

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	409
Land:	Etiopien
Kilde:	UK Home Office
Titel:	Country Policy and Information Note. Ethiopia: Actors of protection
Udgivet:	september 2020
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	7. december 2020



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Ethiopia: Actors of protection

Version 1.0

September 2020

Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- The general humanitarian situation is so severe as to breach Article 15(b) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC (the Qualification Directive) / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules
- The security situation presents a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that it would breach Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- A claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Assessment

Updated: 21 September 2020

1. Introduction

1.1 Scope of this note

- 2.1.1 Whether in general, those with a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from non-state actors can seek effective state protection.

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.2 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.4 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection.
- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and [Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Protection

- 2.3.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, including 'rogue' state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.
- 2.3.2 The constitution provides the legal framework for establishing a criminal justice system, providing for a national defence service, federal and state (regional) police forces, the recognition of both religious and traditional courts and an independent judiciary. The criminal code establishes a series of laws criminalising behaviour and acts that might be persecutory or cause serious harm, and the available sentencing options (see [Legal context](#) and [Judiciary and court system](#)).

- 2.3.3 The Ethiopian Federal Police (EFP), with an estimated number of staff at 30,000 in 2016, have responsibility for maintaining law and order at federal level and the investigation of crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of federal courts. The EFP also maintain law and order in any region when there is a deteriorating security situation beyond the control of the regional government, as do the military, as seen in the establishment of command posts in some parts of Oromia and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' (SNNP) region. The security sector has undergone a number of reforms since Abiy Ahmed became prime minister in April 2018, including the removal of a number of senior figures associated with the former regime, particularly in the military and intelligence sectors which has disrupted the efficacy and stability of security organisations. However, the government generally retains control over federal and defence security forces and their actions (see [Reform and restructure](#) and [Federal security forces](#)).
- 2.3.4 State police forces (regional police) maintain law and order in the regional states but vary in size, structure, training and how they fulfil their role within the region they are operating. Bribery and petty corruption affect the police, particularly in the state police forces, for example to prevent arrest. In some areas there is limited central government control over regional forces due to ethnic and regional loyalties. Local militias operate across the regions in co-ordination with regional police forces or act on behalf of the ethno-linguistic communities they represent (see [Regional security forces](#)).
- 2.3.5 While the constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, they do occur and security forces have been responsible for harassment, excessive force, torture and extra-judicial killings. Conditions in prisons are also reportedly harsh and life-threatening in some cases, with unreliable medical care, unhygienic conditions and overcrowding. Oversight is generally limited although in 2018, the Ministry of Peace was introduced to oversee the Federal Police, and in July 2019, a new commissioner was appointed to the government-funded Ethiopia Human Rights Commission. The commissioner has publicly criticised the government and has called for reform of the organisation (see [Arrest and detention rights](#), [Human rights abuses Police oversight and complaints mechanism\(s\)](#) and Country Policy and Information Note: [Ethiopia: opposition to the government](#).)
- 2.3.6 The law recognises both religious and traditional courts and provides for an independent judiciary. The law provides for the right to a fair public trial and the presumption of innocence. However, the independence of the judiciary is impaired by political interference, corruption and bribery. A weak and overburdened judicial system contributes to slow prosecutions and sometimes lengthy detentions without charge or trial, undermining the courts' effectiveness. Access to formal judicial systems is limited in rural areas and for women (see [Judiciary and court system](#)).
- 2.3.7 It should be noted that protection does not lead to eliminating the risk of discrimination and violence. The available country evidence indicates that despite some failings, the state is largely effective in maintaining law and order has functioning security forces at federal and regional level, and a legal system for the prosecution and punishment of acts constituting persecution or serious harm. Therefore, in general, the state is willing and

able to offer effective protection, however each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate why they would not be able to seek and obtain protection.

- 2.3.8 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.3.9 For an assessment of protection available for persons whose claims are based on their Oromo ethnicity or for claims based on opposition to the government see the Country Policy and Information Notes on [Oromos](#) and [Opposition to the government](#).
- 2.3.10 For background information, including on LGBTI persons, women and assessment on internal relocation see Country Policy and Information Note [Ethiopia: Background information, including internal relocation](#)

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 24 June 2020

3. Legal context

3.1 Criminal code and Constitution

- 3.1.1 [The Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia](#) 2004 came into force on 9 May 2005 and repealed the 1957 Penal Code and the 1982 Revised Special Penal Code of the Provisional Military¹.
- 3.1.2 [The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia](#) was adopted on 8 December 1994 and promulgated by the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No. 1/1995 which entered into force on 21 August 1995².

