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FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2025

Ethiopia

18
/100

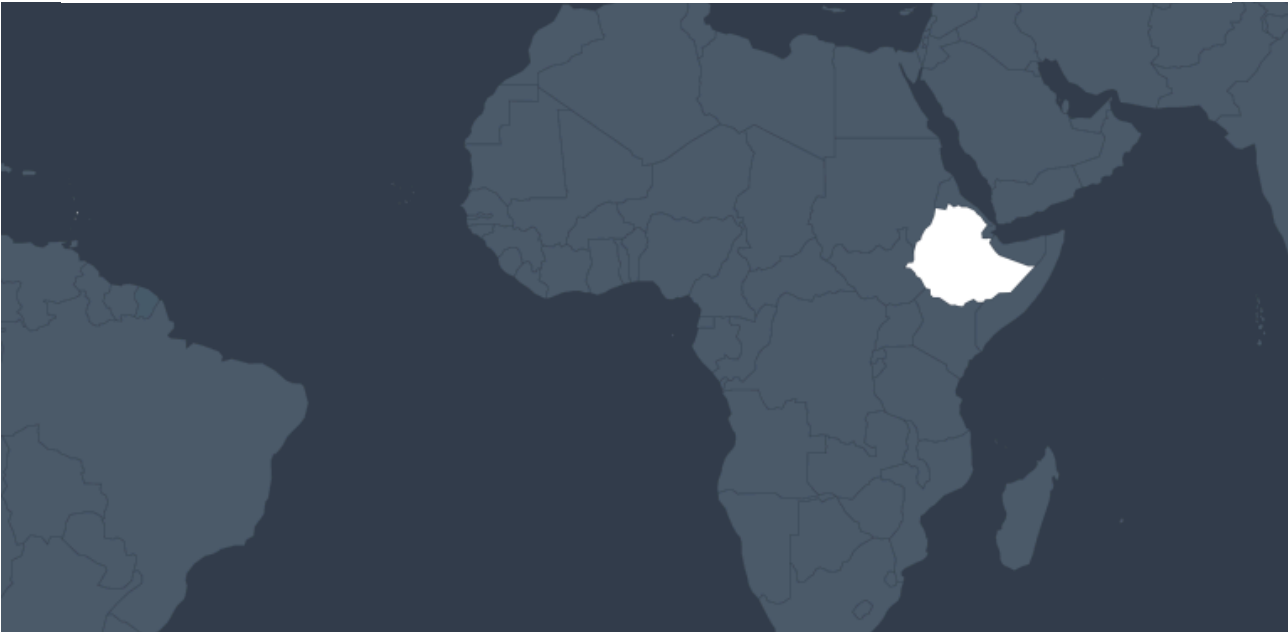
NOT FREE

<u>Political Rights</u>	8 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	10 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

20 /100 Not Free

A country or territory's Freedom in the World status depends on its aggregate Political Rights score, on a scale of 0–40, and its aggregate Civil Liberties score, on a scale of 0–60. See the methodology.



Overview

The 2018 election of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed initially set off a transitional period. Abiy pledged to reform Ethiopia's authoritarian state, undertook legislative reforms, held elections, and implemented some liberalization policies. However, Ethiopia remains beset by internal conflicts and intercommunal violence; abuses by security forces and violations of due process are common, many reformed laws have yet to be implemented meaningfully; and many restrictive laws remain in force. Armed conflicts in the Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray Regions in recent years have caused widespread displacement, and credible allegations of atrocity crimes have emerged.

Key Developments in 2024

- Armed conflict in Amhara and Oromia intensified during the year. Civilians were killed in clashes between government forces and regional militias, and instances of destruction and looting of property, mass arbitrary arrests, restrictions on movement, and internal displacement were reported. From January through November, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data group (ACLED) recorded over 9,000 fatalities from the ongoing conflicts.
- Media outlets and other monitors described a sharp increase in the number of kidnappings for ransom in Amhara and Oromia throughout the year. Criminal groups, militias, and members of the security forces were implicated.
- Thousands of homes and businesses were demolished as in Addis Ababa as part of the government's Corridor Development Project. Thousands of citizens were displaced, many of whom received little advance notice or compensation.
- Journalists and civil society groups came under increasing pressure. In September, the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center condemned "escalating pressure on journalists, including arbitrary arrests, intimidation, threats, and forced self-censorship." Several prominent nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were suspended during the year.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

1/4

The president is the head of state and is indirectly elected to a six-year term in a joint session of both chambers of Parliament. In October 2024, lawmakers selected Foreign Minister Taye Atske Selassie as president. He replaced Sahle-Work Zewde, the country's first woman president, who had served since October 2018.

The prime minister is head of government and is selected by the largest party in Parliament after parliamentary elections, or in the case of a vacancy. Abiy Ahmed was sworn in for a new five-year mandate as prime minister in October 2021, after his Prosperity Party won a parliamentary majority in June and September elections. The results were contested by political actors who were excluded or who did not participate in the process due to perceived unfairness.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

1/4

The bicameral Parliament includes the 153-seat House of Federation, whose members are elected by state assemblies to five-year terms, and the House of Peoples' Representatives, with 547 members directly elected to five-year terms.

The June and September 2021 parliamentary and regional elections, which were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, benefited from changes in electoral laws and reform of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) that improved the body's operations and encouraged more opposition parties to participate. Final results from the NEBE confirmed a majority for the Prosperity Party. As a result of ongoing conflicts, voting in several constituencies was further delayed. Despite some improvements, the elections were fraught with insecurity, registration problems, and other challenges that limited widespread acceptance of the outcomes. Numerous political parties raised concerns about the closure of their offices by security agents, harassment, imprisonment, and killings of their

members. Key opposition groups boycotted the election, leaving many seats uncontested.

Some outstanding legislative and regional elections were held in June 2024. According to African Union (AU) election observers, the elections were held in a peaceful and credible manner.

Regional elections have been postponed in Tigray since 2020.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

2/4

Several reforms to the electoral system and its oversight have taken shape under Prime Minister Abiy. Under a law passed in 2019, restrictions that had impeded opposition groups and the voting rights of prisoners, internally displaced persons, and other groups were reduced.

Challenges that arose during the 2021 polls tested the impartiality and credibility of the NEBE and the broader electoral framework, including difficulties related to the participation of imprisoned candidates and to party accreditation.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

1/4

The transition beginning in 2018 initially brought progressive political reforms, but crackdowns in 2020—first after the assassination of Oromo musician Hachalu Hundessa and then after the beginning of the conflict in Tigray later that year—harmed political pluralism. In 2021, the House of Peoples' Representatives

designated the TPLF and OLA terrorist organizations, accusing them of carrying out acts of politically motivated violence against government officials and civilian targets based on their ethnic identity. Consequently, thousands of Tigrayans and Oromos accused of being affiliated with the TPLF and OLA faced arrest and other pressure. The government removed TPLF from its list of terrorist groups in March 2023. Oromo civilians still face pressure over suspected ties to the OLA.

Amid a broader crackdown in 2024 on government critics, members of opposition parties continued to face restrictions on assembly, harassment, and arrest. In February, authorities arrested at least five prominent political figures, among others, under provisions of a state of emergency, using the designation to deny them due process. In September, seven Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) leaders were released after being detained since 2020, despite earlier court orders mandating their release.

In April 2024, Bate Urgessa, an OLF spokesperson and outspoken critic of the federal government's policies, was killed by an unknown attacker in Oromia. The OLF and Urgessa's family claimed that Urgessa was killed by government security officers. Oromia regional authorities denied involvement. Previously, in February, he had been detained for conspiring to incite unrest after speaking to a foreign journalist.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

0 / 4

Continuing detentions, harassment, and other restrictions has left the opposition with little ability to take part in meaningful political activity in 2024. The Prosperity Party has accused opposition officials and government critics of having links with rebel groups or state enemies, hindered their political participation. Key opposition groups including the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and the OLF boycotted recent elections, citing electoral mismanagement and harassment by the ruling party.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because Ethiopian authorities in recent years have engaged in a pattern of detentions, harassment, and other

restrictions that have left the opposition with little ability to take part in meaningful political activity.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

1 / 4

An ongoing crackdown on opposition figures and others critical of the government impedes avenues for voters to pursue meaningful political participation. Ordinary political activity is also impeded by violent conflict and insecurity.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

1 / 4

The constitution outlines equal rights and protection from discrimination on grounds of race, nationality, color, sex, language, religion, and other categories, but these guarantees are unevenly upheld in practice. Since 1991, political parties in Ethiopia have primarily been formed along ethnic lines, affecting policymaking negotiations and procedures and at times resulting in the exclusion of minority ethnicities. Women remain significantly underrepresented in political leadership positions. Ethiopia criminalizes LGBT+ activity, and LGBT+ people do not identify themselves openly due to discrimination and persecution.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

1 / 4

The shortcomings of the 2021 elections, including a climate of insecurity and growing repression of opposition groups, presaged a stall in political reform. Many Ethiopians do not enjoy representative rule in practice due to the crackdown on opposition politicians and ongoing conflict.

The federal government does not wield control over areas plagued by conflict, such as parts of Amhara and Oromia. Other areas have experienced prolonged states of emergency with heightened military presence and control, including parts of Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Gambella, and Oromia.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

1 / 4

Corruption and unequal resource distribution are significant problems that have contributed to civil unrest. