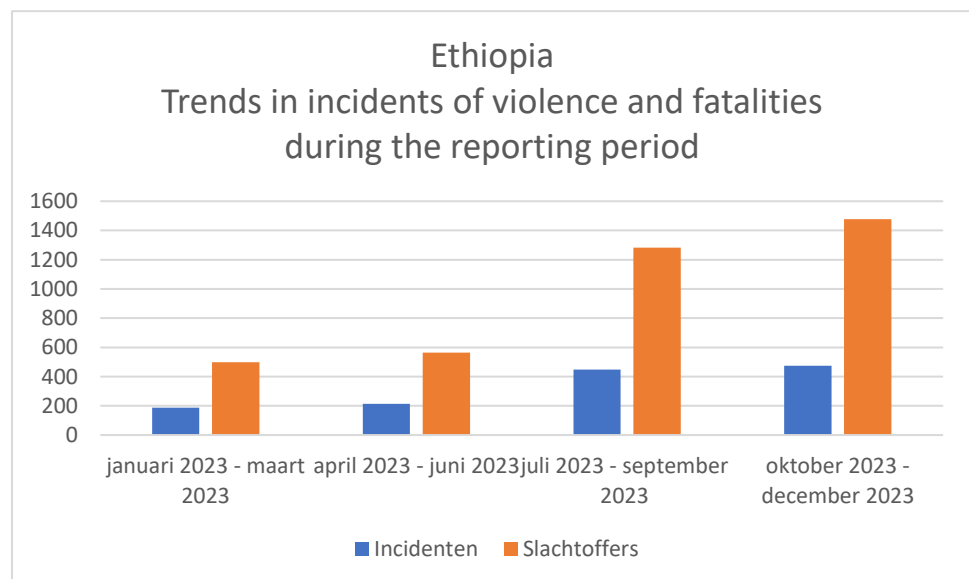


Figure 3: Ethiopia – Trends in incidents of violence and fatalities during the reporting period (December 2022–December 2023). Source: ACLED

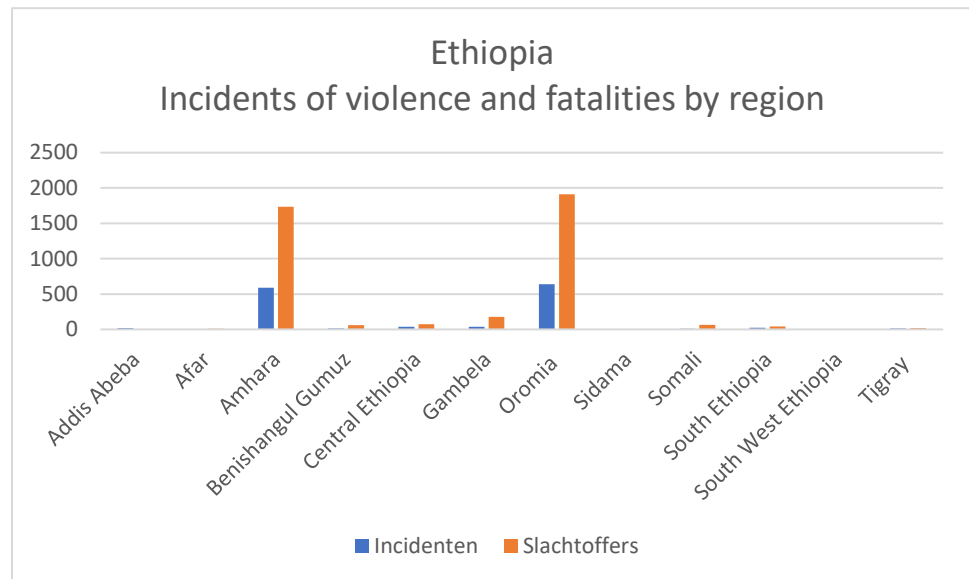


Figure 4: Ethiopia – Incidents of violence and fatalities by region during the reporting period.
Source: ACLED

As shown in Figure 1, the numbers of incidents of violence and fatalities during the reporting period decreased compared to previous years. Due to escalating conflicts in Oromia and Amhara, however, the level of violence remained higher than in the years prior to the Tigray conflict. The spike in the third quarter can be explained by the outbreak of conflict in the Amhara region (see also 1.3.5). As shown in Figure 4, most of the violence during the reporting period took place in Oromia, and then in Amhara.

Given the scale of violence in Tigray, Oromia and Amhara, the security situation in those regions is discussed in more detail below. The security situation in the Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambela, Afar and Somali regions is discussed briefly as well. Finally, the situation in Addis Ababa for Tigrayans and those from outside Addis Ababa is addressed.

1.3.3. Human rights violations by state actors

Sources reported extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention and violence against civilians by security forces.¹²⁶ According to confidential sources, the discipline of state actors was insufficient, especially in the worst conflict zones. One confidential source reported that the authorities were not always in full control of their own troops.¹²⁷ During the reporting period, there were several reports of drone attacks in the Amhara region by the federal army that allegedly killed dozens of people, including civilians.¹²⁸ In December 2023, the commander of the Ethiopian armed

¹²⁶ Addis Standard, *News: Rights body reveals extrajudicial killings by gov. forces in Amhara region; "widespread, arbitrary arrests" in Oromia, Amhara and Addis Abeba*, 15 September 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian army accused of killing nine in western Oromia*, 28 November 2023; Confidential source, 6 October 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

¹²⁷ Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

¹²⁸ BBC Monitoring, *Thirty civilians reportedly killed in Ethiopia drone attack*, 21 September 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: UN accuses Ethiopia of killing 21 in drone attacks in Amhara region*, 18 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Drone strikes reportedly kill 20 in Ethiopia's Amhara region*, 29 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Drone attack kills five in Ethiopia's Amhara region*, 4 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Over 70 killed in drone*

forces warned the population to keep their distance from the militias, because otherwise they could fall victim to drone attacks. He also indicated that the authorities planned to continue using drone attacks.¹²⁹

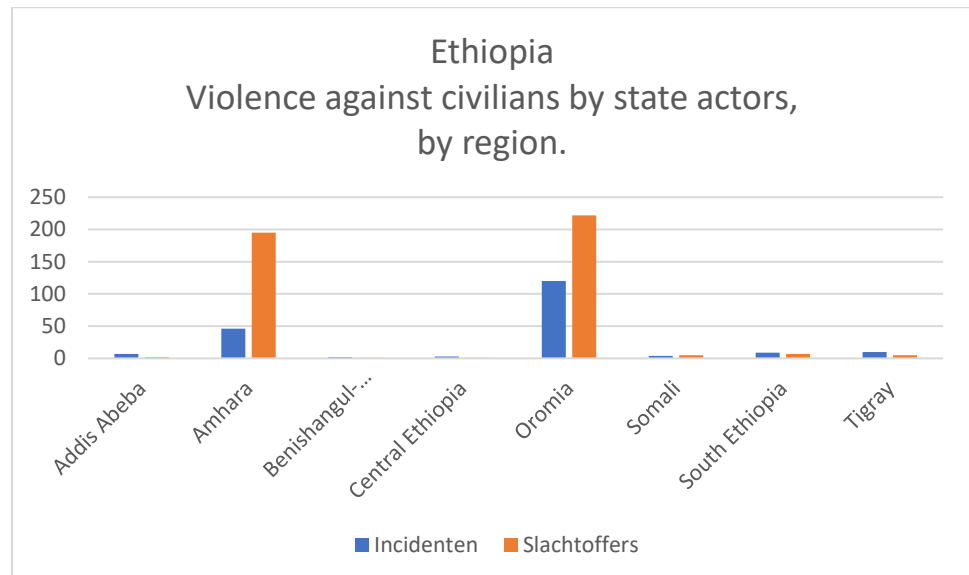


Figure 5: Violence against civilians by state actors (incidents and fatalities) at the federal and regional level. Source: ACLED

During the reporting period, the OLA accused the federal army of committing crimes against the civilian population of Oromia. For example, the authorities purportedly engaged in the forced recruitment of farmers for local militias, and officials had to contribute financially to military operations. Resisters reportedly faced punitive measures, ranging from the withholding of fertiliser to summary executions.¹³⁰

In addition, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts recorded persistent hate speech and many cases of incitement to gender and ethnic discrimination, including by senior government officials.¹³¹

1.3.4. Tigray

At the time the ceasefire was signed in Pretoria, Tigray was under the control of four different parties: the Ethiopian federal army, the TPLF, the Eritrean army and Amharic troops. The ceasefire operationalisation plan drawn up by military leaders stated that the TPLF was to gradually surrender its weapons, simultaneously with the withdrawal of 'foreign and non-ENDF forces' from the area.¹³² As indicated in 1.1.3.2, in March 2023, the federal government transferred the administration of the areas under its control to the Interim Regional Administration once it was established in March 2023. Amharic troops nevertheless remained present in West

attacks in Ethiopia's Amhara Region, 5 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian drone attacks reportedly kill nine civilians*, 5 December 2023.

¹²⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian army chief cautions civilians over drone strikes*, 12 December 2023; Borkena, *Defense Chief's disturbing remark on Amhara, conflict in the region*, 12 December 2023.

¹³⁰ OLA, *Statement regarding peace talks*, 17 May 2023; BBC Monitoring, *OLF accuses Ethiopian government of unending atrocities against civilians*, 14 December 2023.

¹³¹ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 2.

¹³² *Declaration of executive plan of the Pretoria peace agreement*, [Executive-Declaration.pdf \(addisstandard.com\)](#), consulted on 6 November 2023.

Tigray (see also 1.3.2.4). Eritrean troops withdrew from most of Tigray after several months, but remained present in the Ethiopia-Eritrea border region.¹³³ Both groups continued to be accused of serious human rights violations, including sexual violence, even after the ceasefire was signed.¹³⁴ In its report, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia stated that the Ethiopian authorities had failed to protect the population from this.¹³⁵

1.3.4.1. Sexual violence

The ceasefire agreement between the Ethiopian authorities and the TPLF in November 2022 explicitly included the condemnation of conflict-related sexual violence by the parties.¹³⁶ According to the international NGO Physicians for Human Rights, sexual violence continued after the ceasefire was signed.¹³⁷ According to the findings of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts, the sexual violence in several cases involved multiple gang rapes over long periods of time. The perpetrators also sometimes left objects in the genitalia of the victims that had to be removed by medical procedure. Eritrean troops were most frequently cited as perpetrators of this violence (see also 1.3.2.2).¹³⁸

1.3.4.2. Eritrean presence in Ethiopian territory

Eritrean troops withdrew from most of Tigray several months after the ceasefire agreement was signed, but retained control of parts of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border region (see also 1.3.2).¹³⁹ Some of the areas where Eritrea remained present had already been a source of disagreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea since the 1998 war.¹⁴⁰ For example, there were reports that, during the reporting period, Eritrean troops were still present in most of Irob, an area Eritrea regards as its territory. This prevented aid organisations from accessing this area.¹⁴¹ Eritrean troops were said to have blocked the road to Irob, preventing the transport of humanitarian goods into the area.¹⁴²

Other sources reported the presence of Eritrean troops in the woreda¹⁴³ Shiraro,¹⁴⁴ in areas around Tserona¹⁴⁵ and Zalambessa,¹⁴⁶ and in Gulo-Mekhedda.¹⁴⁷ In his report covering the period until March 2023, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human

¹³³ The Reporter, *Eritrean forces still occupy several woredas and kebeles in Tigray, officials*, 22 April 2023; The Economist, *Ports in a storm*, 2 November 2023; Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, pp. 13-14; International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 15-16; Confidential source, 13 June 2023.

¹³⁴ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 2; Confidential source, 13 June 2023.

¹³⁵ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 2.

¹³⁶ African Union, *Agreement for lasting peace through a permanent cessation of hostilities between the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front*, 2 November 2023, [Download-the-signed-agreement-here.pdf \(igad.int\)](#).

¹³⁷ Physicians for Human Rights, *Broken promises: Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Before and After the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Tigray, Ethiopia*, August 2023, p. 1.

¹³⁸ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 6, 25.

¹³⁹ The Reporter, *Eritrean forces still occupy several woredas and kebeles in Tigray, officials*, 22 April 2023; The Economist, *Ports in a storm*, 2 November 2023; Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, pp. 13-14; International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 15-16; Confidential source, 13 June 2023.

¹⁴⁰ The Reporter, *Eritrean forces still occupy several woredas and kebeles in Tigray, officials*, 22 April 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

¹⁴¹ The New Humanitarian, *Ethiopian minorities remain fearful despite peace deal*, 16 February 2023; The Guardian, *'People are under siege': why Ethiopia's war in Tigray isn't over*, 7 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Eritrean army accused of raping 22 women in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 15 August 2023; Confidential source, 16 June 2023.

¹⁴² The Guardian, *'People are under siege': why Ethiopia's war in Tigray isn't over*, 7 August 2023.

¹⁴³ A woreda is an administrative unit consisting of several kebeles.

¹⁴⁴ BBC News, *Ethiopia war in Tigray Eritrean soldiers accused of rape despite peace deal*, 15 February 2023.

¹⁴⁵ Confidential source, 16 June 2023.

¹⁴⁶ Confidential source, 6 October 2023; Confidential source, 16 June 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Eritrean army accused of raping 22 women in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 15 August 2023.

¹⁴⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Eritrean army accused of raping 22 women in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 15 August 2023.

Rights in Eritrea reported the presence of Eritrean troops in some areas in northern, western and central Tigray.¹⁴⁸ In May 2023, Eritrean troops impeded a team that was monitoring the implementation of the peace agreement from carrying out its work.¹⁴⁹ Eritrean identity documents were also issued to residents of Irob and other localities, as part of the occupation of the area.¹⁵⁰

In late October 2023, following Prime Minister Abiy's statements that access to the Red Sea was an existential issue for Ethiopia (see also 1.2.1), both Eritrea and Ethiopia reinforced the presence of troops in the border region, particularly in the border region around the port of the Eritrean city of Assab.¹⁵¹

In addition to the border region between Eritrea and Ethiopia, Eritrean troops were also said to be present in West Tigray, an area controlled by Amharic militias. There, Eritrean troops were reportedly training and arming Amharic militias, which were then said to fight the federal army in Amhara.¹⁵²

1.3.4.3. Human rights violations by Eritrean troops

Prior to the ceasefire agreement

During the conflict, Eritrean troops frequently committed serious human rights violations in Tigray, including the forced repatriation of Eritrean refugees, arbitrary detentions, killings and sexual violence, including against children.¹⁵³ For a more detailed description, please refer to the General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea dated May 2022.¹⁵⁴ The Eritrean authorities denied these allegations.¹⁵⁵

At the end of the previous reporting period, just days before the ceasefire agreement was signed on 2 November 2022, more than three hundred villagers, including children, women and priests, were killed in Tigray in a single week.¹⁵⁶ Eritrean and Ethiopian troops attacked villagers in at least ten different villages in retaliation for losses in the area east of the town of Adwa.¹⁵⁷ Villagers told *The Guardian* that Eritrean troops remained in the area after the killings, preventing family members from searching for the missing and burying the bodies. Many of the bodies were later found, having been damaged by wild animals. It was not until

¹⁴⁸ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea A/HRC/53/20*, 1 May 2023, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹ Al Jazeera, *Protesters in Ethiopia's Tigray demand Eritrean troops withdraw*, 23 May 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 430*, 12 May 2023; Confidential source, 17 October 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

¹⁵⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Eritrean forces accused of abducting 56 people from Tigray*, 21 July 2023; The Guardian, *'People are under siege': why Ethiopia's war in Tigray isn't over*, 7 August 2023; Confidential source, 17 August 2023.

¹⁵¹ EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 490*, 23 October 2023; The Economist, *Ports in a storm*, 2 November 2023.

¹⁵² EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 468*, 7 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 491*, 26 October 2023; NRC, *Nieuw etnisch conflict in Ethiopië*, 9 August 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 16 June 2023; Confidential source, 17 August 2023.

¹⁵³ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea A/HRC/47/21* (12 May 2021), p. 13; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World: Eritrea*, 2023; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The State of World's Human Rights*, 2023, p. 158; Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World Report 2023 - Eritrea*, 12 January 2023; The Washington Post, *Hundreds massacred in Ethiopia even as peace deal was being reached*, 1 March 2023.

¹⁵⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea*, May 2022, pp. 16-18.

¹⁵⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Eritrea rejects Amnesty report linking troops to atrocities in Ethiopia*, 5 September 2023; Reuters, *Xi: Strong China-Eritrea ties part of keeping peace in Horn of Africa*, 15 May 2023; The Washington Post, *Hundreds massacred in Ethiopia even as peace deal was being reached*, 1 March 2023; BBC News, *Ethiopia war in Tigray Eritrean soldiers accused of rape despite peace deal*, 15 February 2023; Al Jazeera, *Crimes against humanity continue in Ethiopia despite truce, say UN experts*, 19 September 2023.

¹⁵⁶ The Washington Post, *Hundreds massacred in Ethiopia even as peace deal was being reached*, 1 March 2023; Al Jazeera, *Will Ethiopia and Eritrea be dragged into Sudan's complex war?*, 6 May 2023; The Guardian, *'They just left the corpses lying there': survivors speak about the horrors of a massacre in northern Tigray*, 20 April 2023.

¹⁵⁷ The Washington Post, *Hundreds massacred in Ethiopia even as peace deal was being reached*, 1 March 2023.

after the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the area at the end of January 2023 that many of the bodies could be buried.¹⁵⁸

Since the ceasefire agreement

Even after the ceasefire agreement was signed in November 2022, Eritrean troops continued to maintain a presence in Tigray and commit human rights violations.¹⁵⁹ According to the International Commission of Human Rights Experts for Ethiopia, these violations sometimes took place at close range of the Ethiopian armed forces, without them intervening.¹⁶⁰ The Eritrean troops were guilty of looting,¹⁶¹ kidnapping,¹⁶² arbitrary arrests and detention of young men,¹⁶³ shelling of aid workers in East Tigray,¹⁶⁴ killings¹⁶⁵ and sexual violence, including gang rape and transactional¹⁶⁶ rape (see also 1.3.2.1).¹⁶⁷ An analysis by Physicians for Human Rights of medical records in Tigray showed that, months after the peace treaty was signed (the study ran until June 2023), Eritrean soldiers were still responsible for the majority of rapes in Tigray.¹⁶⁸ In July and August 2023, local authorities in Tigray accused Eritrean troops of abducting 70 Tigrayans from the border region and raping 22 women.¹⁶⁹

1.3.4.4. Amharic militias in Tigray

West Tigray was disputed territory between Amhara and Tigray. Amharic militias had not yet withdrawn from the area by the end of the reporting period. According to a representative of the Tigrayan authorities, as quoted in a local newspaper, all of West Tigray and parts of North West Tigray and Southern Tigray were under the control of Amharic militias.¹⁷⁰

Human rights violations by Amharic troops and militias in Tigray

According to the UN, some 1.2 million people had been displaced from West Tigray during the Tigray conflict due to their Tigrayan ethnicity and fled to central Tigray. Another seventy thousand people had been displaced to Sudan.¹⁷¹ The Amharic special forces and militias were responsible for this, at times assisted by the Eritrean

¹⁵⁸ The Guardian, 'They just left the corpses lying there': survivors speak about the horrors of a massacre in northern Tigray, 20 April 2023.

¹⁵⁹ Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, p. 9; Human Rights Council, A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, 14 September 2023; Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Eritrean soldiers committed war crimes and possible crimes against humanity after signing of agreement to end hostilities – new report*, 4 September 2023; The Guardian, 'People are under siege': why Ethiopia's war in Tigray isn't over, 7 August 2023; Confidential source, 6 October 2023; The Independent, *UN experts say Ethiopia's conflict and Tigray fighting left over 10,000 survivors of sexual violence*, 18 September 2023.

¹⁶⁰ Human Rights Council, A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, 14 September 2023, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ The Guardian, 'People are under siege': why Ethiopia's war in Tigray isn't over, 7 August 2023; The Washington Post, *Peace deal ending Ethiopia's Tigray war yet to dispel fear of more atrocities*, 25 January 2023; Amnesty International, *Eritrese soldaten pleegden gruweldaden in de regio Tigray*, 5 September 2023.

¹⁶² The Guardian, 'People are under siege': why Ethiopia's war in Tigray isn't over, 7 August 2023; The New Humanitarian, *Ethiopian minorities remain fearful despite peace deal*, 16 February 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Eritrean forces accused of abducting 56 people from Tigray*, 23 July 2023.

¹⁶³ AP, *Kidnappings, looting cited in Ethiopia's Tigray after truce*, 27 November 2022; Addis Standard, *News: Families of ten youngsters abducted by Eritrean forces near Axum in distraught over their whereabouts*, 14 February 2023.

¹⁶⁴ Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, p. 8.

¹⁶⁵ Addis Standard, *News: Tigrayan official accuses Eritrean forces of "summarily executing" civilians, calls on federal government for protection*, 28 November 2022; Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, p. 8; Confidential source, 17 August 2023.

¹⁶⁶ Transactional rape is sex under duress in exchange for food, for example.

¹⁶⁷ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), A/HRC/54/CRP.3 *Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 15-16, 28; BBC News, *Ethiopia war in Tigray: Eritrean soldiers accused of rape despite peace deal*, 15 February 2023; The New Humanitarian, *Ethiopian minorities remain fearful despite peace deal*, 16 February 2023.

¹⁶⁸ PHR (Physicians for Human Rights), *Broken Promises: Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Before and After the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Tigray, Ethiopia*, 24 August 2023; The Independent, *Scores of women and girls were sexually assaulted after peace deal in Ethiopia's Tigray, study shows*, 24 August 2023.

¹⁶⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Eritrean forces accused of abducting 56 people from Tigray*, 21 July 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Eritrean army accused of raping 22 women in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 15 August 2023.

¹⁷⁰ The Reporter, *Eritrean forces still occupy several woredas and kebeles in Tigray, officials*, 22 April 2023.

¹⁷¹ OCHA, *Ethiopia – Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update Situation Report*, 02 December 2021.

army and/or the Ethiopian army and local police. From 8 to 10 November 2022, a few days after the ceasefire agreement was signed, large numbers of ethnic Tigrayans were once again driven out of West Tigray by Amharic special forces and militias. Many of them had been imprisoned in detention camps since the earlier campaign of expulsions in November 2021.¹⁷² Despite the signing of the ceasefire, these displaced persons could not return home. In January, March and April 2023, tens of thousands more civilians, mostly Tigrayans, fled their homes in West Tigray.¹⁷³

1.3.4.5. Difficult access for humanitarian aid organisations

Compared to the period of the conflict prior to the signing of the ceasefire agreement in November 2022, there was a marked improvement in the security situation in Tigray during the reporting period. The ceasefire agreement was aimed partly at restoring access to services after the *de-facto* siege of Tigray. However, this did not proceed smoothly.¹⁷⁴ The most difficult regions to access were the north-west and north-east of Tigray, where Eritrean troops were still present, as well as the west and south of Tigray, where Amharic special forces and militias were active. Many schools and hospitals remained closed, and medical equipment that had been destroyed was not yet operational.¹⁷⁵ According to the International Commission of Human Rights Experts, there were also backlogs in the payment of pensions and salaries of medical staff and civil servants in Tigray.¹⁷⁶

Discontinuation of food aid due to fraud

In addition, there was a major shortfall in funding for humanitarian aid in Ethiopia: by September 2023, only 27% of the aid required throughout the country for that year had been funded. The humanitarian situation deteriorated further when USAID and the World Food Program (WFP) cut off food aid in June 2023, following allegations of large-scale fraud against various actors, including government agencies. This created food shortages for the population.¹⁷⁷ Following approval from the US, the WFP resumed food aid in October 2023, first only to refugees and, starting in November, to the rest of the population as well.¹⁷⁸ According to a confidential source, hardly any humanitarian organisations were active in Tigray at that time.¹⁷⁹ In November 2023, the Ethiopia Human Rights Commission (EHRC)¹⁸⁰ stated that, according to its information, more than 1,300 people had died of hunger in Tigray as a result of the suspension of food aid.¹⁸¹

¹⁷² International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 44-45.

¹⁷³ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 44-45, 47; Addis Standard, *News: At least 47,000 fresh IDPs arrive at Endabaguna, Shire from Ten woredas of disputed Western Tigray*, 12 April 2023; Human Rights Watch, *'We will erase you from this land': crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia's Western Tigray Zone*, 1 June 2023.

¹⁷⁴ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 15-16.

¹⁷⁵ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 42-43.

¹⁷⁶ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 42-43.

¹⁷⁷ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 15-16; Confidential source, 27 June 2023; Confidential source, 6 October 2023.

¹⁷⁸ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, p. 43; BBC Monitoring, *USAID to resume food aid delivery to Ethiopia*, 15 November 2023.

¹⁷⁹ Confidential source, 6 October 2023.

¹⁸⁰ The EHRC is a constitutionally mandated, independent federal institution. In 2021, the commission received A status from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. The A status means that the Commission is fully compliant with the Paris Principles — the basic principles established by the UN for national human rights institutions. Source: Ethiopian Citizen, *Ethiopian human rights body gets "A" level accreditation by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions*, 10 December 2021.

¹⁸¹ BBC Monitoring, *Over 1,000 IDPs in Ethiopia's Tigray Region die of food shortage*, 4 November 2023.

Access to education

According to a report by the Tigray Education Bureau, in May 2023, 552 schools in Tigray were occupied by Amharic and Eritrean troops. Amharic troops occupied a total of 479 schools, particularly in South, West and North West Tigray, and Eritrean troops occupied 73 schools in East, Central and North West Tigray. Other schools in the border regions with Eritrea and Amhara, although not occupied, could not open because of the security situation.¹⁸² According to UNICEF, by June 2023, 64% of the schools in Tigray had reopened, 80% of which were not in their original school buildings.¹⁸³ Many school buildings were being used to accommodate displaced persons.¹⁸⁴

1.3.5. Oromia

The following charts provide insight into the security situation in Oromia. Figure 6 gives an overview of trends since 2019, thus enabling a comparison between the reporting period (December 2022–December 2023), the period of conflict in Tigray (November 2020–November 2022) and the preceding period. Figure 7 shows the pattern of violence during the reporting period by quarter, and Figure 8 shows where the OLA committed the most violence.

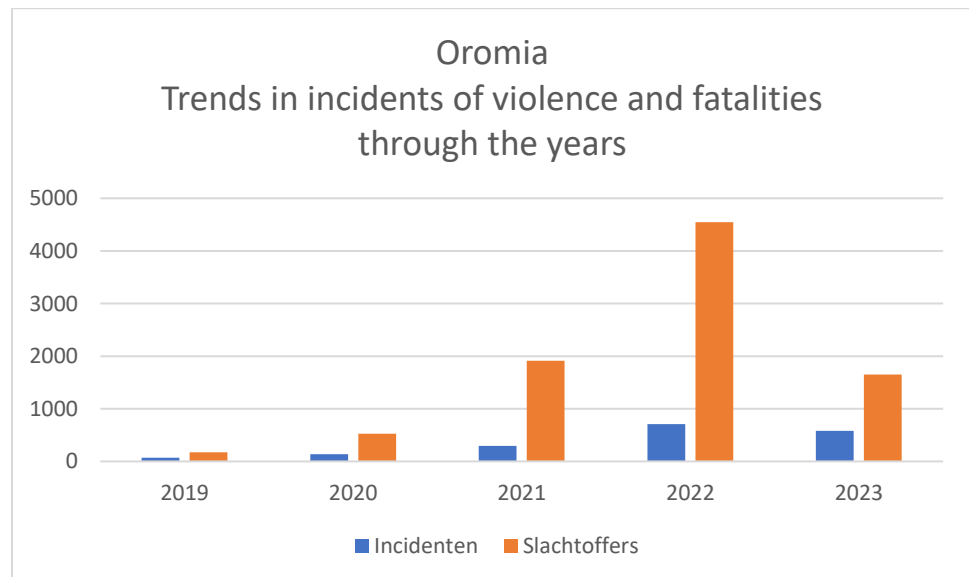


Figure 6: Oromia – Incidents of violence and fatalities by year (2019–2023). Source: ACLED

¹⁸² Tigray Education Bureau on X (previously Twitter), (1) [Tigray Education Bureau \(@TigEduc\) / X \(twitter.com\)](#), 11 May 2023.

¹⁸³ UNICEF, Ethiopia Education Cluster Newsletter, April – June 2023, June 2023, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴ Confidential source, 15 December 2023.

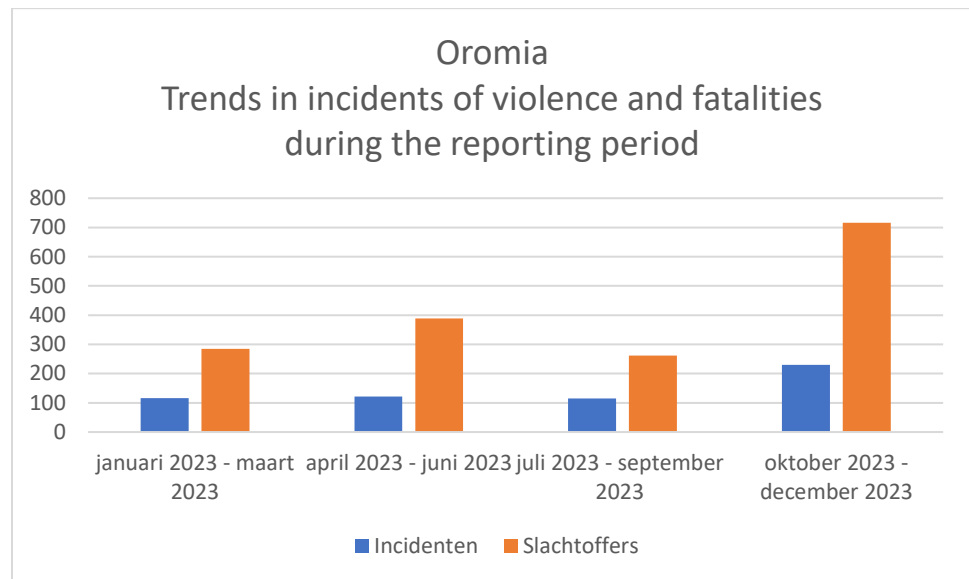


Figure 7: Oromia – Trends in incidents of violence and fatalities during the reporting period (December 2022–December 2023). Source: ACLED

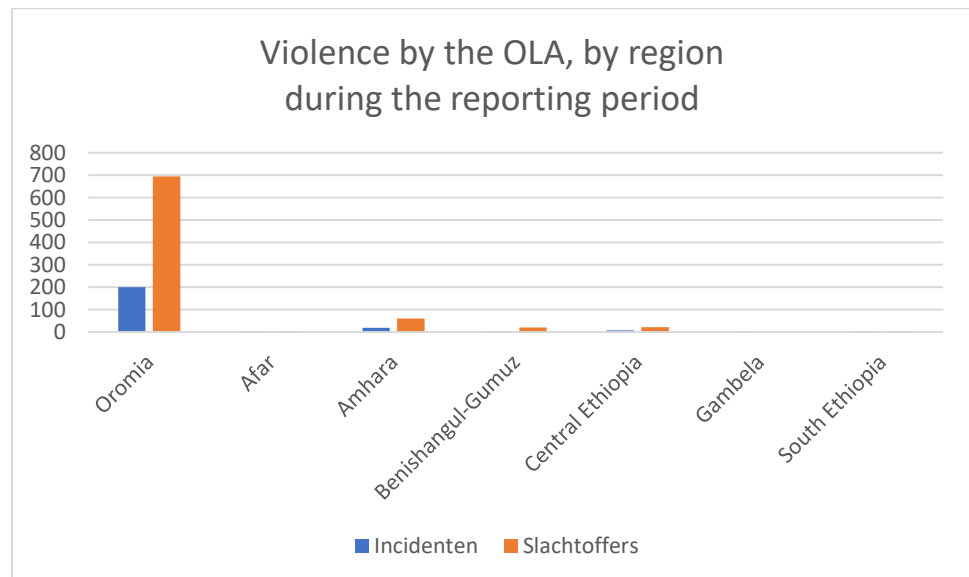


Illustration 8: Oromia: Violence by the OLA and Oromo militias (incidents and fatalities) by region during the reporting period (December 2022–December 2023). Source: ACLED

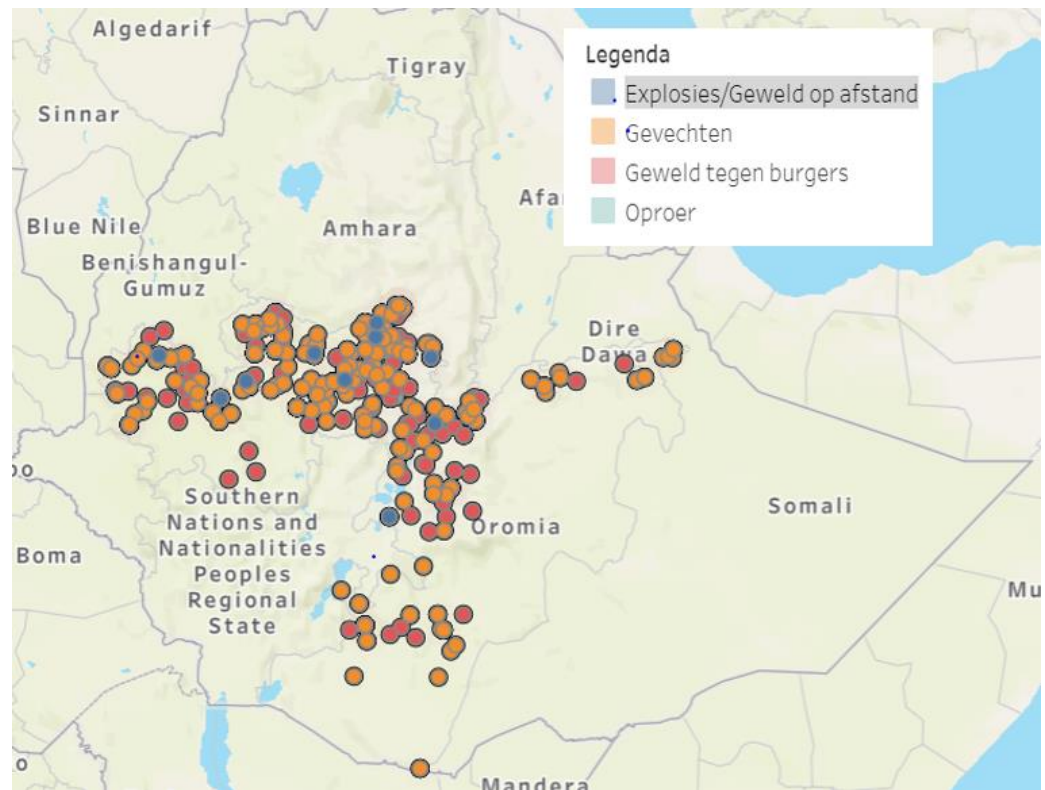


Illustration 9: Map of incidents of violence in the Oromia region during the reporting period (December 2022–December 2023). Source: ACLED and Open Street Map.

[Legend: Explosions/Remote violence; Battles; Violence against civilians; Riots]

1.3.5.1. Geographic presence of the OLA and affiliated groups

The security situation in the Oromia region deteriorated since the end of the previous reporting period. According to *The New Humanitarian*, an online magazine that writes about humanitarian issues, the OLA used to commit mainly small-scale attacks and robberies on banks. By the end of 2022, however, the violence had increased and spread to large parts of Oromia, including rural areas near Addis Ababa.¹⁸⁵ As shown in Figure 8, the violence of the OLA is concentrated in Oromia.

During the reporting period, large parts of western Oromia region and parts of Central Ethiopia region were no longer under the control of Ethiopian authorities.¹⁸⁶ Figure 9 shows where most violence took place in the Oromia region. The road from Dera to Addis Ababa was closed by the rebels.¹⁸⁷ According to one source, the federal army's operations concentrated mainly on western Oromia because of the tensions with the Amharic militias in that area, but there were also tensions in other parts of Oromia, even across the border with Kenya.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ The Reporter, *Oromia in dire straits*, 3 December 2022; The New Humanitarian, *Ethiopia's Oromia conflict flares as Tigray violence subsides*, 12 January 2023.

¹⁸⁶ Ethiopia Peace Observatory, *Western Oromia conflict*, 29 September 2023; The New Humanitarian, *Ethiopia's Oromia conflict flares as Tigray violence subsides*, 12 January 2023; Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 4; The Reporter, *Oromia in dire straits*, 3 December 2022.

¹⁸⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian Oromo rebels reported to seize 16 constituencies*, 9 October 2023.

¹⁸⁸ Africa Intelligence, *Ethiopia: OLA and Addis open preliminary talks in climate of mistrust*, 27 April 2023.

According to a confidential source, the OLA was not actually interested in governing areas. The interests of this group were reportedly linked primarily to the conflict economy. Many unemployed young people were said to have joined the OLA to earn a living.¹⁸⁹ An article in a local newspaper quoted a political analyst as stating, on the other hand, that the OLA had genuine supporters, 'however unachievable their political goals were'.¹⁹⁰

1.3.5.2. Organisation and hierarchy of the OLA

For years, the OLA was led by Kumsa Dirriba, also known as Jaal Marro. He was said to control primarily the western and central factions of the OLA.¹⁹¹ The southern faction of the OLA was led by Jaal Gemechew. According to an Ethiopian newspaper, Jaal Gemechew was Jaal Marro's adjutant.¹⁹² Other commanders of the OLA included Jaal Segni, Sabaif and Fekedo. Each of these commanders was in charge of a different area.¹⁹³ According to a confidential source, these commanders communicated with each other but had no shared vision, and there was no alignment of what was happening on the ground.¹⁹⁴ In addition, many other small factions with local commanders were active in Oromia.¹⁹⁵

1.3.5.3. Violence and human rights violations by the OLA

The 2023 peace talks between the OLA and the federal government did not lead to an agreement.¹⁹⁶ Violence actually increased during the reporting period (see also Figure 7). In early December 2023, Oromia's regional authorities announced that they would remain open to negotiations, but that 'as long as the OLA did not choose peace', they would launch a new offensive against the OLA.¹⁹⁷

¹⁸⁹ Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

¹⁹⁰ The Reporter, *Oromia in dire straits*, 3 December 2022.

¹⁹¹ Addis Standard, *Update: US, IGAD, Kenya & Norway key peace talk facilitators; OLA southern command chief arrives in Dar es Salaam*, 8 November, 2023; Africa Intelligence, *Ethiopia: OLA and Addis open preliminary talks in climate of mistrust*, 27 April 2023; The Reporter, *Oromia in dire straits*, 3 December 2022; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

¹⁹² Addis Standard, *Update: US, IGAD, Kenya & Norway key peace talk facilitators; OLA southern command chief arrives in Dar es Salaam*, 8 November, 2023.

¹⁹³ Africa Intelligence, *Ethiopia: OLA and Addis open preliminary talks in climate of mistrust*, 27 April 2023; The Reporter, *Oromia in dire straits*, 3 December 2022; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

¹⁹⁴ The Reporter, *Oromia in dire straits*, 3 December 2022; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

¹⁹⁵ The Reporter, *Oromia in dire straits*, 3 December 2022; Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 25 October 2023.

¹⁹⁶ OLA, OLF, *Statement regarding peace talks*, 17 May 2023; Ethiopia Insight, *Oromia peace prospects dimmed by renewed fighting*, 24 May 2023; France24, *Ethiopia's Oromo rebels accuse govt forces of offensive*, 17 May 2023.

¹⁹⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia to intensify offensive against OLA rebels*, 2 December 2023.

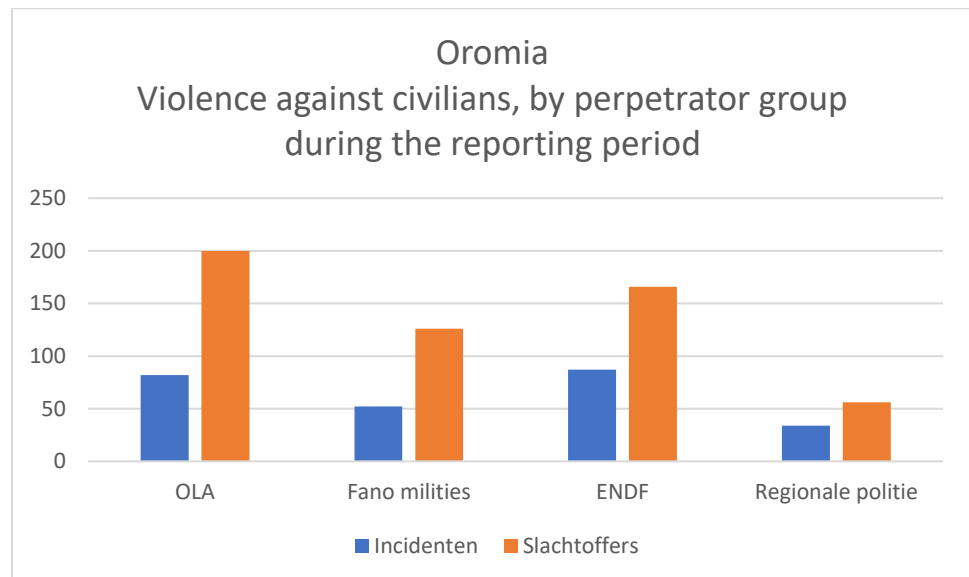


Figure 10: Oromia – Violence against civilians (incidents and fatalities), by actor during the reporting period (December 2022–December 2023). Source: ACLED

As shown in Figure 10, in addition to regional and federal security forces (the ENDF and regional police) and Amharic militias using violence against civilians, the OLA reportedly did the same. According to several sources, this also involved serious human rights violations (see below).¹⁹⁸ The violence was often directed against ethnic minorities in Oromia, but sometimes also against the Oromo ethnic group.¹⁹⁹ It was often difficult to distinguish between tactical and criminal violence by the OLA and more or less affiliated local groups. The OLA itself was guilty of criminal violence as well. According to confidential sources, the conflict had become a business model for the armed group.²⁰⁰ Since 2021, the Ethiopian authorities have classified the OLA as a terrorist organisation.²⁰¹

Types of human rights violations by the OLA

Violence and human rights violations by the OLA involved kidnappings for ransom, extortion, theft, robberies, vandalism and destruction, arbitrary arrests and murder to get money and maintain control.²⁰² Although no official figures were known about numbers of abductions, anecdotal information suggested that, on 31 July 2023, 63 people were abducted in a single day,²⁰³ and at least seventeen people were reportedly abducted in October 2023, including an unknown number of people of Chinese nationality.²⁰⁴ Victims of kidnapping during the reporting period reported

¹⁹⁸ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian rebels accused of killing 300 in Oromia*, 23 October 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 25 October 2023.

¹⁹⁹ Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 25 October 2023.

²⁰⁰ Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 25 October 2023.

²⁰¹ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian rebels accused of killing 300 in Oromia*, 23 October 2023; International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, p. 19.

²⁰² The Reporter, *Oromia in dire straits*, 3 December 2022; Borkena, *Militants ransack banks, market stalls in Kellem-Wollega Zone of Oromia Region*, 14 July 2023; Borkena, *OLF Shene attacks police station in Gurage Zone of South Region*, 5 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Gunmen kidnap six workers in Ethiopia's Oromia*, 2 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian power firm confirms abduction of staff*, 4 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Suspected rebels kidnap Chinese nationals in Ethiopia*, 20 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Gunmen reportedly kidnap 10 researchers in Ethiopia*, 22 October 2023; Confidential source, 25 October 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

²⁰³ BBC Monitoring, *Suspected rebels kidnap Chinese nationals in Ethiopia*, 20 October 2023.

²⁰⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Gunmen kidnap six workers in Ethiopia's Oromia*, 2 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian power firm confirms abduction of staff*, 4 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Suspected rebels kidnap Chinese nationals in Ethiopia*, 20 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Gunmen reportedly kidnap 10 researchers in Ethiopia*, 22 October 2023.

having to pay sums ranging from 50 thousand to ten million birr²⁰⁵ to be released.²⁰⁶

According to one report, the OLA was said to have killed at least three hundred people and set houses on fire in October 2023 as well, forcing thousands to flee.²⁰⁷ According to a confidential source, the OLA and affiliated armed groups were also guilty of rape.²⁰⁸

1.3.6. Amhara

As described in 1.1.7, several political and security leaders who had supported the demobilisation of the special forces were murdered by ethnic extremists in the Amhara region from April 2023 onwards. The victims included the leader of the PP's Amharic faction.²⁰⁹ Violence in Amhara escalated in August 2023, when the federal army intensified the disarmament of the Amhara regional special forces and Amharic militias.²¹⁰

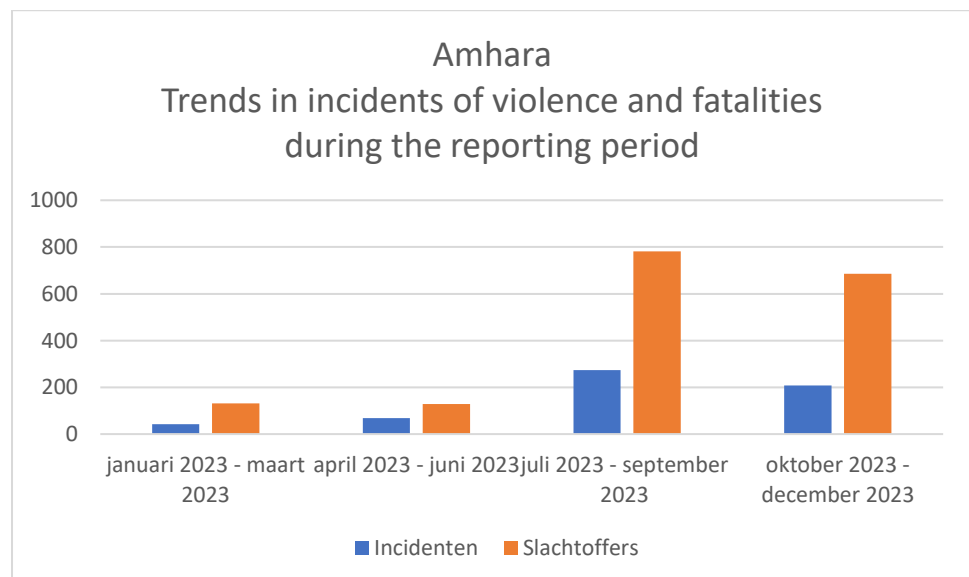


Figure 11: Amhara – Trends in violence (incidents and fatalities) during the reporting period (December 2022–December 2023). Source: ACLED

The chart in Figure 11 provides an overview of the progression of violence per quarter during the reporting period.

1.3.6.1. Amharic militias

²⁰⁵ In November 2023, 50 thousand birr was equivalent to more than eight hundred euros, and ten million birr was equivalent to more than 160 thousand euros.

²⁰⁶ The Reporter, *Oromia in dire straits*, 3 December 2022; Addis Standard, *News: Kidnapped workers of Dangote Cement released after paying ransom*, 1 February 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Gunmen kidnap six workers in Ethiopia's Oromia*, 2 October 2023.

²⁰⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian rebels accused of killing 300 in Oromia*, 23 October 2023.

²⁰⁸ Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

²⁰⁹ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 17-18; Ethiopia Peace Observatory, *EPO weekly: 29 July-4 August 2023*, 10 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 420*, 28 April 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 422*, 2 May 2023; Confidential source, 28 April 2023.

²¹⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia blocks internet in Amhara amid clashes*, 3 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia heightens restrictions on six Amhara towns amid unrest*, 9 August 2023; Al Jazeera, *What's behind the crisis in Ethiopia's Amhara region? A simple guide*, 10 August 2023; ADD-09/23 disbandment of the Regional Special Forces /Confidential source, 28 April 2023.

Amharic militias were referred to by the collective name *Fano*. These militias emerged during anti-government protests in the period 2015–2018. Their appeal was enhanced by high unemployment; young unemployed men joined local militias to earn a living through their weapons. Membership was informal, and the militias did not have a high degree of organisation or internal discipline. The Fano, along with Amharic special forces, played an important role in the conflict in Tigray by occupying West Tigray.²¹¹ Initially, the militia's use of violence made them unpopular with the people of Amhara. Their popularity increased with the further rise of Amharic nationalism after the signing of the ceasefire agreement, and even more when the federal government decided to disband the special forces (see also 1.1.6).²¹²

Several cities responded to that decision with demonstrations, and some units refused to disarm. Roads were cordoned off, businesses closed down, and Amhara regional authorities imposed a curfew and shut down the internet.²¹³ Fighting also broke out between the federal army and the Fano.²¹⁴ Many members of the Amharic special forces who did not want to disarm, joined the militia and gathered in the mountains on the border between Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz.²¹⁵ In August 2023, a federal official admitted that more than half of the special forces had joined the Fano.²¹⁶ Various sources report that Eritrea is supporting Amharic nationalists and militias in the battle for West Tigray. For example, Eritrea is purportedly training Amharic troops.²¹⁷

1.3.6.2. Violence against civilians

As shown in Figure 12, the federal army was responsible for most of the violence against civilians. There was both indiscriminate violence resulting from drone attacks²¹⁸ and more targeted violence against civilians.²¹⁹ Amharic militias were also guilty of violence against civilians in the Amhara region. According to the information underlying Figure 13, much of this violence was directed against citizens of the Oromo and Agew ethnic groups, or against local authorities loyal to the federal government (see also 1.1.7).²²⁰ According to a newspaper article from the local press, the militias were accused of violence against Amhara-based Oromo who did not want to support the militias.²²¹ In addition, as shown in Figure 13, most of

²¹¹ Africa Report, *Will the Fano drag Ethiopia back into civil war?*, 26 September 2023; The New Humanitarian, *Unresolved status of western Tigray threatens Ethiopia's peace deal*, 26 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 6 October 2023.

²¹² Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 6 October 2023.

²¹³ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 17-18; BBC News, *Ethiopia's Amhara region hit by protests over move to dissolve regional forces*, 10 April 2023; Addis Standard, *News Update: Heavy artillery fired in Kobo as protests engulf Amhara region following decision to dissolve regional special forces*, 10 April 2023; Confidential source, 28 April 2023.

²¹⁴ EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 412*, 18 April 2023; Voice of America, *Gunfire, Protests in Ethiopia's Amhara Over Plan to Disband Regional Force*, 9 April 2023.

²¹⁵ EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 470*, 14 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian minister on why Amhara forces joined local militia*, 15 August 2023; Confidential source, 28 April 2023.

²¹⁶ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 17-18.

²¹⁷ NRC, *Nieuw etnisch conflict in Ethiopië*, 9 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 468*, 7 August 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

²¹⁸ VOA, *At Least 26 Killed in Drone Strike in Ethiopia's Amhara Region*, 14 August 2023; Reuters, *Conflict in Ethiopia's Amhara kills dozens, rights body says*, 30 October 2023; Addis Standard, *News: More than a dozen people killed in gov't drone strikes in Amhara; a school and bus station among targets struck: UN*, 18 November 2023; Addis Standard, *News: Drone strikes in Amhara region result in loss of civilian lives, infrastructure damage*, 4 December 2023; Borkena, *Ethiopian Defense Chief Confirms Drone Attack in Amhara, Vows to continue it*, 14 December 2023; Al Jazeera, *'Collective punishment': Ethiopia drone strikes target civilians in Amhara*, 29 December 2023.

²¹⁹ ACLED, *Dataset Violence against civilians by Amharic militias/Fano in Amhara region between 1 December 2022 and 30 November 2023*, notes, consulted on 18 December 2023.

²²⁰ ACLED, *Dataset Violence against civilians by Amharic militias/Fano in Amhara region between 1 December 2022 and 30 November 2023*, notes, consulted on 18 December 2023.

²²¹ Addis Standard, *News: Fresh armed attack in Bure, Amhara region killed many, displaced thousands – residents*, 14 November 2023.

the violence against civilians by the Amharic militias took place in the Oromia region.

According to some reports, during the reporting period, the Amharic militias called on young people to join them and threatened to kill individuals cooperating with the regional authorities. Stay-at-home protests took place in some parts of Amhara. According to a local newspaper, residents of Bahir Dar, Gondar and Debre Markos had been instructed by phone from militia circles to stay at home. The principals threatened repercussions for individuals who did go out or who opened their businesses.²²²

The fighting in Amhara had little impact on the numbers of displaced persons.²²³ This was possibly due to the fact that the Amharic militias tried to spare civilians (especially Amharic) as much as possible.²²⁴

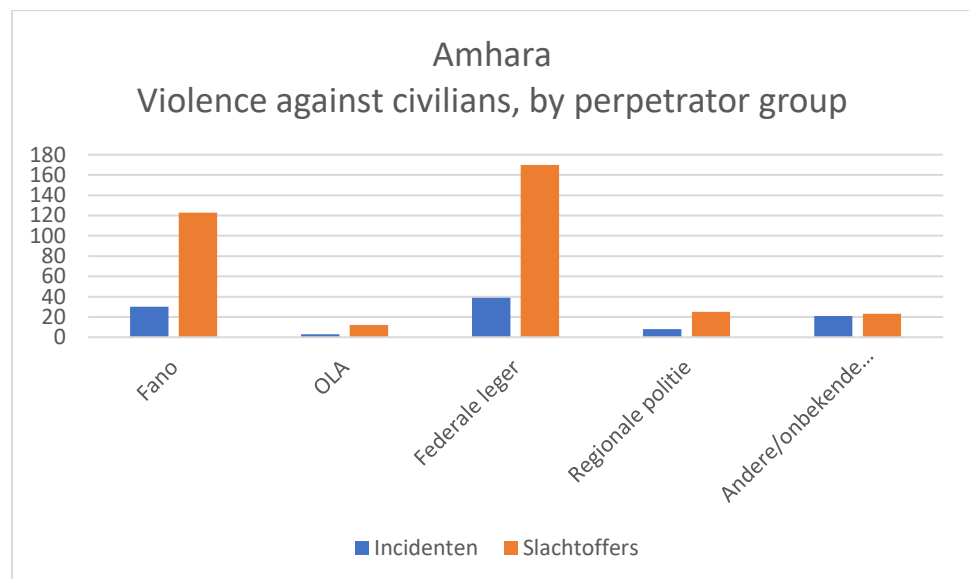


Figure 12: Amhara – Violence against civilians in the Amhara region (incidents and fatalities), by actor during the reporting period (December 2022–December 2023).

²²² EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 470*, 14 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Some parts of Ethiopia's Amhara region embark on stay-at-home strike*, 23 August 2023.

²²³ IOM, *Ethiopia Displacement Tracking Matrix 184*, 7-13 August 2023; IOM, *Ethiopia Displacement Tracking Matrix 185*, 14-20 August 2023; IOM, *Ethiopia Displacement Tracking Matrix 187*, 28 August-3 September 2023; IOM, *Ethiopia Displacement Tracking Matrix 188*, 4-10 September 2023; IOM, *Ethiopia Displacement Tracking Matrix 189*, 11-17 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

²²⁴ Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

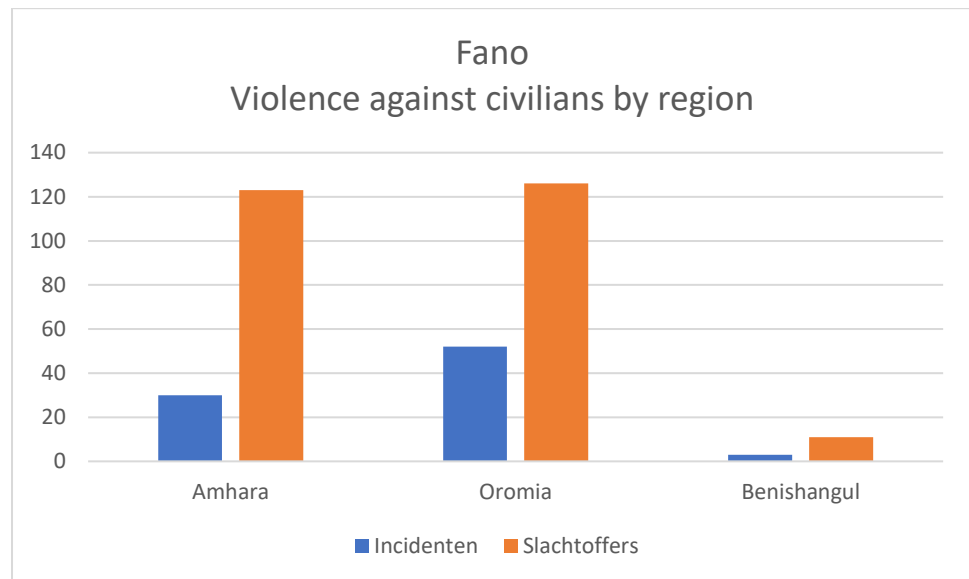


Figure 13: Amhara – Violence against civilians by Amharic militias (incidents and fatalities), by region during the reporting period (December 2022–December 2023).

1.3.6.3. Geographic presence of Amharic militias

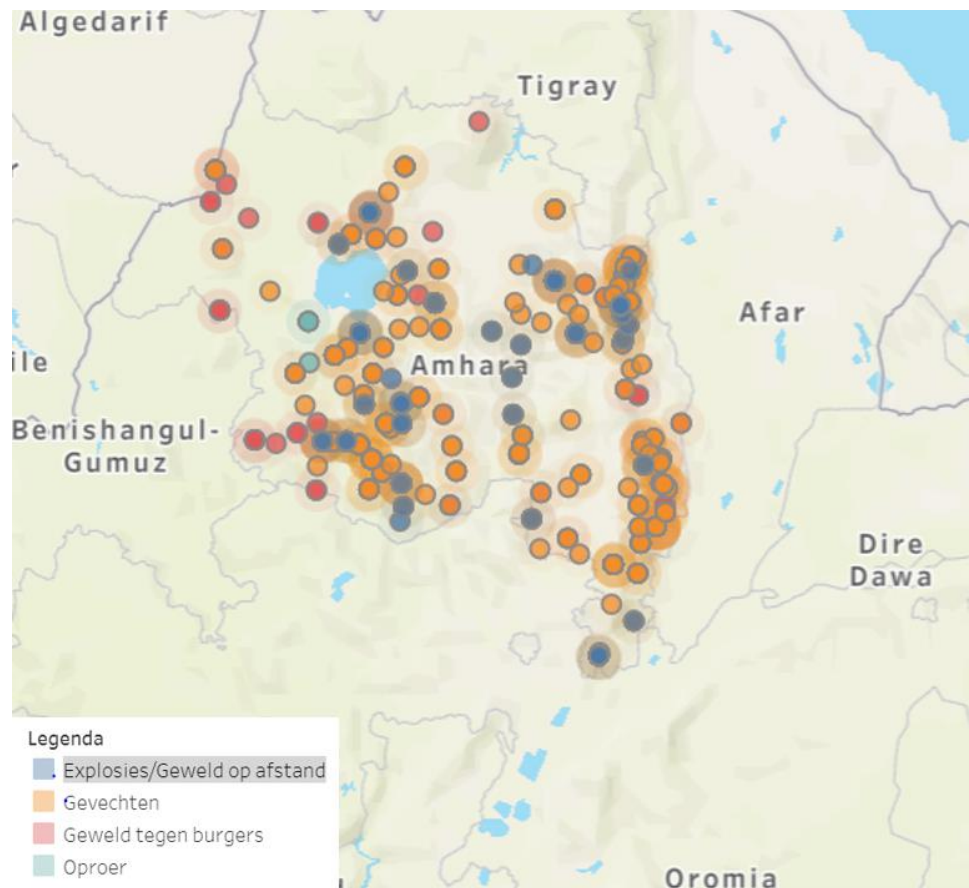


Figure 14: Map of incidents of violence in the Amhara region during the reporting period (December 2022–December 2023). Source: ACLED and Open Street Map. [Legend: Explosions/Remote violence; Battles; Violence against civilians; Riots]

The federal army maintained a strong presence in the region, especially in major cities, such as Bahir Dar, Gondar, Dessie, Debre Markos and Kombolcha. Under the state of emergency, curfews, checkpoints and patrols were instituted. The internet remained disconnected, and the mobile phone network was also frequently down. Domestic flights were suspended on a regular basis.²²⁵ Fighting between the Fano and the federal army continued even towards the end of the reporting period, particularly in Gojjam, South and North Gondar, North Wollo and North Shewa.²²⁶ The Fano regularly reported controlling areas in Amhara.²²⁷

Amhara militias also maintained a presence in West Tigray during the reporting period, after the ceasefire agreement was signed, and committed human rights violations there. Additional information on this point is provided in 1.3.2.4.

1.3.7. Benishangul-Gumuz

In the Benishangul-Gumuz region, peace agreements were signed in late 2022 between the authorities and two rebel groups, the Gumuz People's Democratic Movement (GPDM) in October and the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement (BPLM) in December.²²⁸ According to a confidential source, tensions persisted, leading to sporadic violence (see also Figure 4); the two groups accused the president of Benishangul of failing to keep his promises.²²⁹

1.3.8. Gambella

Inter-ethnic tensions between the Nuer and Anuak persisted in the Gambella region. The Nuer were traditionally a minority in Gambella, but the influx of Nuer refugees and displaced persons from South Sudan put relations with the Anuak on edge.²³⁰ During the reporting period, movements of displaced persons were repeatedly observed in the region due to conflicts,²³¹ but the number of incidents with fatal consequences remained limited (see Figure 4).

²²⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian Airlines reportedly suspends flights to Lalibela*, 9 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian Airlines cancels flights to Amhara region as fighting rages*, 4 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian Airlines extends flight cancellation to Amhara*, 8 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia reduces curfew hours in three Amhara towns*, 22 October 2023; Confidential source, 6 October 2023.

²²⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian Fano militia claims seizing more Amhara towns*, 2 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Amhara rebels 'seize' town from federal troops*, 1 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Amhara rebels form united front to fight army*, 31 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Hundreds escape prison amid clashes in Ethiopia's Amhara*, 25 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Fano militiamen reportedly kill 12 soldiers in camp raid*, 29 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *'Several' people killed as fighting rages in Ethiopia's Amhara*, 27 November 2023; Confidential source, 6 October 2023.

²²⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian militias claim seizing several areas in Amhara Region*, 5 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian militia reportedly take 'partial control' of historic Lalibela town*, 8 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Militia group reportedly captures Ethiopia's Lalibela town*, 8 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Amhara militias reportedly seize one more town*, 7 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian Fano rebels 'seize two more towns'*, 6 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian Fano militia claims seizing more Amhara towns*, 2 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Amhara rebels 'seize' town from federal troops*, 1 November 2023.

²²⁸ Addis Standard, *News: Benishangul Gumuz regional govt, rebel group sign peace agreement*, 19 October 2022; Addis Standard, *News: Benishangul Gumuz region signs peace agreement with second rebel group, deal signed in Sudan*, 12 December 2022; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

²²⁹ Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

²³⁰ Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

²³¹ IOM, *Displacement Tracking Tool*, 24-30 July 2023; IOM, *Displacement Tracking Tool*, IOM, *Displacement Tracking Tool*, 4-10 September 2023; 11-17 September 2023; IOM, *Displacement Tracking Tool*, 25 September – 1 October 2023; IOM, *Displacement Tracking Tool*, 2-8 October 2023.

1.3.9. Tensions between Somali and Afar

During the reporting period, violence broke out again amidst tensions between Afar and Somali communities over border disputes between the two regions. This conflict has been going on for years, and it sporadically leads to violent clashes.²³²

1.3.10. Forced recruitment

There were no reports of forced recruitment during the reporting period. According to confidential sources, a variety of push and pull factors generally lead individuals — and especially young men — to join armed groups (such as the OLA and Fano). These factors include social, economic, ideological and protective considerations.²³³ A confidential source indicated that civilians, especially in conflict zones, often felt forced to choose between the two camps (armed group or authorities) to receive protection.²³⁴ Another confidential source indicated that, while there was probably little coercion to join the armed groups, there was indeed coercion not to leave the groups. Departing members were seen as a security risk, as they could possess sensitive information.²³⁵

1.3.11. Amhara/Oromo/federal army conflict

In addition to fighting separately against the federal army in the border region between the Amhara and Oromia regions, the OLA and Fano militias also fought each other and against the population.²³⁶ For example, Amharic civilians were victims of murder and rape by OLA fighters. Conversely, there were reports that Oromo civilians in the Oromo Special Zone were victims of killings, rapes and other sexual violence, looting and burning of agricultural crops by Fano militias.²³⁷

In November 2023, thirty people were killed in inter-ethnic violence in this border region due to the destruction of crops by stray cattle.²³⁸ According to the International Crisis Group, such inter-ethnic violence had increased since Prime Minister Abiy took office. Amhara accused the prime minister of allowing violence by Oromo against Amhara.²³⁹

1.3.12. Security situation in Addis Ababa

Overall, the security situation in Addis Ababa was relatively good. Armed groups — like the OLA (Oromia) and the Fano (Amhara) — did not have the discipline or level of organisation needed to pose a threat to Addis Ababa, as had been the case with the TPLF.²⁴⁰

²³² International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, p. 16; Ethiopia Insight, *Federal action needed to end Ethiopia's Somali-Afar conflict*, 4 April 2023.

²³³ Confidential source, 24 November 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

²³⁴ Confidential source, 28 November 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

²³⁵ Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

²³⁶ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, p. 67; Confidential source, 25 October 2023.

²³⁷ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, p. 67.

²³⁸ BBC Monitoring, *Over 30 people dead in Ethiopia communal clashes*, 7 November 2023.

²³⁹ International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Ominous New War in Amhara*, 16 November 2023, p. 2.

²⁴⁰ Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

During the reporting period, in the months after the state of emergency was declared, mass arrests of Amhara and Eritreans took place in the regions, as well as in Addis Ababa (see also 3.2.1.2).²⁴¹ At the end of the reporting period, the arrests became more targeted,²⁴² but in early December 2023, large numbers of arrests were again made following a banned anti-war demonstration that had been planned for 10 December.²⁴³ According to an article in the local press, police went house-to-house in certain neighbourhoods looking for politically active youth.²⁴⁴ The youth were accused of being members of the OLA and Fano, and of planning terrorist activities.²⁴⁵ Some of the organisers, including opposition politicians and activists, were also arrested.²⁴⁶

1.3.12.1. Relocation possibilities for individuals from outside Addis Ababa
Individuals wishing to settle outside their own region had to submit a letter from the old kebele²⁴⁷ to the new kebele. Without such a letter, it was impossible to register. In practice, this procedure was complicated by the many conflicts, which often made it difficult or even impossible to obtain such a letter. In addition, ethnicity could affect freedom of movement and the ability to obtain documents in practice, even if this was not officially the case.²⁴⁸ Although not all kebeles recorded ethnicity on the identity card, in practice, it was often possible to form an idea of an individual's ethnicity based on name and accent.²⁴⁹

For this reason, it was very difficult to settle outside one's own community, especially for young people.²⁵⁰ According to a confidential source, it was almost impossible to build a new life without land to settle on, especially for individuals dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry.²⁵¹

According to confidential sources, checkpoints and strict controls increased on roads into Addis Ababa, as well as on borders between regions, especially those between Oromia and Amhara (people travelling from Amhara to Addis Ababa must pass through Oromia to do so).²⁵² According to a confidential source, these measures were aimed at countering the infiltration of the capital by members of the armed groups OLA and Fano who might seek to carry out destabilising actions there. As reported by that source, many of the security forces in Addis Ababa and Oromia were deployed to prevent such a situation.²⁵³ Because of the intimidation that accompanied the controls, as well as the insecurity due to fighting in Amhara and

²⁴¹ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 4; Ethiopia Peace Observatory, *EPO Weekly: 23-29 September 2023*, 4 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian police accused of mass arrests of ethnic Amharas*, 14 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 473*, 24 August 2023; Addis Standard, *News: Command Post admits civilian deaths in Amhara region, reveals list of suspects under custody*, 12 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 472*, 21 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia heightens restrictions on six Amhara towns amid unrest*, 9 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 470*, 14 August 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

²⁴² Confidential source, 28 November 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

²⁴³ Borkena, *Massive Crackdown in Addis Ababa Ahead of Planned Demonstration*, 6 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia foils 'terror acts' in capital, arrests 97 suspects*, 7 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian police arrest organisers of planned protest*, 10 December 2023.

²⁴⁴ Borkena, *Massive Crackdown in Addis Ababa Ahead of Planned Demonstration*, 6 December 2023.

²⁴⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia foils 'terror acts' in capital, arrests 97 suspects*, 7 December 2023.

²⁴⁶ Borkena, *Massive Crackdown in Addis Ababa Ahead of Planned Demonstration*, 6 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian police arrest organisers of planned protest*, 10 December 2023.

²⁴⁷ Kebele is the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia. Several kebeles together constitute a woreda. Source: [Refworld | Ethiopia: Information on the Kebele](#).

²⁴⁸ Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

²⁴⁹ Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

²⁵⁰ Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

²⁵¹ Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

²⁵² Confidential source, 28 November 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

²⁵³ Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

possible attacks by the OLA in Oromia, it was certainly not easy for Amhara to reach Addis Ababa from the regions.²⁵⁴

Additional information on the living conditions for Tigrayans in Addis Ababa is provided in 3.2.1.2.

1.3.13. Travel restrictions

1.3.13.1. Security restrictions on freedom of movement

Ethiopian authorities could not guarantee security in large parts of the country.²⁵⁵ The UN identified areas where the security situation was poor as 'difficult to reach' (see Figure 15).²⁵⁶

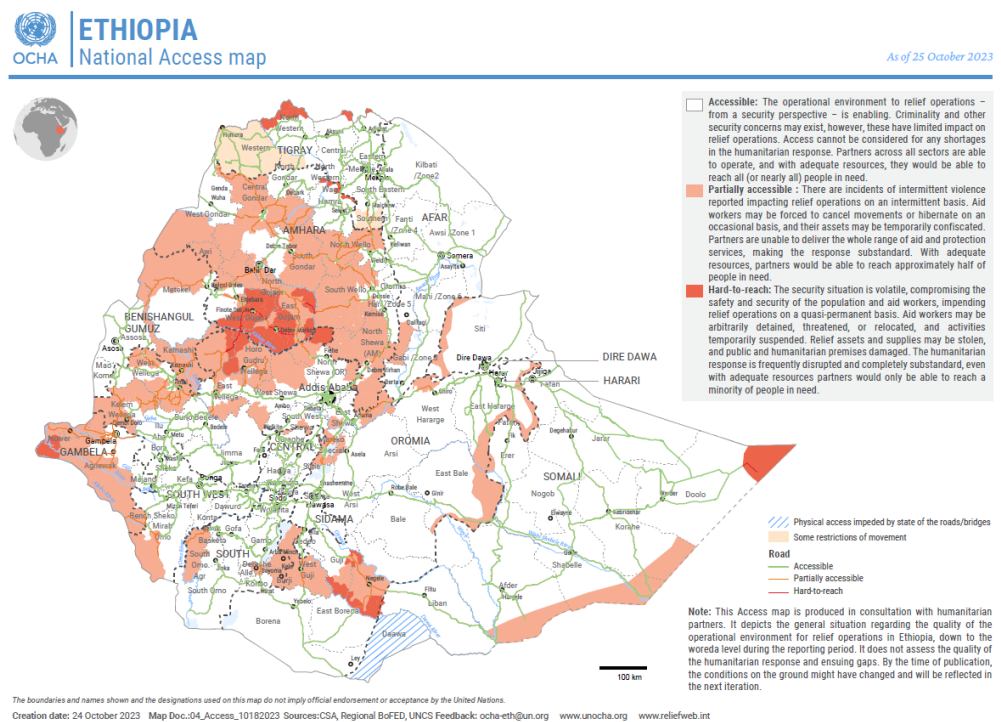


Figure 15: Map showing accessibility for humanitarian aid. Source: OCHA

Under the state of emergency, the command post, which was under military command, could restrict movement at its own discretion. During the reporting period, there were curfews and checkpoints in the regions of Amhara and Oromia (see also 1.1.7.2, 1.3.4.3 and 1.3.10).²⁵⁷ Despite the fact that, officially, states of emergency (and thus command posts) were no longer in force due to the conflict in Oromia, there was a security committee that served a coordinating function

²⁵⁴ Confidential source, 28 November 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

²⁵⁵ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

²⁵⁶ OCHA, [Ethiopia - National Access Map \(As of 25 October 2023\) | OCHA \(unocha.org\)](https://www.unocha.org/ethiopia/national-access-map), consulted on 10 November 2023.

²⁵⁷ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 2; International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 17-18; BBC News, *Ethiopia's Amhara region hit by protests over move to dissolve regional forces*, 10 April 2023; Addis Standard, *News Update: Heavy artillery fired in Kobo as protests engulf Amhara region following decision to dissolve regional special forces*, 10 April 2023; Confidential source, 28 April 2023.

between civil and security authorities at the federal and regional levels. In practice, this also led to a militarised administration.²⁵⁸

1.3.13.2. Access for journalists and human rights investigators

The Ethiopian authorities restricted access to current and former conflict zones for independent journalists and human rights investigators.²⁵⁹ In July 2023, journalists were still not allowed to travel to Tigray, although the security situation there had improved.²⁶⁰ According to a report by Ethiopian civil society, large parts of Tigray²⁶¹ were still inaccessible to independent observers, NGOs and journalists in July 2023. It was particularly difficult to collect information on West Tigray, southern areas of Tigray on the Amharic border, and the northern areas on the Eritrean border. The African Union monitoring team was also denied access to these areas.²⁶² The same applied to parts of the west and south of the Oromia region,²⁶³ as well as to the Amhara region.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁸ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, pp. 9, 12; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

²⁵⁹ Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, p. 4-5; Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 17; Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Authorities must grant independent investigators, media unfettered access to Amhara region to probe violations under state of emergency*, 18 August 2023; The Guardian, *'They just left the corpses lying there': survivors speak about the horrors of a massacre in northern Tigray*, 20 April 2023.

²⁶⁰ The Guardian, *'They just left the corpses lying there': survivors speak about the horrors of a massacre in northern Tigray*, 20 April 2023.

²⁶¹ This is based on Tigray's borders from before the outbreak of the conflict in November 2020.

²⁶² Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, p. 4-5; The Guardian, *'They just left the corpses lying there': survivors speak about the horrors of a massacre in northern Tigray*, 20 April 2023.

²⁶³ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, pp. 9, 12.

²⁶⁴ Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Authorities must grant independent investigators, media unfettered access to Amhara region to probe violations under state of emergency*, 18 August 2023.

2. Identity, nationality and documents

2.1. Developments around the national ID card

The previous Country of Origin Information Report referred to the introduction of a digital national ID card. This card was also referred to as the *fayda*. To this end, the Ethiopian Digital Identity Proclamation Number 1284/2023²⁶⁵ was adopted during the reporting period. Article 7 of this law states that all persons living in Ethiopia, and thus also those without Ethiopian nationality,²⁶⁶ are entitled to a digital ID card. The law also states (in Article 25) that sharing personal data without the consent of the data subject is an offence. Article 16 contains an exception to this: personal data may nevertheless be transferred to legal persons who are entitled to it by law or as a result of a court ruling.²⁶⁷

In the reporting period, the Ethiopia National ID Program (NIDP), responsible for issuing the *fayda*, fell directly under the office of the prime minister.²⁶⁸ As indicated by the November 2022 General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia, according to the UNHCR, responsibility for the card would be transferred to the Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency (INVEA) of the Ministry of Peace. During the previous reporting period, the INVEA's tasks were transferred to the Immigration and Citizenship Service (ICS), which was no longer under the Ministry of Peace, but directly under the office of the prime minister.²⁶⁹ At the ICS, several dozen people, including a director and a deputy director, were discharged and arrested for corruption during the reporting period.²⁷⁰

Although the law refers only to demographic data, according to a confidential source, in order to claim a digital national ID card, the applicant was required to submit a kebele ID card and/or a birth certificate.²⁷¹ According to various sources, the new ID card was not mandatory, and citizens could continue to use the identity cards issued at the kebele level.²⁷²

Authorities tracked online how many people had registered for the digital national ID card. In October 2023, this was 3.1 million people (out of a population of about 119 million, and thus about 2.5 percent).²⁷³ In the reporting period, the Ethiopian authorities announced that, in collaboration with the Central Bank and the National ID Programme, they planned to register all bank customers in Ethiopia for the national ID card by 2024.²⁷⁴ Similarly, the authorities announced that the *fayda* would henceforth serve as a pupil and student card.²⁷⁵ According to plans of the

²⁶⁵ [Digital ID proclamation 1284.pdf - Google Drive](#), consulted on 21 October 2023.

²⁶⁶ Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

²⁶⁷ Ethiopia National ID Program, *What is the newly adopted Ethiopian Digital Identity Proclamation Number 1284/2023 all about?*, 3 April 2023; [Digital ID proclamation 1284.pdf - Google Drive](#), consulted on 21 October 2023.

²⁶⁸ IOM, *Ethiopia Partnership Eases Vulnerable Returnee Access to Legal Identity Documents*, 15 November 2023.

²⁶⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia, November 2022, p. 41; UNHCR, *Citizenship and statelessness in the Horn of Africa*, December 2021, p. 43.

²⁷⁰ Addis Insight, *New Director General Appointed to Ethiopian Immigration Service Amid Passport Shortage*, 24 July 2023; Borkena, *Top Immigration and Citizenship Services officials including former Deputy Director arrested*, 19 October 2023.

²⁷¹ Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

²⁷² Reuters, *FEATURE-Ethiopia digital ID prompts fears of ethnic profiling*, 1 February 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

²⁷³ [National ID | Home](#), consulted on 21 October 2023.

²⁷⁴ BiometricUpdate, *Ethiopia to make digital ID obligatory for banking operations*, 12 July 2023.

²⁷⁵ BiometricUpdate.com, *Ethiopia rolls out student IDs, integrates biometric data to issue Fayda*, 14 September 2023.

Ethiopian authorities, all adult residents of Ethiopia should be registered for the digital ID card by the end of 2025.²⁷⁶

According to the law, the digital ID card is intended to give citizens better access to financial and health services, amongst other facilities.²⁷⁷ According to a report by Reuters, however, human rights defenders feared that careful handling of the personal data was not guaranteed and that such information could be used for ethnic profiling.²⁷⁸ Although ethnicity is not mentioned on the digital national ID card, it is often still mentioned on the kebele ID card. Originally, ID cards always contained information about the holder's ethnic origin. Since 2018, this was discontinued for new ID cards in certain kebeles, including Addis Ababa.²⁷⁹ According to an AP report from 2021, however, the elimination of ethnicity from ID cards in Tigray was also seen as a sign of ethnic cleansing there.²⁸⁰

Ethnicity can often be inferred from a person's name and accent.²⁸¹ According to one source, therefore, there may have been fears that the digitisation of the civil registry would make it easier for authorities to keep tabs on the population.²⁸²

2.2. Applying for Ethiopian travel documents from the Netherlands

Proof of identity and a legalised birth certificate are required to apply for travel documents.²⁸³

According to the website of the Ethiopian embassy in Brussels, applications for an Ethiopian passport or identity card can be made online. Applicants must nevertheless go to the embassy to have fingerprints taken if they have not been taken before, as would be the case for a first passport or if the previous passport did not yet contain biometric data. Children younger than fourteen years of age are not required to have their fingerprints taken. Amongst other requirements, the Ethiopian embassy website in Brussels states that, to apply for a travel document there, applicants must present proof of residence status or a work permit from one of the Benelux countries.²⁸⁴

Ethiopia had no diplomatic representation in the Netherlands during the reporting period. The Ethiopian embassy in Brussels is also accredited for the Netherlands.²⁸⁵ Applicants must therefore go to Brussels to request travel documents requiring fingerprints.

²⁷⁶ Reuters, *FEATURE-Ethiopia digital ID prompts fears of ethnic profiling*, 1 February 2023.

²⁷⁷ Reuters, *FEATURE-Ethiopia digital ID prompts fears of ethnic profiling*, 1 February 2023; [Digital ID proclamation 1284.pdf - Google Drive](#), consulted on 21 October 2023.

²⁷⁸ Reuters, *FEATURE-Ethiopia digital ID prompts fears of ethnic profiling*, 1 February 2023.

²⁷⁹ Borkena, *Addis Ababa residents new ID will not feature ethnic identity information*, 30 August 2018; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

²⁸⁰ AP, *'Leave no Tigrayan': In Ethiopia, an ethnicity is erased*, 7 April 2021.

²⁸¹ Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

²⁸² Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

²⁸³ Ethiopian Passport Service, [Apply for Ethiopian Passport Online \(ethiopianpassportservices.gov.et\)](#), consulted on 28 November 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

²⁸⁴ [Passports - Embassy of Ethiopia \(ethiopianembassy.be\)](#), consulted on 13 September 2023.

²⁸⁵ Website Ethiopian Embassy in Brussels, [About The Embassy - Embassy of Ethiopia \(ethiopianembassy.be\)](#), consulted on 8 December 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

3. Human rights

3.1. Human rights violations by warring parties

Information on violence against civilians and human rights violations by the warring parties during the reporting period is provided in 1.3.

3.1.1. Prosecution of crimes against humanity or war crimes

This section discusses international and national investigative initiatives into crimes against humanity and war crimes, as well as the willingness of Ethiopian authorities to prosecute these crimes.

3.1.1.1. International investigative initiatives

International human rights experts accused the Ethiopian authorities of shirking their responsibilities concerning human rights violations, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Ethiopia opposed international research initiatives into such crimes, including the International Commission of Human Rights Experts for Ethiopia (ICHREE) and the *ad hoc* research committee of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

ICHREE

The International Commission, which consists of three international human rights experts, was established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2021 to conduct official investigations into human rights violations, crimes against humanity and war crimes by parties to the conflict in Tigray.²⁸⁶ From the beginning, the Ethiopian authorities opposed funding for the Commission. They qualified the Commission as 'substandard and politicised'.²⁸⁷ The Ethiopian government also refused to allow the Commission access to Ethiopia beyond a one-off visit to the capital.²⁸⁸ According to the Ethiopian authorities, an international investigative commission was not necessary, as the national Ethiopian Human Rights Commission would be sufficiently capable of investigating human rights violations.²⁸⁹

Following a campaign by the Ethiopian authorities to dissolve the International Commission, there was insufficient support at the UN Human Rights Council in October 2023 to extend the Commission's mandate.²⁹⁰ In its October 2023 final report, the Commission accused the Ethiopian government of deliberately evading accountability. According to the International Commission, national mechanisms,

²⁸⁶ OHCHR, [Members of the Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia](#) | OHCHR, consulted on 24 October 2023; NRC, *Ethiopië blokkeert gerechtigheid voor slachtoffers Tigray*, 12 August 2023.

²⁸⁷ BBC Monitoring, *UN fails to extend mandate of rights experts on Ethiopia*, 4 October 2023; The New Humanitarian, *Ethiopia's new struggle over war crimes accountability*, 29 March 2023.

²⁸⁸ OHCHR, Oral Update of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia to the UN Human Rights Council, Geneva, 30 June 2023; The Reporter, *Human rights investigators' commission on Ethiopia survives UN member states' vote*, 31 December 2022; NRC, *Ethiopië blokkeert gerechtigheid voor slachtoffers Tigray*, 12 August 2023.

²⁸⁹ The Reporter, *Human rights investigators' commission on Ethiopia survives UN member states' vote*, 31 December 2022; NRC, *Ethiopië blokkeert gerechtigheid voor slachtoffers Tigray*, 12 August 2023.

²⁹⁰ NRC, *Ethiopië blokkeert gerechtigheid voor slachtoffers Tigray*, 12 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *UN fails to extend mandate of rights experts on Ethiopia*, 4 October 2023; The Independent, *UN-backed probe into Ethiopia's abuses is set to end. No one has asked for it to continue*, 4 October 2023; The New Humanitarian, *Ethiopia's new struggle over war crimes accountability*, 29 March 2023.

presented with the aim of countering impunity, were mainly aimed at avoiding international political pressure.²⁹¹

It also pointed out that the Ethiopian authorities had not sufficiently cooperated with African organisations on monitoring and research. For example, the African Union delegation responsible for monitoring the ceasefire (the African Union Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mission, AU-MVCM) had not been allowed access to all parts of Tigray.²⁹² A confidential source pointed out that this obstruction of the AU mission was caused primarily by Eritrean and Amharic troops.²⁹³

ACHPR

The ad hoc commission set up by the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)²⁹⁴ to investigate serious human rights violations in Tigray was quietly disbanded in 2023 without publication of investigation results.²⁹⁵ The ACHPR's argument for disbanding the investigative commission was that the Ethiopian authorities were working on a transitional justice policy.²⁹⁶ In a public letter, 33 human rights organisations expressed concern over the ACHPR's decision to disband the research commission. They argued that the ACHPR should not have ceded to political pressure from Ethiopia. In addition, they accused Ethiopia, as a party to the conflict, of seeking to avoid responsibility for any crimes against humanity and war crimes.²⁹⁷

3.1.1.2. National research initiatives

The previous Country of Origin Information Report mentioned the joint investigation into human rights violations in Tigray by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the East Africa Regional Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in June 2021.²⁹⁸ During the reporting period, both the International Commission of Human Rights Experts and individuals who had been directly involved in this investigation recalled that the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) of the UN and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission had been able to investigate only a limited number of incidents until June 2021 and that the investigation was therefore incomplete.²⁹⁹ The International Commission also pointed out that the joint investigation team had faced harassment of its staff, restrictions imposed by the authorities on the use of communication equipment and difficulties in obtaining authorisations to travel.³⁰⁰

3.1.1.3. Trial versus transitional justice

²⁹¹ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 17.

²⁹² Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 17.

²⁹³ Confidential source, 15 December 2023.

²⁹⁴ The ACHPR is a body of the African Union. Source: <https://achpr.au.int/en/about>

²⁹⁵ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 17.

²⁹⁶ Transitional justice is how a country decides to account for human rights violations committed in previous periods, often in times of war. Amnesty International, *Transitie en transitional justice (overgangsjustitie) - Amnesty International*, consulted on 24 October 2023.

²⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Concerns Regarding The Premature Termination of the Commission of Inquiry on the Situation in the Tigray Region of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia*, 31 August 2023.

²⁹⁸ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 17.

²⁹⁹ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 17; NRC, *Ethiopië blokkeert gerechtigheid voor slachtoffers Tigray*, 12 August 2023.

³⁰⁰ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 17.

According to various sources, the authorities had indicated that military personnel had been arrested for crimes against humanity.³⁰¹ These trials took place behind closed doors.³⁰² According to various sources, these legal proceedings were dropped after the ceasefire agreement was signed in November 2022.³⁰³ In late 2023, the president of the Tigray Interim Regional Administration indicated that, as far as he was concerned, individuals suspected of genocide in Tigray — with particular reference to Eritrean troops — should be tried by an international tribunal and not through transitional justice.³⁰⁴

Opinions differed on the proper balance between prosecution, justice and peace. One of the recommendations to the Ethiopian authorities that followed from the joint investigation by the UN and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission in June 2021 was to launch a transitional justice process.³⁰⁵ On the one hand, there were concerns that the criminal prosecution of individuals suspected of crimes against humanity would be insufficient for — or could even thwart — lasting peace.³⁰⁶ On the other hand, there were concerns (as described above in 3.1.1.1) that the Ethiopian authorities were using transitional justice as a pretext for not seriously pursuing the process of accountability and prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity.³⁰⁷ During the reporting period, observers grew sceptical of the good will of the Ethiopian authorities.³⁰⁸

In September 2023, in a jointly prepared advisory note, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights stressed the need for a transitional justice policy that explicitly prohibited amnesty for international crimes and serious human rights violations. The response of the Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWGE) appointed by the Ethiopian government was that transitional justice policies should be based entirely and solely on the 'choices and wishes of the Ethiopian people'.³⁰⁹

According to a report in the local press, Ethiopian lawyers filed charges of war crimes in Tigray, Oromia and Amhara in November 2023. The charges allegedly target Prime Minister Abiy, the intelligence and security service chief, the commander of the armed forces and his deputy, and the Minister of Defence.³¹⁰

3.2. Position of specific groups

³⁰¹ NRC, *Ethiopië blokkeert gerechtigheid voor slachtoffers Tigray*, 12 August 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

³⁰² Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

³⁰³ Addis Standard, *#NewsAlert: Ethiopia terminates charges against TPLF military, civilian leaders*, 30 March 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

³⁰⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Tigray seeks international trial for genocide culprits*, 11 December 2023.

³⁰⁵ Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) 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, p. 93; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

³⁰⁶ NRC, *Ethiopië blokkeert gerechtigheid voor slachtoffers Tigray*, 12 August 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

³⁰⁷ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 17; NRC, *Ethiopië blokkeert gerechtigheid voor slachtoffers Tigray*, 12 August 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

³⁰⁸ The New Humanitarian, *Ethiopia's new struggle over war crimes accountability*, 29 March 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

³⁰⁹ The Reporter, *Transitional Justice Team, rights bodies clash on Ethiopia's international accountability*, 21 October 2023.

³¹⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian lawyers file 'war crimes' case against Abiy, security chiefs*, 27 November 2023.

3.2.1. Ethnic and religious groups

It is not always possible to distinguish between intrastate and inter-ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia. After the death of Prime Minister Meles and the appointment of Prime Minister Abiy, there was a rise in ethnic nationalism, armed groups seeking greater autonomy and power, and thus violence. Ethnic conflicts affected relations between the federal state on the one hand and ethnicity-based regions on the other. In addition, ethnic relations were affected by conflicts over the nature of governance and over which ethnic group dominated the federal state.³¹¹

3.2.1.1. Religious and inter-ethnic conflicts

Although religion and ethnicity in Ethiopia often coincide, it is not always the case. For example, the Afar and Somali are Muslim, while Amhara and Tigrayans are predominantly Christian. In contrast, the Oromo are Muslim as well as Orthodox and Protestant Christian (especially Pentecostal). Ethnic and religious minorities also exist in certain regions. Orthodox Christian identity played an important role in the Amhara nationalism that flared up after the signing of the ceasefire. This created tensions with areas in the Amhara region where the population was predominantly Muslim. The opposite was true in eastern Oromia, where the majority was Muslim, and Islam was used to mobilise the population.³¹²

For many decades, therefore, the main fault lines in the Ethiopian federal state were based on ethnicity in particular. Although religion was an important part of Ethiopian identity, it was rarely, if ever, a cause of conflict. In the wake of ethnic conflicts, religion increasingly entered into disputes concerning access to power and resources between ethnic groups since the signing of ceasefire. According to a confidential source, the following two main trends were exemplary in this regard.³¹³

Schisms in the Orthodox Church

The first trend concerned a schism in the Orthodox Christian church. In January 2023, three Oromo archbishops broke away from the 'Holy Synod', the national leadership of the church.³¹⁴ According to a confidential source, underlying this schism was the sense on the part of Oromo Orthodox Christians that the church was dominated by the Amhara, and that the church leadership was corrupt.³¹⁵ According to an article in the local press, when the Holy Synod sent a new archbishop to Oromia to replace the breakaway archbishops, clashes between police and Orthodox Christians led to 'many' deaths.³¹⁶ Ethiopia's federal authorities, dominated by the Oromo under Prime Minister Abiy, were accused of supporting the split.³¹⁷ Although mediation by Prime Minister Abiy brought some calm to the church in Oromia,³¹⁸ according to various sources, the conflict was not resolved and could flare up again at any time.³¹⁹ Later in 2023, the schism scenario repeated itself in Tigray: four archbishops from Tigray appointed bishops without consulting the Holy Synod in

³¹¹ Bertelsmann Transformation Index, *Ethiopia country report 2022*; ISS, *Drivers of ethnic conflict in contemporary Ethiopia*, December 2019, p. v; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³¹² Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 4 July 2023.

³¹³ Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³¹⁴ Addis Standard, *News: Orthodox Church anoints nine episcopates for Oromia, southern dioceses in bid to quell threat of schism*, 17 July 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³¹⁵ Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³¹⁶ Addis Standard, *News Analysis: Clashes between Orthodox faithful, local police claim "lives of many" in Shashemene; Holy Synod, government in war of words as both stick to their positions over Church schism*, 6 February 2023.

³¹⁷ Africa Confidential Vol 64 no 8, *Abiy tries to exploit Orthodox schism*, 13 April 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³¹⁸ Addis Standard, *News Analysis: Ethiopian Orthodox Church leaders resolve schism through dialogue, restore Church unity "based on church's canon"*, 16 February 2023; Ethiopia Insight, *A rift in Ethiopia's Orthodox Church has been healed, but tensions remain*, 28 February 2023.

³¹⁹ Ethiopia Insight, *A rift in Ethiopia's Orthodox Church has been healed, but tensions remain*, 28 February 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

Addis Ababa, upon which they were excommunicated by the leaders of the church.³²⁰

Tensions around Sheger City

The second trend was that of Muslim opposition to the demolition of mosques in favour of the Sheger City development.³²¹ Sheger City is a multi-billion-dollar project of the Oromia regional government that merged six cities to develop one large modern city under the administration of the Oromia region, around the autonomous city of Addis Ababa. As part of the city's development, tens of thousands of houses and at least twenty mosques were destroyed.³²² According to a confidential source, the authorities had expected the project to gain the support of the Orthodox Oromo, who had traditionally lived in the area and who often had problems with the Muslim Oromo.³²³ Muslims took to the streets in late May, early June 2023 to protest against the destruction of the mosques, marching with other groups residing in the area whose residences had been destroyed.³²⁴ In the process, police fired on the protesters, and some protesters were killed.³²⁵ Although some peace was achieved through mediations by the federal government in this conflict as well, no lasting solution was found.³²⁶

3.2.1.2. Treatment of ethnic groups by the authorities

The 1995 constitution made Ethiopia a federal state with autonomous regions along ethno-linguistic lines. This form of state was intended to give ethnic groups a large degree of self-governance.³²⁷ It followed that ethnic groups living in regions where they were in the majority were best able to represent their interests. In practice, the distribution of ethnic groups did not exactly match the boundaries of the regions. This meant that there were also ethnic minorities. It was the role of the region to ensure the protection of these minorities. In practice, however, they were subject to the dominant ethnic group.³²⁸

Amhara

With the outbreak of conflict in Amhara, a campaign of ethnicity-based mass arrests of Amhara began across the country, but especially in the Amhara and Oromia regions and in Addis Ababa.³²⁹ Those arrested included prominent Amhara politicians, MPs, journalists and priests who had been critical of the government.³³⁰

³²⁰ The Tablet, *Ethiopian synod excommunicates Tigray bishops*, 9 August 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³²¹ Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³²² Addis Standard, *Ethiopia: News Analysis - Despite Growing Grievances Sheger City Officials Continue Demolishing 'Illegal Houses', Deny Accusations of Ethnic Prejudice*, 6 March 2023; Borkena, *Oromia region's new Sheger city encase Addis Ababa*, 19 December 2022; Confidential source, 4 July 2023.

³²³ Confidential source, 4 July 2023.

³²⁴ Confidential source, 4 July 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³²⁵ EEPA, *Situation Report Horn No 443*, 2 June 2023; Ethiopian Citizen, *Thousands Attend Funeral For Four Muslims Killed By Police In Addis Ababa*, 3 June 2023; Horn Diplomat, *3 Killed As Muslims, Police Clash In Ethiopia Capital*, 3 June 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³²⁶ Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³²⁷ Ethiopia Insight, *Under Ethiopia's federal system, Western Tigray belongs in Tigray*, 3 August 2022; Berihun Aduugna Gebeye, 'The Four Faces of Ethiopian Federalism' in *Between Failure and Redemption The Future of the Ethiopian Social Contract*, 12 April 2023, p. 159.

³²⁸ Getaye Mulugeta Kasse and Gizachew Asrat Woldemariam, 'The Matrix of Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia in Protecting Internal Minority Rights: Examining Perceptions in Oromia Regional State', in *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, February 2022, p. 210.

³²⁹ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 4; Ethiopia Peace Observatory, *EPO Weekly: 23-29 September 2023*, 4 October 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian police accused of mass arrests of ethnic Amharas*, 14 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 473*, 24 August 2023; Addis Standard, *News: Command Post admits civilian deaths in Amhara region, reveals list of suspects under custody*, 12 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 472*, 21 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia heightens restrictions on six Amhara towns amid unrest*, 9 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 470*, 14 August 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

³³⁰ Addis Standard, *News: Command Post admits civilian deaths in Amhara region, reveals list of suspects under custody*, 12 August 2023; Trouw, *Politieke veenbrand in Ethiopië kan zo weer opblaaien*, 13 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 470*, 14 August 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 473*, 24 August 2023; Confidential source, 8 August 2023.

In addition, there were frequent street checks and door-to-door searches, with Amhara men in particular being arrested *en masse*, although women and the elderly were not spared.³³¹ Although no official numbers were known, several sources agree that tens of thousands of arrests were involved.³³² The mass arrests were intended to filter out individuals who were mobilising financial or logistical support for the armed groups or who were gathering information for them.³³³

These arrests were made possible by the state of emergency that was declared by the government in early August 2023 in response to the fighting in Amhara (see also 1.1.7.2). The state of emergency made an exception to the legal requirement that detainees be brought before a court within 48 hours.³³⁴ Many of them were eventually released, often after a rehabilitation programme. If evidence of affiliation with the Fano was found, prosecution took place. Those with a more prominent profile were still in detention at the end of the reporting period.³³⁵

The command post acknowledged that there were five detention centres for the detainees: Kombolcha, Gondar, Bahir Dar and Shewa Robit in the Amhara region, and Awash Arba in the Afar region.³³⁶ According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, however, there were also improvised detention centres that had inadequate facilities for detainees.³³⁷ According to confidential sources, detainees were being held in military camps, schools and other facilities.³³⁸ According to unconfirmed reports, many were released after some time, but many thousands of detainees were in well-known and lesser-known informal detention camps, sometimes in Addis Ababa, but also far beyond.³³⁹

The suspicion underlying the arrests was membership of or sympathy with the Amharic militias.³⁴⁰ According to a confidential source, the Amhara arrests were based on the authorities' fear that many in the government, in which Amhara still constitute a majority, would sympathise with Amharic nationalists and militias.³⁴¹ According to various sources, the Amhara were subject to ethnic profiling, especially in the period immediately after the state of emergency was declared.³⁴² The International Commission of Human Rights Experts observed an increase in cases

³³¹ The Independent, *The U.N. says at least 183 people have been killed in Ethiopia over Amhara region unrest since July*, 29 August 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³³² EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 473*, 21 August 2023; Confidential source, 22 January 2024; Confidential source, 24 January 2024.

³³³ Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³³⁴ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

³³⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Amhara Region releases 872 detainees*, 13 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Amhara Region frees over 900 detainees*, 17 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Amhara region frees 2,741 prisoners in holiday pardon*, 2 January 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia to arraign 360 suspects over conflict in Amhara*, 30 December 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³³⁶ Ethiopia Peace Observatory, *EPO Weekly: 23-29 September 2023*, 4 October 2023.

³³⁷ OHCHR, *Ethiopia: Deteriorating human rights situation*, 29 August 2023.

³³⁸ Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

³³⁹ Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Authorities must grant independent investigators, media unfettered access to Amhara region to probe violations under state of emergency*, 18 August 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

³⁴⁰ Africa News, *Ethiopian police arrest hundreds during state of emergency*, 14 August 2023; OHCHR, *Press briefing Ethiopia: Deteriorating human rights situation*, 29 August 2023; Borkena, *Massive Crackdown in Addis Ababa Ahead of Planned Demonstration*, 6 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia foils 'terror acts' in capital, arrests 97 suspects*, 7 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian police arrest organisers of planned protest*, 10 December 2023; Borkena, *Addis Ababa police say it has arrested 97 students, teachers*, 8 December 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

³⁴¹ Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

³⁴² Ethiopia Observer, *Serious concerns about profiling based on ethnicity, religious affiliation*, says Human Rights Commission, 5 September 2023; BBC News, *Why Ethiopia's Amhara militiamen are battling the army*, 16 August 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023;

involving the use of 'ethnicised language objectifying Oromos, Tigrayans and Amharas'.³⁴³

As time passed, arrests became more targeted and less widespread, and the tactics of the authorities changed. This was motivated in part by the fact that the Amhara are the largest ethnic group among Addis Ababa residents; it was impossible to arrest them all.³⁴⁴ According to a confidential source, the authorities in the Amhara region organised meetings to counterbalance Fano-dominated narratives amongst the population. Individuals who were arrested were often released after a rehabilitation programme of several weeks. The authorities also used co-optation by offering certain members of the militia positions within local governments. Longer detention and, in some cases, extrajudicial executions occurred for those who had actually fought with conviction for the militia or gathered information or mobilised financial and logistical support for the militia's battles.³⁴⁵ In early December 2023, arrests increased again in anticipation of a banned anti-war demonstration (see also 1.3.11).³⁴⁶

Eritreans

As described in 1.3.11, Eritreans were also arrested in large numbers during the reporting period. Several hundred of them were deported to Eritrea. Families were reportedly separated, with parents being deported while their children stayed behind in Ethiopia.³⁴⁷ According to a confidential source, these deportees definitely included some people with refugee status and, possibly, those who had not yet been able to register their asylum claims.³⁴⁸ According to the Ethiopian authorities, the deportations were the result of poor coordination between various government departments (e.g. police, migration services).³⁴⁹

The official reason for the arrests and deportations of Eritreans was that they did not have their documents in order or were in possession of forged documents.³⁵⁰ According to several sources, however, the mass arrests were also related to the shifting of the conflict. During the Tigray conflict, the Ethiopian federal government and the Eritrean authorities had cooperated with Amharic special forces and militias in the fight against the TPLF/TDF. Since the signing of the ceasefire, the interests of these groups were no longer the same (see also 1.1.2). Eritrea and the Amharic militias were accused of collaborating and in some cases, Eritreans were suspected of being spies for the Eritrean regime. Eritreans thus became targets of the same mass arrests that targeted the Amhara. This was reinforced by the fact that Eritreans often lacked proper documentation.³⁵¹

³⁴³ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 11.

³⁴⁴ Confidential source, 24 November 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³⁴⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian army accused of killing nine in western Oromia*, 28 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia's Amhara Region releases 872 detainees*, 13 December 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³⁴⁶ Borkena, *Massive Crackdown in Addis Ababa Ahead of Planned Demonstration*, 6 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia foils 'terror acts' in capital, arrests 97 suspects*, 7 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian police arrest organisers of planned protest*, 10 December 2023; Borkena, *Addis Ababa police say it has arrested 97 students, teachers*, 8 December 2023.

³⁴⁷ OHCHR, *UN experts urge Ethiopia to halt mass deportation of Eritreans*, 13 July 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian rights body decries arrest of Eritreans in country*, 27 December 2023.

³⁴⁸ OHCHR, *UN experts urge Ethiopia to halt mass deportation of Eritreans*, 13 July 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

³⁴⁹ Addis Standard, *News: Ethiopian rights commission says Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers subjected to arbitrary arrest in Addis Ababa*, 3 June 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

³⁵⁰ OHCHR, *UN experts urge Ethiopia to halt mass deportation of Eritreans*, 13 July 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

³⁵¹ Martin Plaut, *Blog: Hard times in Ethiopia: the plight of Eritrean refugees inside Addis and across the country*, 11 August 2023; Yohannes Woldemariam, *Blog: Eritrean refugees face danger in Sudan and Ethiopia*, 25 May 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

In November and December 2023, there were reports that Eritreans were again targeted for focused checks by security forces, as well as for arrests and deportations. Five well-known Eritrean singers and actors also disappeared.³⁵²

Oromo

According to several confidential sources, during the reporting period, the authorities engaged in less ethnic profiling of Oromo than was the case for Amhara and, in the past, Tigrayans.³⁵³ This relatively lesser attention that was directed towards the Oromo was said to be mainly a matter of capacity; the authorities were prioritising the conflict in Amhara.³⁵⁴ According to confidential sources, human rights violations by the authorities occurred mainly in rural Oromia and in the areas where fighting was most intense and where the OLA had the most influence.³⁵⁵

According to various sources, suspicion of support for the OLA and affiliated groups in particular gave rise to an increased risk of human rights violations, including detention and extrajudicial killings by government forces (see also Figure 5 on violence against civilians by state actors).³⁵⁶

In the Oromia region, as well as in Addis Ababa, there were large numbers of arrests and detentions of Oromo citizens, especially men, who had been accused of links to the OLA.³⁵⁷ Such accusations could be prompted by suspicions or indications of financial or logistical support to the OLA.³⁵⁸ According to an example given by a confidential source, a restaurant owner could get in trouble for serving OLA fighters.³⁵⁹ In August 2023, an Ethiopian news agency spoke of some two thousand arrests, without clarifying whether this had happened recently or over a longer period of time.³⁶⁰ According to the International Commission of Human Rights Experts, arrests were mainly made by Oromia federal and regional police, Oromia special forces and, in some cases, by the federal army. They were often accompanied by beatings and torture. Family members of individuals suspected of having links to the OLA could also be subject to arrest and detention. Its purpose was to impose pressure on those suspected of having links with the OLA. Some of the female victims reported sexual violence.³⁶¹ According to the International Commission investigation, large parts of Oromia were governed by militarised governance structures, even when a state of emergency was no longer in effect.³⁶²

In a communiqué in May 2023, the OLA accused Ethiopian authorities of using violence against civilians. More specifically, civilians were said to be forcibly recruited to local militias, and local officials were said to be forced to fund military operations. According to the communiqué, those who refused to cooperate with the authorities could face punitive action, from denial of fertiliser to extrajudicial

³⁵² BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Ethiopia excludes Eritreans from new visa system*, 21 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia accused of 'mass arrest' of Eritrean refugees*, 8 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian police arrest five Eritrean actors and musicians*, 23 December 2023; Confidential source, 19 December 2023.

³⁵³ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³⁵⁴ Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

³⁵⁵ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³⁵⁶ Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³⁵⁷ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 9; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia arrests hundreds of suspected militants, rebels*, 7 August 2023; Confidential source, 22 January 2024.

³⁵⁸ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³⁵⁹ Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

³⁶⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia arrests hundreds of suspected militants, rebels*, 7 August 2023.

³⁶¹ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 9; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³⁶² Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 9; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

execution.³⁶³ In October 2023, the OLF accused authorities of killing dozens of villagers in North Shewa zone.³⁶⁴ In the same month, the army was accused of burning down forty houses in the Arsi Zone because the residents were suspected of harbouring OLA fighters.³⁶⁵ These reports could not be independently verified.

Tigrayans

According to various sources, the living situation of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa had improved significantly during the reporting period.³⁶⁶ The negative attention of the authorities had radically and abruptly shifted from the Tigrayans to the Amhara and Eritreans.³⁶⁷ This turnaround in the treatment of Tigrayans was explained by the fact that Prime Minister Abiy had changed his target. He had achieved his goal of weakening the Tigrayan elite and was now targeting the Amhara. To that end, he needed things to be calm on the Tigrayan front.³⁶⁸ According to various sources, work was slowly under way to restore the jobs and homes that Tigrayans had lost during the conflict.³⁶⁹ Some Tigrayans who had sought refuge abroad returned to Ethiopia.³⁷⁰

According to a confidential source, the very marked improvement in living conditions for Tigrayans in Addis Ababa could be explained in part by the fact that, during the Tigray conflict, the Amharic population in particular had treated the Tigrayans negatively. The very fact that the Amharic population group in Addis Ababa was under fire during the reporting period tempered their negative treatment of the Tigrayans.³⁷¹

Other ethnic groups

While it could not be ruled out that members of other groups faced ethnic profiling by the authorities in specific situations, it did not take place on the same scale as it had for the groups mentioned above.³⁷²

3.2.2. Members of opposition parties and critics of the authorities

3.2.2.1. Expressing criticism

Several factors, especially when combined, could lead to problems with the authorities. Criticism of the authorities combined with membership of or sympathy for an opposition party or group could together pose a risk of negative attention from the authorities. This risk was further amplified for those who had the capacity to mobilise people in the process, as in the case of journalists and social media influencers.³⁷³ Finally, ethnicity could also be an amplifying factor (see also 3.2.1.2).

In early December 2023, large numbers of young people and teachers were arrested and detained in anticipation of a banned anti-war demonstration. They were accused

³⁶³ OLA, *Statement regarding peace talks*, 17 May 2023.

³⁶⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Opposition accuses Ethiopian army of killing over 20 villagers in Oromia*, 19 October 2023.

³⁶⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Government forces accused of torching over 40 homes in Oromia*, 10 October 2023.

³⁶⁶ Confidential source, 24 November 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³⁶⁷ Confidential source, 24 November 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³⁶⁸ Makeda Saba, *One year since the Pretoria Ceasefire – where are we?*, 31 October 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

³⁶⁹ Confidential source, 24 November 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³⁷⁰ Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

³⁷¹ Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³⁷² Confidential source, 24 November 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³⁷³ Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

of being members of the OLA and Fano, and of planning terrorist activities.³⁷⁴ According to an article in a local newspaper, some of them had been accused of taking down the flags of Ethiopia and Oromia in schools.³⁷⁵ Some of the organisers of the demonstration, including opposition politicians and activists from different ethnic backgrounds, were also arrested.³⁷⁶

Members of the PP were also not exempt from problems with the authorities if they were critical. For example, a previously very pro-Abiy deputy minister was discharged from the cabinet in December 2023 and arrested on suspicion of links to rebel groups. The arrest took place after the deputy minister had posted some critical messages on social media, including condemning the ban on the anti-war demonstration mentioned above.³⁷⁷

According to a confidential source, critical academic work with a small audience did not necessarily cause problems. If it was picked up by journalists or politicians, however, this could still be the case over time.³⁷⁸

According to a confidential source, in some instances members and sympathisers of the armed groups used membership of a political party or a company as a cover for their activities for an armed group.³⁷⁹

3.2.2.2. Terrorist organisations

After the removal of the TPLF in March 2023, the OLA was the only group left on the Ethiopian list of terrorist organisations.³⁸⁰ In addition, individuals in a personal capacity could be prosecuted for terrorism. For example, during the reporting period, the journalist Gobeze Sisay was arrested in Djibouti and extradited to Ethiopia to be prosecuted for terrorism.³⁸¹

3.2.2.3. Members and sympathisers of armed groups

As stated above, the OLA was still classified as a terrorist organisation during the reporting period, and fighters could thus be prosecuted for terrorism. In practice, members and sympathisers of armed groups (such as the OLA and the Amharic militias) were at risk of arbitrary detention and extrajudicial executions (see also 1.3.1). The OLA regularly attacked police stations and prisons in Oromia to free detained members and obtain weapons.³⁸² The same was true for the Amharic

³⁷⁴ Borkena, *Massive Crackdown in Addis Ababa Ahead of Planned Demonstration*, 6 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia foils 'terror acts' in capital, arrests 97 suspects*, 7 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian police arrest organisers of planned protest*, 10 December 2023; Borkena, *Addis Ababa police say it has arrested 97 students, teachers*, 8 December 2023.

³⁷⁵ Borkena, *Addis Ababa police say it has arrested 97 students, teachers*, 8 December 2023.

³⁷⁶ Borkena, *Massive Crackdown in Addis Ababa Ahead of Planned Demonstration*, 6 December 2023; Borkena, *Ethiopian Government Detains Anti-War Protest Organizers in Addis Ababa*, 7 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian police arrest organisers of planned protest*, 10 December 2023.

³⁷⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian minister chides government over protest ban*, 10 December 2023; Reuters, *Ethiopia peace minister critical of PM Abiy held for suspected coup plot*, 12 December 2023; ABC News, *Ethiopia arrests former peace minister over alleged links to an outlawed rebel group*, 13 December 2023; APA News, *Ethiopia's former State Minister for Peace arrested*, 13 December 2023.

³⁷⁸ Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

³⁷⁹ Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³⁸⁰ France 24, *Ethiopia's parliament removes Tigray rebel party from terror list*, 22 March 2023; Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia removes 'terrorist' tag from Tigray regional party*, 22 March 2023; AfricaNews, *Ethiopia: new government-OLA talks end without agreement, armed Oromo group*, 22 November 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

³⁸¹ Committee to Protect Journalists, *Journalist Gobeze Sisay facing terrorism investigation in Ethiopia after arrest in Djibouti*, 12 May 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

³⁸² Addis Standard, *News: Intense fighting between OLA, gov't forces in several parts of Oromia kills civilians, cast shadow on peace talks*, 18 May 2023; BBC News, *Ethiopia's PM sees OLA rebellion grow in his own backyard*, 18 December 2023; The Reporter, *Oromia's peace remains distant gunshot*, 3 June 2023; The New Humanitarian, *As violence subsides in Tigray, Ethiopia's Oromia conflict flares*, 12 January 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia reportedly arrests officials over rebel jail raid*, 14 December 2023.

militias.³⁸³ For example, on 23 November 2023, Amharic militias freed hundreds of prisoners from a prison in the North Wollo Zone in the Amhara region.³⁸⁴

In Addis Ababa, the authorities were particularly looking for individuals who were mobilising financial or logistical support for the armed groups or who were gathering information for them. These could be members of political parties, as well as businesspeople or other groups.³⁸⁵ According to a confidential source, mass arrests were used to filter out these individuals.³⁸⁶

For information on the organisation and hierarchy of the OLA, see 1.3.4.2.

3.2.2.4. Members and sympathisers of political parties

Members and sympathisers of political opposition parties — including the OLF, the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), Ezema, and the National Movement of Amhara (NaMA) — had no reason, in that capacity, to anticipate problems with the federal authorities.³⁸⁷ Leaders of the OLF who had been arrested prior to the reporting period remained in detention, however, despite the fact that the court had ruled that they should be released.³⁸⁸ Although the TPLF was no longer considered a terrorist organisation, the Ethiopian Election Board rejected the application for it to be recognised as a political party again (see also 1.1.3.3).³⁸⁹ During the reporting period, however, there were no reports that members or sympathisers of the TPLF were experiencing problems since the signing of the ceasefire agreement.³⁹⁰

More than twenty SFP leaders were arrested in the Sidama region during the reporting period. Shortly before, the party had accused the PP-dominated regional government of mismanagement and corruption. The party had also accused the regional government of setting up an armed group known as Sidama's Freedom Army (SFA) with the aim of suppressing the opposition. According to the party, the arrests had been made without a warrant, but authorities denied this.³⁹¹

According to confidential sources, most parties had been neutralised by co-optation and infiltration by the dominant PP. The more radical leaders were regularly arrested.³⁹² A critical MP for the NaMA, Christian Tadele, was arrested and mistreated immediately after the state of emergency was declared in August 2023. Although in legal terms, this required first lifting his parliamentary immunity, this did not happen.³⁹³ He was detained at the Awash military camp in Afar.³⁹⁴ A critical

³⁸³ Borkena, *Ethiopia Woldia : Fano Rebels Attack Prison, Freeing Over 600 Inmates*, 24 November 2023; ADF, *Fano Attacks Threaten Return to War in Ethiopia*, 10 October 2023; Ethiopia Observer, *Heavy fighting, civilian casualties in Gondar*, 25 September 2023.

³⁸⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Hundreds escape prison amid clashes in Ethiopia's Amhara*, 25 November 2023; Borkena, *Ethiopia Woldia : Fano Rebels Attack Prison, Freeing Over 600 Inmates*, 24 November 2023.

³⁸⁵ Confidential source, 28 November 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

³⁸⁶ Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³⁸⁷ Confidential source, 28 November 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

³⁸⁸ Oromia Global Forum, *Open Letter - Call to the Ethiopian Government and International Community*, 20 April 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

³⁸⁹ Addis Standard, *News: Election board declines new requests for TPLF as regional party*, 13 June 2023; EEPA, *Situation Report Horn No. 457, 26 June 2023*; Addis Standard, *ASDailyScoop: Court upholds NEBE ruling declining request to establish TPLF as new regional party, 7 August 2023*; Confidential source, 13 June 2023.

³⁹⁰ Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

³⁹¹ Addis Standard, *News: Sidama Federalist Party accuses regional government of unlawful arrests, calls for release of detained members*, 4 October 2023; Addis Standard, *News: Sidama regional government counters SFP allegations, accuses party of spreading discord*, 5 October 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

³⁹² Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

³⁹³ Borkena, *Ethiopian Police reportedly beat, arrest member of parliament*, 4 August 2023; Addis Insight, *Where Is Christian Tadele? MP Arrested Under Emergency Declaration Not Found in Custody*, 21 August 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

³⁹⁴ Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

councillor from Addis Ababa — from the PP, but of Amharic origin — was also arrested and detained in Awash.³⁹⁵

3.2.2.5. Journalists and human rights defenders

During the reporting period, Ethiopian federal and regional authorities regularly arrested and mistreated journalists and human rights defenders. This was particularly the case for Amharic journalists and human rights defenders, but they were not the only people to be targeted.³⁹⁶ According to a human rights organisation, they were often wiretapped, and the information that was illegally obtained in the process was used to prosecute them criminally.³⁹⁷ According to confidential sources, the risk lay more in the critical statements that journalists and human rights defenders had made about the conflict in Amhara, combined with their ability to reach people, rather than their ethnic background.³⁹⁸ Under the state of emergency, arrests no longer required a warrant, nor was it mandatory for detainees to be brought before a court within 48 hours (see also 1.1.7.2). According to a November 2023 BBC article, four journalists working for state media had fled Ethiopia.³⁹⁹

In September 2023, in Mekelle, Tigray, three journalists from two different media outlets were mistreated and arrested by Tigrayan security forces as they reported on a banned opposition demonstration.⁴⁰⁰

3.2.2.6. Relatives

According to confidential sources, both security forces and the armed groups used threats, detention and, in some cases, the killing of family members as means to pressure individuals suspected of collaborating with the other side. They included women who reported being victims of sexual violence in the process.⁴⁰¹ According to an article in the local press, relatives of politicians and journalists who were abroad were also victims of arrests. In one case, the nephew of a journalist who was in the United States was arrested by the authorities.⁴⁰² The nephew was ill and needed medical care, but did not receive it.⁴⁰³ In particular, the OLA was also accused of threatening relatives of individuals who were suspected of collaborating with the authorities.⁴⁰⁴

3.2.2.7. Political prisoners

It was difficult to determine how many political prisoners there were during the reporting period. This was because not all sources agreed on who should be

³⁹⁵ Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

³⁹⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia rights group accuses government of eavesdropping*, 10 December 2023; Eastern Africa Editors Organisation, *Media Freedom Violations escalate in Ethiopia as 11 journalists are detained*, 22 August 2023; Committee to protect Journalists, *At least 8 journalists detained amid renewed unrest in Ethiopia*, 14 April 2023; Committee to Protect Journalists, *Ethiopian authorities detain Alpha Media founder Bekalu Alamrew*, 10 August 2023; Committee to protect Journalists, *Three more journalists arrested under Ethiopia's state of emergency*, 6 September 2023; Committee to Protect Journalists, *Three Ethiopian journalists beaten and detained while covering protest in Tigray*, 21 September 2023; Committee to Protect Journalists, *Three journalists detained in Ethiopia, transferred to military camp*, 5 October 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

³⁹⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia rights group accuses government of eavesdropping*, 10 December 2023.

³⁹⁸ Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023

³⁹⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian journalists 'flee' country*, 7 November 2023.

⁴⁰⁰ Committee to Protect Journalists, *Three Ethiopian journalists beaten and detained while covering protest in Tigray*, 21 September 2023.

⁴⁰¹ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 9; Oromia Legacy Leadership and Advocacy Association, *Human Rights Violations: The Case of East Arsi Zone*, 20 October 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

⁴⁰² Borkena, *Ethiopian Diasporas complain of arrests of family members at home*, 17 August 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁴⁰³ Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁴⁰⁴ Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

regarded as political prisoners. In any case, during the reporting period, seven leaders of the OLF remained imprisoned, despite the fact that the court had ruled that they should be released.⁴⁰⁵ According to a confidential source, at least ten Oromo leaders were imprisoned.⁴⁰⁶ In September 2023, 54 cases of journalists and politicians were before the Ethiopian court, according to a confidential source. At least twelve journalists and social media influencers were detained in military camps.⁴⁰⁷ According to another source, it was also unclear whether all those arrested during the first weeks after the state of emergency was declared — especially Amhara — had been released.⁴⁰⁸

In November 2023, the Amhara Association of America reported on the arrest of two lawyers: Talema Gizachew and Addisu Getaneh. According to this organisation, the two lawyers had been assisting political prisoners.⁴⁰⁹

Several SFP leaders were arrested in Sidama in late 2023 (see also 3.2.2.4).⁴¹⁰ At the end of the reporting period, they were still in detention.⁴¹¹

3.2.3. Women

3.2.3.1. The position of women

For a detailed description of the position of women, see the November 2022 General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia.⁴¹² This position has not changed substantially. During the reporting period, however, gender-based violence (GBV) and child marriages increased, according to confidential sources, due to conflict, drought and floods.⁴¹³ Additional information on the prevalence of and protection from female genital mutilation (FGM) is provided in 3.2.3.2. There were also high levels of conflict-related sexual violence. Additional information on this is provided in 1.3.3.1.

3.2.3.2. FGM

⁴⁰⁵ Oromia Global Forum, *Open Letter - Call to the Ethiopian Government and International Community*, 20 April 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

⁴⁰⁶ Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁴⁰⁷ Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁴⁰⁸ Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

⁴⁰⁹ Amhara Association of America, *Report: Continued Arrests of Amhara Journalists and Rights Lawyers in Ethiopia - November 2023*, 19 November 2023.

⁴¹⁰ Addis Standard, *News: Sidama Federalist Party accuses regional government of unlawful arrests, calls for release of detained members*, 4 October 2023; Addis Standard, *News: Sidama regional government counters SFP allegations, accuses party of spreading discord*, 5 October 2023; Confidential source, 28 November 2023.

⁴¹¹ Confidential source, 19 December 2023.

⁴¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia, November 2022, pp. 75-77.

⁴¹³ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

There are social and regional differences in attitudes towards FGM (see Figure 16).⁴¹⁴ No new figures on FGM were released during the reporting period. According to figures from the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), nationwide, 79% of all women and 87% of all men who knew about FGM believed that the practice should be stopped.⁴¹⁵ For Tigray, 89% of all interviewed women and men between the ages of 15 and 49 years who knew what FGM was, believed that FGM should be stopped. In Addis Ababa, this figure was 93%. In contrast, in Afar and Somali, where FGM rates were highest in the country, the rates were 31% and 48%, respectively. For example, education level also influenced opinions on whether FGM should be stopped. In 2016, 70% of women without any education said FGM should be stopped, while 99% of women with more than secondary education held this view.⁴¹⁶

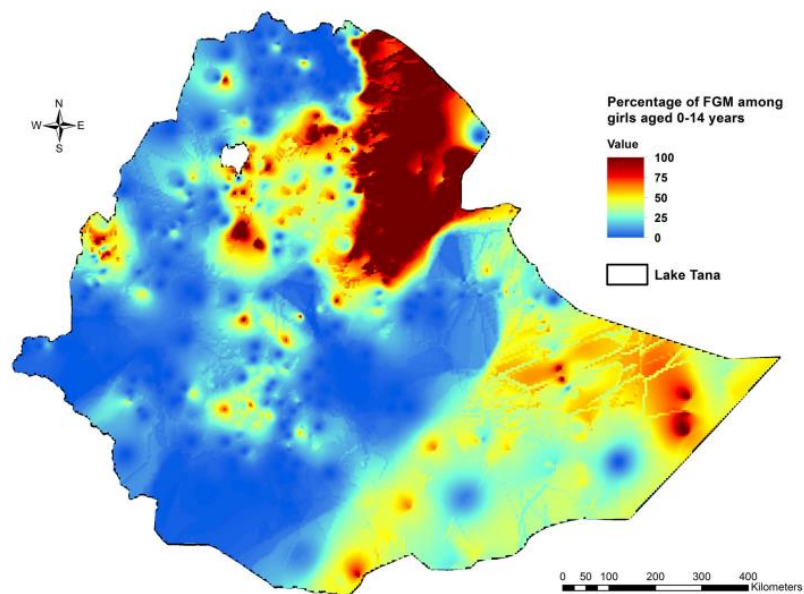


Figure 16: Prevalence of FGM amongst girls up to fourteen years old, based on data from 2016. Source: BMC Public Health, *Hotspots of female genital mutilation/cutting and associated factors among girls in Ethiopia: A spatial and multilevel analysis*, 2021.

According to confidential sources, conflict, drought and floods had increased GBV and child marriages, giving reason to believe that FGM had increased as well.⁴¹⁷

3.2.3.3. Legal and policy framework

FGM was prohibited by law. Clitoridectomy was punishable by three months' imprisonment or a fine. Infibulation, the most extreme and dangerous form of FGM, carried a prison sentence of five to ten years.⁴¹⁸

Although the law protected individuals who reported FGM, few reports were made, including during the reporting period. This was largely due to social pressure from religious and traditional leaders. For example, communities that needed to be

⁴¹⁴ Confidential source, 1 June 2022; Confidential source, 3 June 2022.

⁴¹⁵ Central Statistical Agency, *Demographic and Health Survey 2016*, July 2017, p. 319.

⁴¹⁶ Central Statistical Agency, *Demographic and Health Survey 2016*, July 2017, p. 327.

⁴¹⁷ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁴¹⁸ US Department of State, *Annual Report on Human Rights Practices Ethiopia*, 2023, p. 38.

mobilised against FGM were much harder to reach.⁴¹⁹ The closure of schools due to the deteriorating security situation also created a less safe environment for girls. In the government's roadmap, the school was a place where a safe environment could be created for girls and where they could report the risk of FGM.⁴²⁰

The Ethiopian government's National Costed Roadmap aims to end FGM in Ethiopia by 2025. This plan was developed in 2019 by the then Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, in collaboration with interested organisations (such as UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women).⁴²¹ Focal points of the plan included strengthening community involvement (including religious and traditional leaders) to promote more social action aimed at supporting and protecting girls from FGM and bringing about shifts in social expectations with regard to the elimination of FGM. Through training and dialogue, religious and traditional leaders were prepared to speak out against FGM and commit to ending the practice. The plan also aimed to strengthen law enforcement with efforts to raise legal awareness and prosecute those who broke the law on FGM.⁴²²

According to a confidential source, the perception from the previous Country of Origin Information Report remained that the Ethiopian government was striving to end FGM and was making efforts to do so at the national level. Because of the dynamics in the country, however, fighting FGM was not the government's highest priority.⁴²³

3.2.3.4. Protective practice

Breaking established social norms can be controversial. The consequences for parents who resist circumcising their daughters, and for the daughters themselves, depend on the attitudes of the immediate family and community. For example, parents could fear being ostracised by society or not being able to find marriage partners for their daughters.⁴²⁴ In general, girls undergo FGM at a very young age. In almost half of the cases, FGM took place before the girl reached the age of five, but there were differences between population groups: in Amhara, the rate was 92%, in Afar 89.5%, and in Benishangul-Gumuz 76.5%. In the regions of Oromia, SNNP and Somali, FGM also occurred at older ages. About 6% of girls in Ethiopia were older than fifteen years of age when they underwent FGM.⁴²⁵ A confidential source pointed out that this made it virtually impossible for victims to seek protection from it independently.⁴²⁶

Information on the reception of unaccompanied minors is provided in 3.2.4.5.

3.2.4. Minors (including unaccompanied minors)

3.2.4.1. Age of majority

⁴¹⁹ Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁴²⁰ EUAA, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Ethiopia*, May 2022, p. 34; UNICEF, *The UNICEF Approach to the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation*, November 2020, p. 5; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁴²¹ UNICEF, UNFPA and UNICEF in Ethiopia call for renewed commitment to end female genital mutilation in Ethiopia, February 2022, p. 3.

⁴²² UNICEF, *A Profile of Female Genital Mutilation in Ethiopia*, February 2020, p. 20; UNFPA-UNICEF, *Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change, Technical Guidance A Comprehensive Approach to Accelerating the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation*, September 2021, pp. 70, 75.

⁴²³ Confidential source, 2 June 2022; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁴²⁴ Landinfo, *Ethiopia - Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)*, 22 June 2021, p. 23; UNICEF, [Female genital mutilation | UNICEF](#), consulted on 13 November 2023.

⁴²⁵ EUAA, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Ethiopia*, May 2022, p. 23.

⁴²⁶ Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

In principle, people in Ethiopia attain majority at the age of eighteen years.⁴²⁷ According to a confidential source, there were a few exceptions to this. People are allowed to work starting at the age of fourteen years. From the age of nine years, a minor is criminally responsible, and people are tried as adults starting at fifteen years of age. Legally, people are allowed to marry from the age of eighteen years, but the court may grant exception from the age of sixteen. Minors who marry automatically become legally competent.⁴²⁸

3.2.4.2. Compulsory education

Primary school for children aged seven to fourteen years is free and compulsory in Ethiopia.⁴²⁹ According to information from UNICEF, 87.7% of all children in Ethiopia were enrolled in the 2021–2022 school year.⁴³⁰ According to a confidential source, records were kept of how many children dropped out of school, and parents were contacted by the school in those cases, but it was not clear how many children never started school.⁴³¹

3.2.4.3. ID and travel documents for minors

Ethiopia still did not have a functional, national civil registry during the reporting period. Kebeles issued ID cards to individuals aged eighteen years and older. Minors were thus not eligible for this.⁴³² They were eligible for the digital national ID card, although the application for this had to be made by a parent, caretaker or guardian.⁴³³ In addition, minors always needed the consent of a parent or guardian to apply for passports and travel abroad.⁴³⁴

According to confidential sources, if minors travelled abroad unaccompanied, permission had to be obtained from the ICS, formerly known as the Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency (INVEA).⁴³⁵

3.2.4.4. Legal authority over minors

Ethiopia has a family law.⁴³⁶ Each region has its own version of this law.⁴³⁷ Under the Federal Family Act, minor children are under the joint custody of their parents. In case of death, absence, disability or 'unworthiness' on the part of either parent, custody falls to the other parent. In a divorce, it is up to the parents to agree on who will take care of the child. Should the parents fail to reach a settlement in this regard, the court handling the divorce will also determine to whom the child or children are to belong. If one of the parents dies, the remaining parent may determine through a will who will have custody of the child upon that parent's death. This right exists only if the remaining parent also exercised parental authority over the child during the lifetime of the deceased parent.⁴³⁸

Ethiopian law favours care by family and relatives over institutionalised care.⁴³⁹ If a child no longer has parents, and if no custodian has been appointed by the parents,

⁴²⁷ *Ethiopia Civil Code*, Article 198; Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁴²⁸ Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁴²⁹ Nuffic, [Primary and secondary education - Ethiopia | Nuffic](#), consulted on 21 October 2023.

⁴³⁰ UNICEF, [Learning and development! | UNICEF Ethiopia](#), consulted on 21 October 2022.

⁴³¹ Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁴³² World Bank, *ID4D Country Diagnostic: Ethiopia*, 2016, p. 7.

⁴³³ [Digital ID proclamation 1284.pdf - Google Drive](#), consulted on 21 October 2023, Article 10.

⁴³⁴ Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

⁴³⁵ Confidential source, 24 November 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

⁴³⁶ Federal Negarit Gazetta Extra Ordinary Issue No. 1/2000, *The Revised Family Code Proclamation No. 213/2000*, 4 July 2000.

⁴³⁷ Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁴³⁸ Federal Negarit Gazetta Extra Ordinary Issue No. 1/2000, *The Revised Family Code Proclamation No. 213/2000*, 4 July 2000, Articles 219–223.

⁴³⁹ Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

the law specifies that custody is to be transferred to the grandparents. In the absence of grandparents, custody falls to adult siblings or, in their absence, to an uncle or aunt.⁴⁴⁰ Individuals who have a blood or affective relationship with a child may claim custody of that child. Such requests should be addressed to the individuals mentioned above. If the parties do not agree, the court makes a ruling. The request must be filed within two months from the time the family member designated by law formally took over custody from the parents. According to the law, the foregoing is determined based on the best interests of the child.⁴⁴¹ If, after applying the above, the minor still remains without a guardian, the court may appoint a guardian. In such a case, the court will transfer custody to a more distant relative, if possible, although it is also possible to transfer custody to an auxiliary agency.⁴⁴² The law provides for cases where the designated individuals are unable to assume custody of the minor. In that case, it is assumed for legal purposes that these individuals do not exist.⁴⁴³

3.2.4.5. Accommodations for unaccompanied minors

In practice, the care of children who had lost their parents was generally assumed by relatives or other close contacts, without any court involvement. Guardianship cases usually did not come before the courts unless there has been a disagreement concerning who should or could take care of the child.⁴⁴⁴

Reception by the state

The Ethiopian state had shelters for unaccompanied children, but confidential sources said that they lacked capacity, and conditions were said to be far from optimal.⁴⁴⁵ Access to education was minimal, as it required a birth certificate. Other services (such as healthcare and psychological care) were available only if offered by private entities. The offer of psychological help was very limited across the country, however, despite the enormous need amongst both adults and minors, due to drought and conflict.⁴⁴⁶

Supervision

The policy on the reception of unaccompanied minors in Ethiopia, including returnees, was the responsibility of the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs.⁴⁴⁷ Guidelines for alternative (long-term) shelter⁴⁴⁸ have existed since 2009. According to a confidential source, however, the legal framework was weak, and the government did not have sufficient capacity to enforce the guidelines. There was no case management system for unaccompanied minors.⁴⁴⁹ Shelter quality was generally a larger issue than shelter capacity, although the shelters in urban areas were often full.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁰ Federal Negarit Gazette Extra Ordinary Issue No. 1/2000, *The Revised Family Code Proclamation No. 213/2000*, 4 July 2000, Article 225.

⁴⁴¹ Federal Negarit Gazette Extra Ordinary Issue No. 1/2000, *The Revised Family Code Proclamation No. 213/2000*, 4 July 2000, Article 226.

⁴⁴² Federal Negarit Gazette Extra Ordinary Issue No. 1/2000, *The Revised Family Code Proclamation No. 213/2000*, 4 July 2000, Articles 227-229.

⁴⁴³ Federal Negarit Gazette Extra Ordinary Issue No. 1/2000, *The Revised Family Code Proclamation No. 213/2000*, 4 July 2000, Article 230.

⁴⁴⁴ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁴⁴⁵ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

⁴⁴⁶ Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁴⁴⁷ Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

⁴⁴⁸ [Alternative Childcare Guidelines on Community-Based Childcare, Reunification and Reintegration Program, Foster Care, Adoption and Institutional Care Service | Save the Children's Resource Centre](#), 2009.

⁴⁴⁹ Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁴⁵⁰ Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

A confidential source stated that, given the political context, it could not be ruled out that the supply and quality of reception was influenced by ethnic profiling by public or private shelters, but there was no evidence of this.⁴⁵¹

Short-term reception

Almost all reception services were short-term and intended only to reconnect unaccompanied minors with family. In many cases, however, the capacity for that was also insufficient.⁴⁵²

Ethiopia received large numbers of returnees from the Middle East. For returnees, there were transit houses near national borders, where they could stay for a maximum of a few weeks. These centres were not set up for gender-specific reception or the reception of unaccompanied minors. Regional authorities that were responsible for this reception often complained about a lack of resources.⁴⁵³ According to a confidential source, minors, if they accepted this help, received the same assistance as adults: help in obtaining documents, tracing relatives and a financial contribution for the bus trip home. There were hardly any additional reception services.⁴⁵⁴

Private shelters

In addition to government orphanages and transit centres, there were also private shelters.⁴⁵⁵ Again, these were generally short-term reception services.⁴⁵⁶ There were several 'drop-in centres' in Addis Ababa, provided by NGOs, where homeless young people could go during the day for food, showers and information. Family tracing services were also offered there.⁴⁵⁷ According to a confidential source, however, there was insufficient capacity to help all minors find family members.⁴⁵⁸

Many unaccompanied minors ended up on the streets.⁴⁵⁹ In an undated briefing, UNICEF states that there were about 10,500 homeless children in Addis Ababa in 2018, according to the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs.⁴⁶⁰ According to a 2020 study, the numbers then stood at 150 thousand homeless (and perhaps many times more) across Ethiopia, including at least 60 thousand in Addis Ababa.⁴⁶¹ According to Tigrayan authorities, some 30 thousand minors had become separated from their families during the conflict. Of these, 15 thousand were in the regional capital Mekelle.⁴⁶²

Alternative reception

According to two confidential sources, the Bright Star private reception facility was the only one offering alternative long-term accommodations for young male and female returnees up to 25 years of age. In addition to returnees, this organisation also provided services to other young people at risk of exploitation, including street

⁴⁵¹ Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁴⁵² Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

⁴⁵³ Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁴⁵⁴ Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁴⁵⁵ Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁴⁵⁶ Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁴⁵⁷ Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

⁴⁵⁸ Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁴⁵⁹ Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁴⁶⁰ UNICEF, *Situation and access to services of homeless children and adults in Addis Ababa*, undated, p. 2.

⁴⁶¹ Ayenew, M., Kabeta, T. & Woldemichael, K., *Prevalence and factors associated with substance use among street children in Jimma town, Oromiya national regional state, Ethiopia: a community based cross-sectional study* in Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, Policy 15, 61 (2020), p. 1.

⁴⁶² BBC Monitoring, *Over 30,000 children in Ethiopia's Tigray separated from families*, 21 October 2023.

children and former sex workers.⁴⁶³ According to a confidential source, Bright Star did not provide services to young people with physical or mental disabilities.⁴⁶⁴

Bright Star offered shelter for up to about six months, although it could be longer as circumstances demanded. For example, this was the case for youth coming from Tigray who had not been able to return, due to the security situation in that region.⁴⁶⁵ From the age of sixteen years, the youth staying with Bright Star were prepared to live independently. The moment a young person left care depended on the extent to which they showed independence and had received training. Youth leaving the shelter did not do so alone, but in groups.⁴⁶⁶

Quality

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) worked with Bright Star, which means that Bright Star met the IOM's minimum requirements for reception.⁴⁶⁷

Bright Star offered some professional training. For example, young people could be trained as hairstylists or tailors. In addition, minors were provided with clothing, and there was access to medical and psychological help, including services specifically for former sex workers.⁴⁶⁸

Capacity

During the reporting period, Bright Star had five houses: three for young men and two for young women. These houses together provided 160 places, consisting of rooms with two to six people to a room. There were extra mattresses for short-term emergency shelter. A new building with slightly less capacity was under construction. This building was said to have rooms for two to eight people, a communal kitchen, and space for the young people's small businesses (such as tailoring, clothing stores and childcare). The intention was to dispose of at least some of the other properties — which were rented — once the new building was completed.⁴⁶⁹

Reception of returnees by Bright Star

Bright Star had hosted a minor returnee from Sweden once in the past. This boy had returned voluntarily.⁴⁷⁰ In order to provide accommodations for more young returnees (voluntary or forced), additional resources would need to be made available.⁴⁷¹ According to a confidential source, it could not be guaranteed that the capacity to provide additional services could actually be realised, even if additional funding was available.⁴⁷²

3.2.5. LGBTIQ+

The Ethiopian Penal Code states that sexual activity between persons of the same sex, both male and female, is punishable by law. This carries a prison sentence of one to fifteen years, depending on whether there was an abuse of power or

⁴⁶³ Bright Star Website, <https://brightstarethiopia.org/>, consulted on 25 October 2023; Confidential source, September 2023.

⁴⁶⁴ Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

⁴⁶⁵ Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

⁴⁶⁶ Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

⁴⁶⁷ IOM, [Standards of assistance and minimum requirements | Migrant Resource and Response Mechanisms \(iom.int\)](https://www.iom.int/publications/standards-of-assistance-and-minimum-requirements-migrant-resource-and-response-mechanisms), consulted on 13 November 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁴⁶⁸ Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2023; Confidential source, September 2023.

⁴⁶⁹ Confidential source, 22 September 2023; Confidential source, September 2023.

⁴⁷⁰ Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

⁴⁷¹ Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

⁴⁷² Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

violence, and whether the accused had made a profession of such activity.⁴⁷³ For more comprehensive information on the legal and social context for the LGBTIQ+ community, see the November 2022 General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia.⁴⁷⁴

During the reporting period, there was an increase in hate speech towards the LGBTIQ+ community, with calls to kill and mistreat community members, according to the International Commission on Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia. According to the Commission, MPs, government representatives, opposition politicians, media and diaspora groups were guilty of this.⁴⁷⁵ No reports were found on the trial of members of the LGBTIQ+ community during the reporting period.⁴⁷⁶ According to members of the community themselves, prosecution for homosexual acts was complicated, as suspects had to be caught in the act. For this reason, they were more likely to be prosecuted for cases such as drug possession or rape.⁴⁷⁷ Furthermore, there was an increase in both physical and online harassment, due to TikTok's failure to remove inflammatory videos. Those videos called for gay and transgender people to be whipped, stabbed and killed.⁴⁷⁸ The authorities offered no protection against this.⁴⁷⁹ In August 2023, the Addis Ababa police appealed to the public to report individuals with links to the LGBTIQ+ community, recalling that 'homosexuality was forbidden'.⁴⁸⁰

3.3. Compliance and violations of various liberties

3.3.1. Compliance with liberties

As in previous years, Freedom House classified Ethiopia as 'not free' in 2022. According to the organisation, Ethiopia lacked many elements of the rule of law that should protect citizens.⁴⁸¹ According to several sources, compliance with civil liberties has worsened rather than improved since the ceasefire agreement.⁴⁸² Government agencies monitored certain individuals, such as politicians and journalists, through wiretaps and observation of social (and other) media.⁴⁸³ According to the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, the Ethiopian authorities had Israeli wiretapping equipment from the Cellebrite company, which has allowed them to access the phones of prisoners since 2021.⁴⁸⁴

In 2023, Freedom House added Ethiopia to the list of countries where the government intentionally tried to change the ethnic composition, with the aim of either destroying a culture or breaking political relations.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁷³ Proclamation No.414/2004 *The Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, [The Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2004 \(wipo.int\)](#), Articles 629, 630, 106.

⁴⁷⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia, November 2022, pp. 81-83.

⁴⁷⁵ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁷⁶ Reuters, *Ethiopia cracks down on gay sex in hotels, other venues*, 10 August 2023; Voice of America, *Ethiopia Cracks Down on 'Homosexual Acts' in Capital*, 11 August 2023.

⁴⁷⁷ Confidential source, 19 January 2024.

⁴⁷⁸ The Independent, *LGBTQ+ people in Ethiopia blame attacks on their community on inciteful and lingering TikTok videos*, 11 August 2023.

⁴⁷⁹ Confidential source, 19 January 2024.

⁴⁸⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Addis Ababa police warn against homosexuality in Ethiopian capital*, 5 August 2023.

⁴⁸¹ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World. Country report Ethiopia*, March 2023.

⁴⁸² Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

⁴⁸³ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World. Country report Ethiopia*, March 2023; Confidential source, 24 March 2023.

⁴⁸⁴ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World. Country report Ethiopia*, March 2023; *Haaretz*, *Ethiopia obtains Phone-Hacking Tech*, 18 December 2022.

⁴⁸⁵ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World*, March 2023, p. 7.

3.3.1.1. Freedom of the press and freedom of expression

The Ethiopian constitution provides for freedom of the press and freedom of expression. In practice, however, these liberties were restricted. The state media had to adhere to the ruling-party line.⁴⁸⁶ Most private media were established with the aim of serving the interests of a specific ethnic or political group. As a result, according to Reporters Without Borders, the media landscape was polarised and based more on opinions than reporting and facts.⁴⁸⁷

As described in 3.2.2.5, various Ethiopian journalists were arrested and prosecuted in 2023. Media companies were also victims of burglaries that were not investigated.⁴⁸⁸ In early 2023, fifteen foreign media in Ethiopia were said to have been suspended for allegedly operating without a licence.⁴⁸⁹

The Ethiopian authorities used deliberate restrictions on internet access.⁴⁹⁰ In April 2023, an international coalition of human rights organisations wrote an open letter to the Ethiopian authorities calling for an end to deliberate restrictions on internet and social media access in several regions. The letter called for the reversal of three active shutdowns of internet access that had taken place in 2023. It was not clear from the letter which shutdowns were indicated.⁴⁹¹

3.3.1.2. Freedom of religion

Ethiopia's constitution guarantees religious freedom, and groups of different faiths have lived together in the country for centuries.⁴⁹² As described in 3.2.1.1, ethnic fault lines in Ethiopian society led to an increase in religious fault lines during the reporting period.

3.4. Supervision and legal protection

3.4.1. Protection in the event of a crime

In practice, whether authorities provided protection in the event of a reported crime depended on several factors, as listed below.

3.4.1.1. Legal and procedural framework

Ethiopia has a Code of Criminal Procedure outlining the procedures and deadlines for reporting a crime.⁴⁹³ According to one source, only victims are allowed to report petty crimes.⁴⁹⁴ According to the law, the report of a crime should be forwarded to the police station's investigation team.⁴⁹⁵ The latter summons and interviews the

⁴⁸⁶ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World. Country report Ethiopia*, March 2023; US Department of State, *Ethiopia Human Rights Report 2022, 2023*, p. 19.

⁴⁸⁷ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World. Country report Ethiopia*, March 2023; Reporters Without Borders (RSF), *Ethiopia, Ethiopia | RSF*, consulted on 25 November 2023.

⁴⁸⁸ The Reporter, *Equipment stolen from Ethiopian media outlet in "suspected targeted" attack*, 17 July 2023; Committee to Protect Journalists, *CPJ calls for swift and credible investigation into burglary of Ethiopia Insider office*, 20 July 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁴⁸⁹ Reporters Without Borders (RSF), *Ethiopia, Ethiopia | RSF*, consulted on 25 November 2023.

⁴⁹⁰ US Department of State, *Ethiopia Human Rights Report 2022, 2023*, pp. 22-23; Access Now, *Open letter to the Ethiopian Government: urgently end ongoing internet shutdowns in all regions across the country*, 27 April 2023; Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

⁴⁹¹ Access Now, *Open letter to the Ethiopian Government: urgently end ongoing internet shutdowns in all regions across the country*, 27 April 2023.

⁴⁹² Freedom House, *Freedom in the World. Country report Ethiopia*, March 2023; US Department of State, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Ethiopia*, 2023.

⁴⁹³ *Criminal Procedure Code*, [Criminal Procedure Code \(English\).pdf \(policinglaw.info\)](#), consulted on 31 October 2023.

⁴⁹⁴ Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁴⁹⁵ *Criminal Procedure Code*, [Criminal Procedure Code \(English\).pdf \(policinglaw.info\)](#), consulted on 31 October 2023, Book II, Title 1, Chapter 2.

suspect, and identifies the crime, after which the investigation report is forwarded to the prosecutor, who formulates any charges and determines whether the case should go to trial. At that point, the case is assigned a number and entered into the national crime registry.⁴⁹⁶

3.4.1.2. Reporting in practice

According to several confidential sources, procedures were generally followed when crimes were reported, although there were instances in which deviations were made. Such exceptions could be due to the political nature of the case, to nepotism or personal interests of the police officers involved, or to lack of capacity. In some instances, individuals were pressured to drop their charges.⁴⁹⁷ In practice, according to a confidential source, the police did not investigate unless substantial attention was paid to the case or there was political pressure to do so. In a few cases, individuals who had filed reports were asked to provide evidence themselves.⁴⁹⁸ It also regularly occurred that suspects were not brought before a court within the legally prescribed 48 hours.⁴⁹⁹

The command post had been given far-reaching discretionary powers under the state of emergency in relation to the Amhara conflict. For example, the state was relieved of the obligation to bring suspects before a court within 48 hours (see also 1.1.7.2).⁵⁰⁰

3.4.1.3. Access to legal remedies

Crime suspects were entitled to legal representation.⁵⁰¹ In practice, the fundamental rights of detainees were not always guaranteed, especially if they had been arrested for acts relating to terrorism or within the context of a state of emergency. For example, they were not always informed of the reason for their arrest; they did not always have access to legal representation; they were not always given a timely medical examination; nor were they always given the opportunity to inform a family member of their arrest. The quantity and quality of legal assistance available was insufficient, and the police regularly refused to carry out instructions for the release of detainees.⁵⁰² An individual suspected of serious crime could be assigned a pro bono lawyer.⁵⁰³ According to a confidential source, however, people rarely trusted these lawyers, and they preferred to pool funds with family and friends to hire a lawyer.⁵⁰⁴

3.4.2. Capacity and willingness of authorities to provide protection

⁴⁹⁶ Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁴⁹⁷ Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁴⁹⁸ Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁴⁹⁹ Committee Against Torture, CAT/C/ETH/CO/2 *Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Ethiopia*, 7 June 2023, p. 4; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵⁰⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Command centre set up to coordinate security operation in Ethiopia's Amhara*, 4 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia admits losing areas in Amhara region to militia*, 6 August 2023; Ethiopian Monitor, *Council Declares State of Emergency in Amhara Region*, 4 August 2023; Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 4; Addis Standard, *News: Intelligence chief Temesgen Tiruneh to lead command post overseeing SoE in Amhara region, ministry of justice reveals further details*, 5 August 2023; Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Authorities must grant independent investigators, media unfettered access to Amhara region to probe violations under state of emergency*, 18 August 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵⁰¹ *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, [Refworld | Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia](https://www.refworld.org/docid/3a68621d.html), consulted on 31 October 2023, art. 20.5; *Criminal Procedure Code, Criminal Procedure Code (English).pdf (policinglaw.info)*, consulted on 31 October 2023, art. 61.

⁵⁰² Committee Against Torture, CAT/C/ETH/CO/2 *Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Ethiopia*, 7 June 2023, p. 4; Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵⁰³ Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵⁰⁴ Confidential source, 18 September 2023;

According to several sources, the authorities lacked both capacity and, in some cases, willingness to provide protection to the population against violence.⁵⁰⁵ Due to disappointment in the policies of the Abiy⁵⁰⁶ government, ethnic nationalism has increased since 2018, as has the ensuing violence (see also 1.3.4.1 and 3.2.1). Language used by representatives of the federal authorities were said to have led to feelings of insecurity. For example, in the past, generalising descriptions had been used that were considered offensive by Tigrayans, including *junta*, *woyane* and *agame*.⁵⁰⁷ During the reporting period, this treatment shifted to other ethnic groups. For example, Amhara were increasingly called *neftenga* or *jawisa* (bandits).⁵⁰⁸

3.4.2.1. Protection from violence by non-state actors

According to confidential sources, armed groups in the regions of Amhara (Fano), Oromia (OLA) and also Benishangul-Gumuz were guilty of most human rights violations (see also 1.3.3, 1.3.4, 1.3.5 and 1.3.6).⁵⁰⁹ The capacity of the authorities to protect the population and provide public services deteriorated.⁵¹⁰ According to a confidential source, the authorities shifted their priority from protecting the population to protecting themselves.⁵¹¹ This trend continued during the reporting period.⁵¹²

According to the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) (which is an NGO, and not to be confused with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission funded by the Ethiopian authorities), the high number of abductions in Oromia indicated that the Ethiopian authorities were unable to guarantee human rights and the security of the population, especially in Oromia.⁵¹³

The authorities also did not provide adequate protection to civilians against violence — and particularly sexual and gender-based violence — committed by the Eritrean army on Ethiopian territory. According to the International Commission of Human Rights Experts for Ethiopia, these violations sometimes took place at close range of the Ethiopian armed forces, without them intervening.⁵¹⁴

3.4.2.2. Protection from violations by state actors

Little verifiable information was available on the human rights situation in conflict zones. This was partly because the authorities restricted the access of journalists and human rights observers to those areas (see also 1.3.11.2). Access to the internet and social media was also sometimes deliberately restricted (see also 1.3). The lack of active accountability by the authorities contributed to the sense of impunity regarding human rights violations by security forces (see also 3.1.1.1).

⁵⁰⁵ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵⁰⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia, November 2022, pp. 9, 13, 90; Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵⁰⁷ Woyane means 'rebel'. Agame is an Eritrean swear word for poor Tigrayans who worked in Asmara as domestic help or day labourers for wealthier Eritreans.. Confidential source, 15 December 2023.

⁵⁰⁸ Borkena, *Amharas: The New Tutsi? State-Sponsored Genocide of the Amhara People*, 19 August 2023; Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 11.

⁵⁰⁹ Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

⁵¹⁰ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 2; Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁵¹¹ Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

⁵¹² Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

⁵¹³ Addis Standard, *News: Ethiopian Human Rights Council raises concern over alarming surge in abductions, attacks in Oromia region*, 2 November 2023.

⁵¹⁴ Human Rights Council, *A/HRC/54/55 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, p. 2.

4. Refugees and displaced persons

4.1. Displaced persons

4.1.1. Numbers

By the end of October 2023, nearly 4.4 million of some 119 million inhabitants in Ethiopia were displaced persons.⁵¹⁵ There were around 45 camps for displaced persons spread across the country.⁵¹⁶ According to a confidential source, however, most displaced persons were accommodated in host communities.⁵¹⁷

Most displaced persons were in the Somali region (1.32 million), the Oromia region (1.06 million) and the Tigray region (1.02 million). Displaced persons were also in the other regions: the Amhara region (436 thousand), the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' region (211 thousand), the Benishangul-Gumuz region (125 thousand), the Afar region (97 thousand), the Sidama region (48 thousand), the Gambella region (45 thousand) and the South West Ethiopia Peoples' region (13 thousand).⁵¹⁸

4.1.2. Causes

Displacement was caused primarily by conflict, including violence between population groups. Natural disasters (such as drought and floods) also caused displacement.⁵¹⁹ The conflict in Amhara had hardly any effect on the numbers of displaced persons.⁵²⁰ This was possibly due to the fact that the Amharic militias spared the Amharic people as much as possible (see also 1.3.5.2).⁵²¹

4.1.3. Access to services

Ethiopia did not grant legal status to displaced persons, who had no access to jobs or government services as a result. According to research, displaced persons faced security risks, intimidation by security forces and kidnappings, and they experienced shortages of food, shelter, healthcare, water and sanitation.⁵²² The large numbers of displaced persons and temporary settlements of IDPs, as well as the destruction of infrastructure, made it difficult to protect IDPs and to find durable solutions in Tigray. Tensions also arose in some cases, both in Tigray and elsewhere, when

⁵¹⁵ UNHCR, *Ethiopia: Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons by Region as of 31 October 2023*; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵¹⁶ Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

⁵¹⁷ Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵¹⁸ UNHCR, *Ethiopia: Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons by Region as of 31 August 2023*.

⁵¹⁹ UNHCR, *Ethiopia – Response to Internal Displacement in Ethiopia, Second quarter 2023*, July 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁵²⁰ IOM, *Ethiopia Displacement Tracking Matrix 184*, 7-13 August 2023; IOM, *Ethiopia Displacement Tracking Matrix 185*, 14-20 August 2023; IOM, *Ethiopia Displacement Tracking Matrix 187*, 28 August-3 September 2023; IOM, *Ethiopia Displacement Tracking Matrix 188*, 4-10 September 2023; IOM, *Ethiopia Displacement Tracking Matrix 189*, 11-17 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵²¹ Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵²² Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, pp. 10-11; BBC Monitoring, *Over 1,000 IDPs in Ethiopia's Tigray Region die of food shortage*, 4 November 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 21 September 2023.

there was more humanitarian aid for displaced persons than for the host communities in which they were hosted.⁵²³

The situation further deteriorated during the reporting period for both displaced persons and host communities, with the cessation in June 2023 of food aid following the discovery of large-scale fraud (1.3.3.5).⁵²⁴ In November 2023, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission indicated that at least 1,329 displaced persons had died due to food shortages. Others (including children, the elderly, nursing mothers and people with disabilities) also faced extreme food shortages.⁵²⁵

4.2. Asylum seekers and refugees

4.2.1. Numbers

In late August 2023, Ethiopia had received more than 950 thousand asylum seekers and refugees, primarily from South Sudan (44%), Somalia (32%), Eritrea (18%) and Sudan (5%). They were mainly in the regions of Gambella (380 thousand), Somali (213 thousand), Benishangul-Gumuz (almost 80 thousand), Afar (58 thousand), Addis Ababa (76 thousand) and Amhara (22 thousand).⁵²⁶

4.2.2. Reception

From 2016 onward, Ethiopia's reception policy for asylum seekers and refugees shifted from reception in camps to reception in 'settlement sites'.⁵²⁷ During the reporting period, there were still 21 camps. Settlement sites were places where services for asylum seekers and refugees were more integrated with those of the surrounding communities. In these settlements, asylum seekers and refugees generally had more freedom of movement. During the reporting period, however, the influx was such that the Ethiopian federal government decided that refugees and asylum seekers should stay in camps and sites near their countries of origin. The aim was to prevent cities from becoming a pull factor.⁵²⁸ According to one source, the refugee camps in Tigray had not yet been restored during the reporting period.⁵²⁹

⁵²³ Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, pp. 10-11; UNHCR, *Ethiopia – Response to Internal Displacement in Ethiopia, Second quarter 2023*, July 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁵²⁴ UNHCR, *Ethiopia – Response to Internal Displacement in Ethiopia, Second quarter 2023*, July 2023; International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, pp. 15-16; Confidential source, 27 June 2023; Confidential source, 6 October 2023.

⁵²⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Over 1,000 IDPs in Ethiopia's Tigray Region die of food shortage*, 4 November 2023.

⁵²⁶ UNHCR, *Ethiopia, Refugees and Asylumseekers as of 31 October 2023*, November 2023.

⁵²⁷ Tadesse Kassa Woldetsadik (PhD), Fasil Mulatu, Jetu Edosa, *Ethiopia's refugee policy overhaul: implications on the Out of Camp regime and rights to residence, movement and engagement in gainful employment*, 2019, p. 1.

⁵²⁸ Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

⁵²⁹ Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

There was a severe shortage of funding for humanitarian aid in Ethiopia. In addition, food shortages arose due to the cessation of food aid by USAID and WFP (see also 1.3.2).⁵³⁰ The US resumed food aid to refugees in October 2023.⁵³¹

4.2.3. Registration

Registration and the issuance of documents to asylum seekers in Addis Ababa was stopped in 2021 because of COVID-19.⁵³² It was then further hampered by a lack of capacity at the Refugee and Return Service (RRS), as well as by the conflict in Tigray. Many files of asylum seekers and refugees in the camps in Tigray were destroyed.⁵³³ Without registration, and therefore without valid documents, asylum seekers and refugees in Addis Ababa had no access to government humanitarian aid or financial services. Many therefore purchased forged Ethiopian documents through corruption.⁵³⁴ For instance, Eritreans could buy Ethiopian identity cards from corrupt Ethiopian officers for prices ranging from nine hundred to four thousand US dollars.⁵³⁵

Staff changes and capacity problems at the RRS delayed the resumption of registrations.⁵³⁶ Registration was resumed in December 2023.⁵³⁷

4.2.4. Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees in Ethiopia

In August 2023, more than 167 thousand Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees were registered in Ethiopia.⁵³⁸ The majority were staying in northern Ethiopia, including in the Alemwach camp in Amhara (29 thousand); in the Aysaita, Barhale and Serdo camps in Afar (58 thousand); and in Shire in Tigray (10 thousand).⁵³⁹ More than 76 thousand refugees were registered in Addis Ababa at the same time, most of whom (73 thousand) were Eritreans. According to a confidential source, however, the Eritrean community in Addis Ababa, including non-registered individuals, comprised some 200 thousand people.⁵⁴⁰

4.2.4.1. The situation of Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees during the Tigray conflict

For a long time, Ethiopia was an important host country for Eritreans. Persons crossing the border were automatically granted asylum and were largely

⁵³⁰ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, p. 16; Confidential source, 27 June 2023; Confidential source, 6 October 2023.

⁵³¹ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), *A/HRC/54/CRP.3 Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations*, 13 October 2023, p. 43; BBC Monitoring, *USAID to resume food aid delivery to Ethiopia*, 15 November 2023; UN News, *WFP resumes 'vital' food distributions to refugees across Ethiopia*, 9 October 2023.

⁵³² Addis Standard, *News: Ethiopian rights commission says Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers subjected to arbitrary arrest in Addis Abeba*, 3 June 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022; Confidential source, 19 December 2023.

⁵³³ Confidential source, 22 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

⁵³⁴ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea A/HRC/53/20*, 1 May 2023, p. 13; Confidential source, 22 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

⁵³⁵ The New Humanitarian, *Sudan refugees struggle to exit to Ethiopia, while aid workers trying to enter are turned back*, 7 June 2023; Confidential source, 17 August 2023.

⁵³⁶ Addis Standard, *News: Ethiopian rights commission says Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers subjected to arbitrary arrest in Addis Abeba*, 3 June 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

⁵³⁷ Confidential source, 19 December 2023.

⁵³⁸ UNHCR, *Ethiopia: Refugees and Asylumseekers as of 31 August 2023*.

⁵³⁹ Confidential source, 30 August 2023.

⁵⁴⁰ Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

accommodated in four refugee camps in Tigray.⁵⁴¹ This policy changed in January 2020, when the automatic granting of asylum to Eritreans was stopped.⁵⁴² Prior to the conflict in Tigray, there were around a hundred thousand Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees in Tigray, most of them in the four camps: Hitsats and Shimelba in the north of Tigray, and Mai Aini and Adi Harush in the south of the region.⁵⁴³ At the time of the conflict, the camps in Tigray were either destroyed or closed. The Ethiopian government then set up a new camp in Amhara, known as Alemwach.⁵⁴⁴

During the conflict, many refugees had already moved from Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps to Alemwach Dabat in the Amhara region. In the first half of 2022, this concerned about 15 thousand refugees.⁵⁴⁵ Following the November 2022 ceasefire, when access to Mai Tsebri camp improved, another 7,080 refugees were transferred from that camp to Alemwach, with assistance from the UNHCR, the RRS and the IOM.⁵⁴⁶ As of 31 August 2023, more than 22 thousand refugees and asylum seekers were in Alemwach.⁵⁴⁷

4.2.4.2. Situation during the reporting period

As indicated in the previous Country of Origin Information Report, the situation in the camps during the Tigray conflict was dire.⁵⁴⁸ Since the outbreak of conflict with the Fano militias in Amhara (see also 1.3.5.1), the situation has also deteriorated in that region. The UNHCR and the WFP left the Alemwach camp at that time. Partly because of this, there was a lack of food, clean water and medicine, according to several sources.⁵⁴⁹ There were also reports of security incidents in and around the Alemwach camp. According to one source, two Eritrean refugees were killed in June 2023 after refusing to turn over their money and phones to members of the Fano.⁵⁵⁰ Other sources spoke of kidnapping for ransom.⁵⁵¹ One confidential source said that at least nine children had been kidnapped for ransom. An amount of 1.6 million birr⁵⁵² per child was demanded for their release.⁵⁵³ Another source cited ransom amounts of up to four thousand US dollars. In some cases, the abductees were still sold on to other criminals after the ransom had been paid. Although Ethiopians could also be victims of kidnapping, Eritreans had the image of having access to a lot of money, due to the large Eritrean diaspora in Western countries.⁵⁵⁴

Most of the refugees and asylum seekers (primarily Eritrean) who had managed to leave Tigray had not gone to Alemwach, however, but to Addis Ababa.⁵⁵⁵ According to one source, since the deterioration of the security situation in Amhara, more and more Eritreans from Alemwach were trying to come to Addis Ababa.⁵⁵⁶ Since

⁵⁴¹ VOA, *Ethiopia ends blanket protection for Eritrean refugees*, 22 April 2020.

⁵⁴² VOA, *Ethiopia ends blanket protection for Eritrean refugees*, 22 April 2020.

⁵⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia, November 2022, p. 102.

⁵⁴⁴ Confidential source, 16 June 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022; Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

⁵⁴⁵ Reliefweb, *Ethiopia Operation: Refugee Settlement Profile - Alemwach (Updated on: 31st December 2022)*, 2 March 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

⁵⁴⁶ Reliefweb, *Ethiopia Operation: Refugee Settlement Profile - Alemwach (Updated on: 31st December 2022)*, 2 March 2023.

⁵⁴⁷ UNHCR, *ETHIOPIA, Refugees population by location, as of 31 August 2023*, September 2023; Reliefweb, *Ethiopia Operation: Refugee Settlement Profile - Alemwach (Updated on: 31st December 2022)*, 2 March 2023; Confidential source, 30 August 2023; Confidential source, 15-16 June 2023.

⁵⁴⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia, November 2023, p. 102.

⁵⁴⁹ Martin Plaut, *Hard times in Ethiopia: the plight of Eritrean refugees inside Addis and across the country*, 11 August 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

⁵⁵⁰ EEPA, *Situation Report Horn no 448*, 9 June 2023.

⁵⁵¹ Confidential source, 22 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁵⁵² In November 2023, one million birr was equivalent to more than 26 thousand euros.

⁵⁵³ Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

⁵⁵⁴ Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

⁵⁵⁵ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2023; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

⁵⁵⁶ Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

January 2021, Eritrean refugees could no longer go outside the camps without authorisation.⁵⁵⁷ According to one source, Eritreans who lacked proper documentation (see also 4.2.3) also had to use human traffickers within Ethiopia. The cost of the journey from Alemwach to Addis Ababa was about 40 to 50 thousand birr.⁵⁵⁸ According to a post on X (formerly Twitter) by the local press, 52 Eritreans were arrested in Southern Ethiopia region in November 2023. They had entered Ethiopia at Metema in Amhara from Sudan, and they were in an Ethiopian Federal Army vehicle.⁵⁵⁹

4.2.4.3. Endabaguna Reception Centre

In the past, Eritreans arriving in Ethiopia were received and registered at the Endabaguna camp before being forwarded to other camps. During the war, this camp incurred severe destruction. Since then, it was mainly used by displaced Tigrayans fleeing West Tigray. During the reporting period, the situation there was very bad, and there was no food aid.⁵⁶⁰

4.2.4.4. New influx of Eritreans

Individuals from Eritrea have continued to arrive in Ethiopia, including during the reporting period. This included people who had crossed the border directly from Eritrea — despite the presence of Eritrean soldiers on both sides of the border. Given the absence of border controls, however, it was not clear how many people were concerned.⁵⁶¹ The main route for Eritreans since the eruption of the conflict there has nevertheless been through Sudan. At border crossings from Sudan — in October 2023, more than 85 thousand people had crossed the border there⁵⁶² — Eritreans were amongst the second largest group.⁵⁶³

According to one source, it was not easy for Eritreans to cross the border. People were interrogated by Sudanese border guards, and they sometimes had to leave their belongings behind. Ethiopia required an e-visa costing eighty US dollars upon entry.⁵⁶⁴ Many Eritreans did not have the necessary documents for a visa. As a result, they ended up in transit centres at the border.⁵⁶⁵ In November 2023, the Ethiopian authorities launched a new policy that allowed individuals of certain nationalities to apply for a visa upon arrival in Ethiopia, and they therefore did not have to do so in advance at an embassy or consulate. Eritreans did not fall under this programme.⁵⁶⁶

4.2.4.5. Exit after illegal residence

⁵⁵⁷ EEPA, *Situation report Horn 45*, 4 January 2021.

⁵⁵⁸ In November, forty to fifty thousand birr was equivalent to approximately 650 and 850 euros; Confidential source, 22 September 2023.

⁵⁵⁹ Addis Standard on X (previously Twitter), (1) [Addis Standard on X: "#Eritrean refugees traveling in military vehicle apprehended in southern #Ethiopia A group of 52 Eritrean refugees attempting to cross from #Ele_Zone to #South_Omo were apprehended. They were traveling in a Ural vehicle owned by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces \(#ENDF\). The... https://t.co/f774f2Jln6" / X \(twitter.com\)](#), 29 November 2023, consulted on 1 December 2023.

⁵⁶⁰ Addis Standard, *News: At least 47,000 fresh IDPs arrive at Endabaguna, Shire from Ten woredas of disputed Western Tigray*, 12 April 2023; AP, *UN, others cite new displacement from Ethiopia's Tigray*, 13 April 2023.

⁵⁶¹ Confidential source, 22 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

⁵⁶² OCHA, *Flash Update #31: The Impact of the Situation in Sudan on Ethiopia (As of 19 October 2023)*, October 2023.

⁵⁶³ UNHCR, *Ethiopia, Refugees and Asylum-seekers as of 31 August*, September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

⁵⁶⁴ The New Humanitarian, *Sudan refugees struggle to exit to Ethiopia, while aid workers trying to enter are turned back*, 7 June 2023.

⁵⁶⁵ Confidential source, 22 September 2022; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵⁶⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Ethiopia excludes Eritreans from new visa system, 21 November 2023; Immigration and Citizenship Service, [Apply for Ethiopian eVisa Online | Ethiopian E Visa Official Website](#)*, consulted on 1 December 2023.

It was not possible for anyone to leave the country legally after having stayed in Ethiopia illegally without paying an exit fine.⁵⁶⁷ As stated on the EthiopiaVisaTravel website, for overstaying a visa for up to fifteen days, each traveller must pay a fine of about fifty US dollars and an additional fine of five US dollars per day. For example, if someone overstayed by two days, that person had to pay sixty US dollars. Travelers who have overstayed are not allowed to leave the country until they pay the fine.⁵⁶⁸ According to various sources, individuals who wanted to leave the country after staying illegally in Ethiopia had to apply for an exit visa to do so. A fine had to be paid in order to obtain that visa. The amounts mentioned here ranged from 3 US dollars to 10–20 US dollars per day for the duration of the illegal stay.⁵⁶⁹

Eritreans, who generally had only expired residence documents or were not registered as asylum seekers (see 4.2.3), could thus not leave Ethiopia legally without paying an exit fine.

⁵⁶⁷ EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 455*, 20 June 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022; Confidential source, 19 September 2023.

⁵⁶⁸ Ethiopia Visa Travel, [Ethiopia Travel Visa | Obtain your Ethiopian eVisa Online \(ethiopiavisatravel.com\)](https://ethiopiavisatravel.com), consulted on 12 November 2023.

⁵⁶⁹ EEPA, *Situation Report Horn of Africa No 455*, 20 June 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

5. Return

Information on the treatment and reception of unaccompanied minors is provided in 3.2.4.5.

5.1. Returnees from the Middle East

Ethiopia received large numbers of forced returnees. They came mainly from Saudi Arabia and, to a lesser extent, from Djibouti. In March 2022, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia signed an agreement to return more than one hundred thousand Ethiopians who were staying in the country illegally. According to the Mixed Migration Centre, some 750 thousand Ethiopians were residing in Saudi Arabia, some 60% of whom had most likely entered the country in an irregular manner. Many of them were allegedly imprisoned in very poor conditions.⁵⁷⁰

Since 2017, some 600 thousand Ethiopians were deported by Saudi Arabia. In 2023, this concerned about 40 thousand people between January and April — about 10 thousand a month.⁵⁷¹ Between January 2021 and December 2022, about half of the returnees were from drought-stricken areas.⁵⁷²

In some cases, deportations from Saudi Arabia were temporarily halted by mutual agreement when transit centres in Ethiopia were too full. This was the case in April 2023. The transit centres were often full because returnees were unable to return to their region of origin due to the security situation.⁵⁷³

5.2. Risk of problems upon repatriation

According to several confidential sources, returnees may have been at risk of negative attention and poor treatment by the Ethiopian authorities, including interrogation and detention. This depended on their profile. Leaving for economic reasons alone was generally not a reason for negative attention. In contrast, leaving for political reasons could be.⁵⁷⁴ According to a confidential source, in the past, Tigrayans had been taken out of transit centres and detained by security forces after returning.⁵⁷⁵ During the reporting period, there were no known cases of individuals who had had anything similar happen to them.⁵⁷⁶ According to a confidential source, this could be attributed to the temporary suspension of forced repatriation from Saudi Arabia. This source stated that, based on experiences with Tigrayans at the time of the Tigray conflict, Amhara would otherwise definitely be at risk.⁵⁷⁷ According to another confidential source, this was also related to the fact that individuals with a political profile who were critical of the authorities generally did not return.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁰ Mixed Migration Centre, *Experiences of Ethiopian returnees in Saudi Arabia: Employment and unmet expectations*, 6 April 2023.

⁵⁷¹ Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

⁵⁷² IOM, Ethiopia, *Migration Management Overview*, May 2023.

⁵⁷³ Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

⁵⁷⁴ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022; Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

⁵⁷⁵ Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵⁷⁶ Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

⁵⁷⁷ Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵⁷⁸ Confidential source, 20 September 2023.

Despite large numbers of forced deportations by Saudi Arabia, irregular migration towards Saudi Arabia persisted during the reporting period. According to a confidential source, about 180 thousand Ethiopians migrated towards the Middle East between January and September 2023. Conflict-related social and economic problems are said to be the main cause of this migration.⁵⁷⁹ Reports of Saudi border guards firing live rounds at migrants resulting in deaths also seemed to have had little deterrent effect. According to investigators, Saudi border guards on the Yemen border allegedly killed and injured hundreds of Ethiopian migrants.⁵⁸⁰

Several sources stated that Ethiopian authorities refused to cooperate in the repatriation from Europe of people without valid documents.⁵⁸¹ Sources had differing opinions concerning whether having a travel or identity document affected treatment by the authorities upon return. According to one confidential source, it did not matter much,⁵⁸² but another said that it did have an impact, and that it could lead to longer waiting times, interrogations and ill treatment by the authorities. They could be detained or stay in an IOM Migrant Response Centre until their nationality was verified by the ICS.⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁹ Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch, *"They Fired on Us Like Rain" Saudi Arabian Mass Killings of Ethiopian Migrants at the Yemen-Saudi Border*, 21 August 2023; NOS, *De levensgevaarlijke tocht naar Saudi-Arabië: 'Grenswacht schiet op migranten'*, 9 August 2023; Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵⁸¹ Confidential source, 18 September 2023; Confidential source, 19 September 2023; Confidential source, 22 September 2022.

⁵⁸² Confidential source, 18 September 2023.

⁵⁸³ Confidential source, 24 November 2023.

6. Appendices

6.1. Abbreviations

ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
AU	African Union
AU-MVCM	African Union Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mission
BPLM	Benishangul People's Liberation Movement
CoHA	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement
EDF	Eritrean Defence Force
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defence Force
EHRC	Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GERD	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
GBV	Gender-based violence
GPDM	Gumuz People's Democratic Movement
ICHREE	International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia
ICS	Immigration and Citizenship Services
IDP	Internally Displaced People
INVEA	Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
JIT	Joint Investigation Team
MP	Member of Parliament
NaMA	National Movement of Amhara
NEBE	National Election Board Ethiopia
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Service
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid
OFC	Oromo Federalist Congress
OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OLA	Oromia Liberation Army
OLF	Oromia Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
PP	Prosperity Party
RRS	Refugee and Return Service
RSF	Rapid Support Forces (Sudan)
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SFP	Sidama Federalist Party
SFA	Sidama Freedom Army
TDF	Tigray Defence Forces
TJWGE	Transitional Justice Working Group Ethiopia
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UN	United Nations
WFP	World Food Program

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