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4. Security forces

4.1 Overview

- 4.1.1 The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia under Articles 51 and 52, provides for the powers and functions of government: 'It shall establish and administer national defence and public security forces as well as a federal police force' and '[t]o establish and administer a state police force, and to maintain public order and peace within the State.'³

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4.2 Reform and restructure

- 4.2.1 Home Office officials conducted a UK Fact Finding Mission (FFM) between 16 September 2019 to 20 September 2019. Several sources noted a rapid dismantling or purging of the security sector without new systems being put in place. The senior representative of OFC noted that '[t]he whole system has changed and purged, but a new order has not been put in place. We are at a critical crossroad.'⁴ DFID Ethiopia staff stated 'You have a sense across the board that there is a new system and regime but there are a lot of errors within this as forces act how they want. The old systems have been dissected/removed, but a new one has not been put in place, it means security/police do not have a mandate on how they can act.'⁵
- 4.2.2 During the FFM the Life and Peace Institute considered 'Abiy dismantled the authoritarian structures too quickly. The first sector was the security sector, which is one of the most complicated sectors to break down and reform. Abiy knows whoever is in charge of the intelligence is in the ruling party so he tried to restructure this sector to get rid of the TPLF, but Abiy didn't replace it

¹ '[The Criminal Code of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia](#)', 9 May 2005

² '[Constitution of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia](#)', 21 August 1995

³ '[Constitution of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia](#)' (Ch5, articles 51 (6) & 52 (2.g)) 21 August 1995

⁴ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – Senior representative of OFC

⁵ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – DFID Ethiopia staff

with a new reform [sic, system/structure] which caused issues at the regional level.⁶

- 4.2.3 William Davidson of the Crisis Group and the Life and Peace Institute noted to the FFT the significance of the removal of TPLF from the security apparatus, especially the military and intelligence service which were previously dominated by Tigrayans or TPLF⁷ ⁸. William Davidson also noted that this power shift had caused upheaval and raised a question over the efficacy of the security organisations⁹. The Life and Peace Institute considered that the removal of TPLF led to a lack of experience in the security service which meant they were unprepared and unaware of the alleged coup before it happened. The source opined this would not have happened under the previous government¹⁰.
- 4.2.4 In the FFM report the OLF officers noted that the officials who were under the previous government and loyal to TPLF had been replaced by those loyal to Abiy, but the structure of the security services has remained the same. The source stated the situation was similar for areas within the justice sector; 'hence the judicial procedure has remained the same.'¹¹ Hassan Moalin, ONLF, stated 'There is a power struggle within the EPRDF. The reforms, which the [the security sector] is part [of] has started but there is still a long way to go until we see change.'¹²
- 4.2.5 In the FFM report the Horn of Africa researcher described security has having 'crumbled and [it] has created a vacuum for about a year [2018-2019].' The source added 'We have now seen deployment of the army again where we had seen this vacuum... The army, there have been changes at the top but not any clear security sector reforms... We saw a breakdown of security apparatus at many levels, but we are starting to see a reassertion from the federal level which could be good or bad, a mixed bag.'¹³
- 4.2.6 In relation to the extent to which the government had control over the security forces, sources differed in their responses given to the FFT. Life and Peace Institute stated that there was control but the issue was with capacity¹⁴. The Political Section, British Embassy, stated the government had control of the federal forces¹⁵, and Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, stated at federal government level, Abiy had control of the military, police and security forces¹⁶.
- 4.2.7 In the FFM report, in relation to the state's ability to provide protection DFID staff observed to the HO FFM team '... there has been a decrease in protection by state, this is an area we are disappointed in, a lack of protection.' The same source noted: 'In terms of the institution, we have

⁶ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute

⁷ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – William Davison, Crisis Group

⁸ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute

⁹ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – William Davison, Crisis Group

¹⁰ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute

¹¹ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – OLF Officers

¹² Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – Hassan Moalin, ONLF

¹³ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, ONLF

¹⁴ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute

¹⁵ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – Political section, British Embassy

¹⁶ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – Wondemagegn Goshu

seen better commitment from government, for example the appointment of human rights institutions. We are disappointed in the security protection decrease, we don't really have a constitutional mandate, so the enforcement of human rights has been weak.'¹⁷

- 4.2.8 The United States Department of State (USSD) 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2019' (USSD report 2019), Ethiopia published 11 March 2020 noted: 'Under Prime Minister Abiy, there has been an increased focus on the rule of law. The Federal Police report to the newly created Ministry of Peace as of October 2018 and are subject to parliamentary oversight, but parliament's capacity to conduct this oversight is limited.'¹⁸

- 4.2.9 For further information on reform and restructure of the security forces see [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#)

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4.3 Federal security forces

- 4.3.1 The Clingendael (Netherlands Institute of International Relations) report, Perpetuating power – Ethiopia's political settlement and the organization of security, published in September 2016, stated 'The Ethiopian Federal Police force was created in 1995 to maintain law and order at the federal level (including riot control) and to investigate organized crime. It estimates its own size at around 30,000 personnel. The federal police force comes under the Federal Police Commission that reports to the Ministry of Federal Affairs (until recently the Ministry of Justice). Its legal basis is article 51 of the Constitution.'¹⁹

- 4.3.2 The United States Department of State Overseas Security Advisory Council, 'Ethiopia 2020 Crime & Safety Report', (OSAC report 2020) published 10 April 2020 noted:

'The Ethiopian Federal Police (EFP) are responsible for investigating crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of federal courts, including any activities in violation of the Constitution that may endanger the Constitutional order, public order, hooliganism, terrorism, trafficking in persons, or transferring of drugs. The EFP also maintains law and order in any region when there is a deteriorating security situation beyond the control of the regional government and a request for intervention is made; or when disputes arise between two or more regional governments and the situation becomes dangerous for the security of the federal government. The EFP safeguards the security of borders, airports, railway lines/terminals, mining areas, and other vital institutions of the federal government. The EFP delegates powers, when necessary, to regional police commissions.'²⁰

See also [Regional security forces](#)

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¹⁷ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – DFID Ethiopia staff

¹⁸ USSD, '[USSD report 2019](#)' (Executive summary), 11 March 2020

¹⁹ Clingendael, '[Perpetuating power – Ethiopia's political settlement...](#)', September 2016

²⁰ OASC, '[Ethiopia 2020 Crime & Safety Report](#)' (Police responses), 10 April 2020

4.4 National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS)

- 4.4.1 The Clingendael (Netherlands Institute of International Relations) report, *Perpetuating power – Ethiopia's political settlement and the organization of security*, published in September 2016, stated: 'The Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service was established in 1995 and currently enjoys ministerial status, reporting directly to the Prime Minister. It is tasked with gathering information necessary to protect national security. Its surveillance capacities have been used both to prevent terrorist attacks, such as those by Al-Shabaab, and to suppress domestic dissent.'²¹

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4.5 Military

- 4.5.1 In the HO FFM report William Davison, Crisis Group, stated:
'The national defence force is one of the strongest institutions in the government. There is an element of the regional power struggle which is spilling into the military and the assassination [On 22 June 2019 in Amhara, the regional governor and adviser were killed and in Addis Ababa, the chief of staff of the Ethiopian army was shot dead alongside another officer²²] raised this question. But in general, the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) is an institution that has remained loyal and in line with the federal government.'²³
- 4.5.2 The USSD report 2019 noted: 'When community security [regional police or local militia] was insufficient to maintain law and order, the military played an expanded role with respect to internal security; in particular, setting up military command posts in parts of the country like West and South Oromia, as well as Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' (SNNP) Region.'²⁴

For information on military command posts see [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#) and Country policy and information note [Ethiopia: opposition to the government](#)

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4.6 Regional security forces

- 4.6.1 The Clingendael (Netherlands Institute of International Relations) report, *Perpetuating power – Ethiopia's political settlement and the organization of security*, published in September 2016, stated:
'Ethiopia's State Police Forces (regional police) maintain law and order in Ethiopia's constituent [sic] states. While their numbers, structure and even uniforms may vary, they each report to a Regional Police Commission that works loosely together with the Federal Police Commission. The federal police can intervene in regions by invitation of the state police. However, Oromia Regional State and in particular the city of Addis Ababa have seen uncoordinated police interventions. Petty corruption is especially a problem

²¹ Clingendael, '[Perpetuating power – Ethiopia's political settlement...](#)', September 2016

²² BBC, '[Ethiopia army chief shot dead in 'coup bid' attacks](#)', 23 June 2019

²³ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group

²⁴ USSD, '[USSD report 2019](#)' (Executive summary), 11 March 2020

at the level of state police (traffic bribes and bribes to avoid arrest). The state police forces' legal basis is article 52 subsection 2 of the Constitution.'²⁵

- 4.6.2 The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) an UK independent think tank engaged in defence and security research in the publication 'Ethiopia's Security Dilemmas' dated 18 July 2019 noted:

'The regional police forces...include some specially trained and equipped units used for the purposes of riot control and other threats. But beyond these constitutionally mandated institutions are armed and periodically trained rural farmers which make up a voluntary force to provide, where necessary, rural back-up for the police...

'What differentiates the regional security sector today from the regional security sector of the past is the bolstered numbers and sophistication of these contingents, their access to recruits, state-of-the-art training, specialised equipment and their association with anti-government sentiment. The rise of these more prolific informal armed groups could pose the greatest threat ever to the country's federal unity.

'Little is known outside Ethiopia about the exact numbers, structure, funding, command arrangements and roles of these special forces. Yet they are certainly extensive and media sources confirm that all regions have them. Numbers range from thousands to tens of thousands, depending on the region. Whereas some have existed for longer than others, and access to weapon stockpiles and equipment differs between regions, the development of others has only unfolded in recent years. For example, a further 6,000 recruited to join the Amhara force only completed their training days before the recent atrocities [June 2019 assassinations].'²⁶

- 4.6.3 In the HO FFM report the Political Section, British Embassy stated: '...under Ethiopian constitution primary responsibility for internal security lies with the regions. Regional Security forces vary hugely in size, training and how they see their role – whether truly to police or more as forces to defend against other armed actors, including from other regions.'²⁷

- 4.6.4 In the same HO FFM report Wondemagegn Goshu noted that the central government did not have effective control over regional security forces²⁸ and the senior officials of E-ZEMA noted that '[t]he government does not have effective control over the local regional states.'²⁹ Wondemagegn Goshu and the Life and Peace Institute considered that regional areas had become increasingly assertive^{30 31}. William Davison, Crisis Group, noted '[t]o some extent the security apparatus is becoming loyal to the region and so not completely in line with the federal government.'³² The senior representatives

²⁵ Clingendael, '[Perpetuating power – Ethiopia's political settlement...](#)', September 2016

²⁶ RUSI, '[Ethiopia's Security Dilemmas](#)', 18 July 2019

²⁷ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D- Political section, British Embassy

²⁸ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA

²⁹ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu

³⁰ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute

³¹ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group

³² Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group

of E-ZEMA noted: 'The federal government does not have direct control over these regional states and their militia [regional police]'³³.

- 4.6.5 The HO FFM report noted that information on the effectiveness of security services varied between some regions. DFID Ethiopia staff noted that '[i]n Tigray there is still evidence that security is working'³⁴. While William Davidson noted that 'Tigray has a strong regional security apparatus' although adding that Tigray's autonomy could sometimes be exaggerated. He also noted that 'Mekele is managing its own regional security.'³⁵
- 4.6.6 DFID Ethiopia staff noted in the HO FFM report the complexities of regional policing. 'Central police were a long way from village[s] to disperse violence. In the villages (where the kebele [small administrative unit] has authority) there can be corruption'³⁶.
- 4.6.7 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, noted in the HO FFM report that '...we see that the government at times cannot protect all people. We hear about people being attacked by groups. The zonal and woreda officers can be complicit in this. The government respects rights, but the protection is lacking in some areas, especially in areas where they don't speak the language or belong to a different ethnic group.'³⁷
- 4.6.8 The USSD report 2019 noted:
'Each of the nine regions has a regional, a special police force, or both that report to regional civilian authorities. Local militias operated across the country in loose and varying coordination with these regional police, the Federal Police, and the military. Selected by community leadership, local militias are empowered to handle standard security matters within their communities, primarily in rural areas. It was widely reported that civilian authorities at times did not maintain control over regional security forces. Rural local police and militias sometimes acted independently and extrajudicially. Local government authorities provided select militia members with very basic training. Militia members serve as a bridge between the community and local police by providing information and enforcing rules.'³⁸
- 4.6.9 The OSAC report 2020 noted: 'The EFP [Ethiopian Federal Police] delegates powers, when necessary, to regional police commissions. Regional police handle local crime under their jurisdiction and provide officers for traffic control and immediate response to criminal incidents.'³⁹
- 4.6.10 For information on the Liyu police see [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#) and [Country policy and information note Ethiopia:opposition to the government](#)

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³³ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA

³⁴ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D- DFID Ethiopia staff

³⁵ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group

³⁶ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D- DFID Ethiopia staff

³⁷ Home Office, '[HO FFM report](#)', February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu

³⁸ USSD, '[USSD report 2019](#)' (Executive summary), 11 March 2020

³⁹ OSAC, '[Ethiopia 2020 Crime & Safety Report](#)' (Police responses), 10 April 2020

4.7 Training

4.7.1 The United States State Department (USSD) Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2018 stated:

‘The government supported limited training on human rights for police and army personnel. It accepted assistance from NGOs and the EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] to improve and professionalize training on human rights by including more material on the constitution and international human rights treaties and conventions. Additionally, the Ethiopian National Defense Force routinely conducted training on human rights, protection of civilians, gender-based violence, and other courses at the Peace Support Training Center in Addis Ababa.’⁴⁰

4.7.2 The USSD report 2019 stated: ‘Police at the federal and regional levels received training focused on human trafficking and exploitation.’⁴¹

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4.8 Arrest and detention rights

4.8.1 The USSD report 2019 noted: ‘The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. Authorities, however, detained persons arbitrarily, including activists, journalists, and opposition party members. ... There were hundreds of reports of arbitrary arrest by security forces.’⁴²

4.8.2 The same report noted:

‘The constitution and law require detainees to appear before the court and face charges within 48 hours of arrest or as soon thereafter as local circumstances and communications permit. Travel time to the court is not included in this 48-hour period. With a warrant, authorities may detain persons suspected of serious offenses for 14 days without charge and for additional and renewable 14-day periods during a pending investigation. The courts allowed security officials to continue investigations for more than 14 days without bringing formal charges against suspects. Under the ATP police may request to detain persons without charge for 28-day periods, up to a maximum of four months, during an investigation. The law permits warrantless arrests for various offenses including “flagrant offenses.” These include suspects apprehended while committing an offense, attempting to commit an offense, or having just completed an offense.

‘The law prohibits detention in any facility other than an official detention center, but local militias and other formal and informal law enforcement entities operated an unknown number of unofficial detention centers.’⁴³

4.8.3 The report also stated: ‘The law provides persons accused of or charged with a crime the ability to appeal. During the year no cases were brought to

⁴⁰ USSD, ‘[USSD report 2018](#)’, (section 1d), 13 March 2019

⁴¹ USSD, ‘[USSD report 2019](#)’ (section 7b), 11 March 2020

⁴² USSD, ‘[USSD report 2019](#)’ (section 1d), 11 March 2020

⁴³ USSD, ‘[USSD report 2019](#)’ (section 1d), 11 March 2020

the courts by individuals claiming unlawful detention. The criminal law does not provide compensation for unlawfully detained persons.’⁴⁴

For information on the treatment of political opponents including arbitrary arrest and detention see Country policy and information note [Ethiopia: opposition to the government](#)

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4.9 Human rights abuses

4.9.1 The USSD report 2018 stated:

‘Impunity remained a problem, including for killings and other violence against protesters. An internal investigation process existed within the police forces, although officials acknowledged that it was inadequate, and there were continued efforts to reform and modernize these internal mechanisms... The government rarely disclosed the results of investigations into abuses by local security forces, such as arbitrary detention and beatings of civilians.’⁴⁵

4.9.2 In the HO FFM report, DFID Ethiopia staff, the legal expert and William Davidson noted the failure to arrest the former head of the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) Getachew Assefa for human rights abuses, despite there being an arrest warrant in place^{46 47 48}. The senior representative of the OFC opined that this showed that ‘the regional government [in Tigray] will not support [the] central government’s actions’⁴⁹. William Davison, Crisis Group, stated this demonstrated that ‘the federal government were no longer allowed into the region [Tigray] at will’⁵⁰. DFID Ethiopia staff stated the failure to arrest Getachew Assefa was due to political reasons⁵¹. Similarly, the legal expert and active critic noted the belief from those in Amhara that the government were working with those in Tigray who wanted to remain in power and therefore he had not been arrested⁵².

4.9.3 The USSD report 2019 noted:

‘There were numerous reports that the government and its representatives committed arbitrary and unlawful killings. Security forces used deadly force against civilians...

‘There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities...

‘The constitution prohibits such practices [torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment], but there were reports of abuses against detainees by security officials.’⁵³

⁴⁴ USSD, [‘USSD report 2019’](#) (section 1d), 11 March 2020

⁴⁵ USSD, [‘USSD report 2018’](#), (section 1d), 13 March 2019

⁴⁶ Home Office, [‘HO FFM report’](#), February 2020, Annex D – DFID Ethiopia staff

⁴⁷ Home Office, [‘HO FFM report’](#), February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group

⁴⁸ Home Office, [‘HO FFM report’](#), February 2020, Annex D- Legal expert and active critic

⁴⁹ Home Office, [‘HO FFM report’](#), February 2020, Annex D- Senior representative of OFC

⁵⁰ Home Office, [‘HO FFM report’](#), February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group

⁵¹ Home Office, [‘HO FFM report’](#), February 2020, Annex D – DFID Ethiopia staff

⁵² Home Office, [‘HO FFM report’](#), February 2020, Annex D- Legal expert and active critic

⁵³ USSD, [‘USSD report 2019’](#) (section 1a, 1b), 11 March 2020

- 4.9.4 An Ethiopian government national report, dated May 2019, submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) as part of a universal periodic review stated:

‘The prevention of acts of torture, cruel, or degrading treatment and ensuring accountability constitute the core of the on-going political reforms. Accordingly, the Government publicly admitted that there had been a systemic violation of the right by the security and law enforcement agencies. An on-going criminal investigation has resulted in the arrest of members of the National Intelligence and Security Service, police and prison administration including senior officials suspected of committing acts of torture.’⁵⁴

- 4.9.5 In a May 2020 report Amnesty International noted that:

‘While initial first steps have been taken towards improving the human rights environment in the country, a persistence of old-style patterns of violence perpetrated by the security forces threatens to derail sustained long-term gains.

‘Amnesty International conducted research into the Inter-communal violence that took place in the Amhara and Oromia regions of the country in 2019 and found that members of the Ethiopian Defence forces, regional police special force, local administration officials and allied militia armed youth and vigilante groups carried out serious human rights violations in parts of Oromia and Amhara regions in the zones of East Guji and West Guji in Oromia, Regional State and the West Gondar and Central Gondar zones of Amhara Regional State.

‘Researchers found that security forces deployed in the two Guji zones in Oromia carried out extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, forced evictions, and destruction of property. In Amhara region, they discovered evidence that the Regional special police units and local administration militia were complicit in inter-communal violence between the Amhara and Qimant ethnic communities in West and Central Gondar.’⁵⁵

- 4.9.6 For more information on the treatment of political opponents and arrest / prosecutions for corruption and human rights abuses and see [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#) and Country policy and information note [Ethiopia: opposition to the government](#)

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4.10 Prison conditions

- 4.10.1 An Ethiopian government national report, dated May 2019, submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) as part of a universal periodic review stated:

‘Ethiopia recognizes that the conditions of detention centers and prison facilities require significant improvement to meet international standards. Thus, with designs complying with international human rights standards, the

⁵⁴ UNHRC, ‘[Ethiopian government national report](#)’, 6-17 May 2019, (para 39)

⁵⁵ Amnesty International, ‘[Beyond Law Enforcement: ...](#)’, 29 May 2020 (p.5)

federal Government is building four new prison facilities to ensure prisoners are kept in conditions that respect their human dignity. Similar efforts are underway in all regional states and city administrations to improve the conditions of detention including through the improvement of water supply, medical and sanitation services, sporting facilities, libraries and the likes.⁵⁶

4.10.2 The USSD report 2019 noted:

‘Prison and pretrial detention center conditions remained harsh and in some cases life threatening. There were reports authorities physically abused prisoners in detention centers, military facilities, and police stations. Problems included gross overcrowding and inadequate food, water, sanitation, and medical care. Pretrial detention often occurred in police station detention facilities, where conditions varied widely and where reports stated there was poor hygiene and police abuse of detainees.

‘Severe overcrowding was common, especially in prison sleeping quarters... Authorities sometimes incarcerated juveniles with adults. Prison officials generally separated male and female prisoners, although mixing occurred at some facilities. Medical attention following physical abuse was insufficient in some cases...

‘Medical care was unreliable in federal prisons and almost nonexistent in regional ones. Prisoners had only limited access to potable water. Water shortages caused unhygienic conditions, and most prisons lacked appropriate sanitary facilities. Many prisoners had serious health problems but received little or no treatment. There were reports prison officials denied some prisoners access to needed medical care.

‘The law generally provides visitor access for prisoners. Authorities, however, denied some detained and indicted defendants visits with their lawyers or with representatives of their political parties. In some cases, police did not allow pretrial detainees access to visitors, including family members.⁵⁷

For more information on detention conditions including in Jijiga (also known as Jail Ogaden) and Makelawi prisons and treatment in military training camps see Country policy and information note: [Ethiopia: opposition to the government](#).

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5. Police oversight and complaints mechanism(s)

5.1 Oversight mechanisms

- 5.1.1 The Law on Police Use of Force Worldwide organisation noted on their Ethiopia webpage, last updated in June 2019: ‘In Ethiopia, most oversight mechanisms are in the form of internal disciplinary rules or regulations within

⁵⁶ UNHRC, ‘[Ethiopian government national report](#)’, 6-17 May 2019, (para 43)

⁵⁷ USSD, ‘[USSD report 2019](#)’ (section 1.c), 11 March 2020

the police and prison services, rather than an independent external body established for the purpose.’⁵⁸

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5.2 Ethiopia Human Rights Commission

5.2.1 The USSD report 2019 noted:

‘The law provides citizens the right to appeal in civil court, including in cases with human rights violations. For rights violations where a government agency is the accused perpetrator, the victim initiates the process by filing a complaint at the EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission]. Parliament created the EHRC in 2000, and it continued to fund and provide oversight of the commission. The EHRC investigates and makes recommendations to the concerned government agency. Citizens did not file any human rights violations under this system, primarily due to a lack of evidence and a lack of faith in their ability to secure an impartial verdict in these types of cases.

‘On July 2 [2019], parliament approved the appointment of Daniel Bekele as commissioner of the EHRC. Bekele publicly called for “meaningful reform” of the EHRC and signaled his independence by criticizing the government’s continued use of the ATP.’⁵⁹

5.2.2 In the HO FFM report The Horn of Africa researcher noted it was too early to say whether the organisations such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission were going to be effective⁶⁰.

5.2.3 FANA Broadcasting (state-owned) in the report ‘Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Urged To Fulfil Responsibilities’ 23 January 2020 stated:

‘The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) today presented its six-month performance report to the House of Peoples Representatives (HPR). In his report, Dr Daniel Bekele, Commissioner of EHRC, briefed the MPs on the reforms underway within the institution that was established 15 years ago.

“The 15-year old commission is not discharging its responsibilities properly because of political and related reasons of the past,” the Commissioner said. “In order to address these problems, the Commission is undertaking institutional reform,” he said. The Commission has conducted an assessment to find out gaps in the existing legal frameworks and make amendment to them, he stated.’⁶¹

5.2.4 Borkena, an Ethiopian news website noted on 28 May 2020:

‘The EHRC has released an analysis of the declaration of a state of emergency (SoE) by the Ethiopian government to prevent the spread of COVID-19. EHRC’s analysis assesses the declaration based on international human rights standards and the FDRE [Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia] constitution. Accordingly, it has identified several inconsistencies of the declaration and made recommendations on how to correct them.

⁵⁸ The Law on Police Use of Force Worldwide, ‘[Ethiopia](#)’, last updated June 2019

⁵⁹ USSD, ‘[USSD report 2019](#)’ (section 1.e), 11 March 2020

⁶⁰ Home Office, ‘[HO FFM report](#)’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa Researcher

⁶¹ FANA, ‘[Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Urged To Fulfil Responsibilities](#)’, 23 January 2020

‘The document appreciates the constitutionality of the declaration (on the whole), the establishment of an Inquiry Board, the fact that it is led by civilian officials, the government’s willingness to ease or lift the SoE based on evaluation of circumstances and the concerted effort of the government to control the pandemic.

‘However, EHRC has identified several provisions that violate either international human rights standards or the FDRE constitution. The first of these is the fact that crimes and restrictions listed are sweeping and vaguely defined, and the imposition of the same penalty of up to three years imprisonment and a fine up to Birr 200,000 for the wide range of crimes defined therein.’⁶²

See also [Monitoring of prisons](#) and Country policy and information note: [Ethiopia: opposition to the government](#).

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5.3 Monitoring of prisons

5.3.1 The USSD report noted:

‘Independent Monitoring: The International Committee of the Red Cross visited prisons throughout the country during the year as part of its normal activities. The government did not permit access to prisons by other international human rights organizations.

‘Regional authorities allowed representatives of the government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to meet with prisoners without third parties present. The EHRC monitored federal and regional detention centers and interviewed prison officials and prisoners in response to allegations of widespread human rights abuses. The NGO Justice for All-Prison Fellowship Ethiopia (JPA-PFE) had access to multiple prison and detention facilities around the country.’⁶³

5.3.2 The same report noted: ‘There were reports prisoners mistreated by prison guards did not have access to prison administrators or ombudspersons to register their complaints. ...

The Office of the Ombudsman has the authority to investigate complaints of administrative mismanagement by executive branch offices and officials, including investigation into prison conditions. The office reported to parliament that it received 853 complaints between July 2018 and January, of which 455 were outside its mandate. It opened investigations into 488 cases and found no administrative mismanagement in 262 of them. The remaining complaints were pending investigation for six months in January.

Parliament’s Legal, Justice, and Democracy Affairs Standing Committee rated the performance of the office as unsatisfactory.’⁶⁴

See also [Ethiopia Human Rights Commission](#) and [Prison conditions](#) and Country policy and information note: [Ethiopia: opposition to the government](#).

⁶² Borkena, ‘[Ethiopian Human Rights Commission...](#)’, 28 May 2020

⁶³ USSD, ‘[USSD report 2019](#)’ (section 1.c), 11 March 2020

⁶⁴ USSD, ‘[USSD report 2019](#)’ (section 1.c), 11 March 2020

6. Judiciary and court system

6.1 Court system

The USSD report 2019 noted:

‘The constitution recognizes both religious and traditional courts. Many citizens residing in rural areas had little access to formal judicial systems and relied on traditional mechanisms for resolving conflicts. By law all parties to a dispute must agree to use a traditional or religious court before such a court may hear a case, and either party may appeal to a regular court at any time. Sharia (Islamic law) courts may hear religious and family cases involving Muslims if both parties agree to use the sharia court before the formal legal process begins. Sharia courts received some funding from the government. These sharia courts adjudicated a majority of cases in the predominantly Muslim Somali and Afar Regions. Other traditional systems of justice, such as councils of elders, functioned predominantly in rural areas. Some women believed they lacked access to free and fair hearings in the traditional court system because local custom excluded them from participation in councils of elders and due to persistent gender discrimination.’⁶⁵

- 6.1.1 [The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia](#) outlines the structure and power of the courts⁶⁶.

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6.2 Judicial independence

- 6.2.1 An Ethiopian government national report, dated May 2019, submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) as part of a universal periodic review stated:

‘The Ethiopian Constitution establishes an independent judiciary. A number of laws have been enacted at the federal and regional levels to further ensure the independence of the judiciary. The Federal Supreme Court is conducting an inspection aimed at identifying the practical challenges and legal loopholes that may contribute to the erosion of the judicial independence and decline in public trust in the courts. Similar initiatives are underway in a number of regional states.

‘The Federal Supreme Court of Ethiopia has recently established a Judiciary Affairs Reform Task Force. The taskforce is composed of 20 prominent independent legal professionals and is mandated to identify and recommend measures that will enhance the independence and professionalism of the courts. To enhance the accessibility, video conference and e-litigation centers are being expanded across the country and a study to connect all federal courts via Wide-Area Network (WAN) is underway.’⁶⁷

⁶⁵ USSD, ‘[USSD report 2019](#)’ (section 1.e), 11 March 2020

⁶⁶ [Constitution of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia](#) (Chapter 9) 21 August 1995

⁶⁷ UNHRC, ‘[Ethiopian government national report](#)’, 6-17 May 2019, (para 57-58)

- 6.2.2 In the HO FFM report Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, noted that the courts and law enforcement were politicised and did not always act in connection with the constitution, but on ethnic lines⁶⁸.
- 6.2.3 The USSD report 2019 stated: ‘The law provides for an independent judiciary. Although the civil courts operated with a large degree of independence, criminal courts remained weak, overburdened, and subject to political influence. ... Corruption, especially the solicitation of bribes, including police and judicial corruption, remained a problem.’⁶⁹
- 6.2.4 The Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index (BTI) ‘2020 Ethiopia Country Report’ (covering the period from 1 February 2017 to 31 January 2019)
- ‘... The federal state of Ethiopia has a unique legal pluralistic structure with many secular and religious courts. They often have some degree of autonomy and independence. However, the judiciary has not been independent. The independence of the judiciary is heavily impaired by political authorities and high levels of corruption. Judicial appointment has been made on the basis of loyalty to the government to ensure that judicial decisions are consistent with government policy, even when that means contravening the rule of law and the constitution. Corruption among judges is widespread, and judges not loyal to the government run the risk of being replaced by a “more suitable” candidate.
- ‘Since a new government under the leadership of an Oromo politician took office, the judiciary changed insofar as several senior officials – mainly from the Tigrayan population – were charged with corruption...
- ‘The Attorney General’s Office also announced that judicial independence is a key area of reform, though steps to address this remain to be implemented....
- ‘Even though the new government pledged to fight corruption, so far, the executive maintains control over the judiciary and the legislature.’⁷⁰
- 6.2.5 The Freedom House report 2020 noted: ‘The judiciary is officially independent, but in practice it is subject to political interference, and judgments rarely deviate from government policy. The November 2018 appointment of lawyer and civil society leader Meaza Ashenafi as president of the Supreme Court raised hopes for judicial reform, though no major improvements were registered in 2019.’⁷¹

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6.3 Due process / fair trial

- 6.3.1 The USSD report 2019 stated: ‘Under the constitution accused persons have the right to a fair, public trial without undue delay, a presumption of innocence, legal counsel of their choice, appeal, the right not to self-

⁶⁸ Home Office, ‘[HO FFM report](#)’, February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu

⁶⁹ USSD, ‘[USSD report 2019](#)’ (section 1.e), 11 March 2020

⁷⁰ BTI, ‘[2020 Ethiopia Country Report](#)’, 2020

⁷¹ Freedom House, ‘[Freedom House report 2020](#)’ (section F), 4 March 2020

incriminate, the right to present witnesses and evidence in their defense, and cross-examine prosecution witnesses.⁷²

- 6.3.2 The same report noted: 'Some detainees reported indefinite detention for several years without charge or trial. Lengthy legal procedures, large numbers of detainees, judicial inefficiency, and staffing shortages contributed to frequent trial delays, in some cases for years. ... The courts did not always presume a defendant's innocence, allow defendants to communicate with an attorney of their choice, provide timely public defense, or provide access to government-held evidence. Defendants were often unaware of the specific charges against them until the commencement of their trials.'⁷³
- 6.3.3 The Freedom House report 2020 noted: 'Due process rights are generally not respected. ... The right to a fair trial is often not respected, particularly for opponents of the government charged under the antiterrorism law...In civil matters, due process is hampered by the limited capacity of the Ethiopian courts system, especially in the peripheral regions where access to government services is weak. As a result, routine matters regularly take years to be resolved.'⁷⁴
- 6.3.4 The UN Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OCHR) 'Summary of Stakeholders Submissions on Ethiopia ' for the Universal Periodic Review, 4 March 2019 in joint submissions from multiple organisations stated:

'Noting that at the previous review, Ethiopia had supported recommendations to strengthen the criminal justice system to ensure easy and fair access to justice for all persons, respect the right to a fair trial, and respect the rights of all persons to due process of law, particularly the presumption of innocence, JS2 stated that there had been a lack of respect for the right to fair trial and for the presumption of innocence, and that many people had reported being detained without formal charges.

FN stated that the lack of judicial independence had led to the trials of Government critics being riddled with due process violations and with conviction effectively pre-ordained. Due process violations had been particularly egregious for individuals charged under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation.

'JS11 stated that legal aid services for children and other vulnerable groups had been inadequate in terms of accessibility, scope of services and effectiveness. JS13stated that the pro bono scheme was limited to serious criminal cases and the draft national legal aid strategy was yet to enter into force. Also, the Public Defence Office of the Federal Supreme Court had operated with limited capacity and resource constraints.'⁷⁵

See the '[Summary of Stakeholders Submissions on Ethiopia](#)' report (p11-12) for a full list of the organisations who provided submissions.

⁷² USSD, '[USSD report 2019](#)' (section 1.e), 11 March 2020

⁷³ USSD, '[USSD report 2019](#)' (Sections 1.d. and 1.3.), 11 March 2020

⁷⁴ Freedom House, '[Freedom House report 2020](#)' (section F), 4 March 2020

⁷⁵ UN OCHR, '[Summary of Stakeholders' submissions...](#)' (paras 23-24), 4 March 2019

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Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToRs, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Legal context
 - Criminal code
 - Constitution
- Security forces
 - Legal context
 - Reform and restructure
 - Federal forces
 - Intelligence sector
 - Defence
 - Regional security forces
 - Training
 - Impunity
 - Arrest and detention rights
- Police oversight / complaints mechanisms
 - Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
- Judiciary and court system
 - Court system
 - Judicial independence
 - Fair trial

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **1.0**
- valid from **21 September 2020**

Changes from last version of this note

First version.

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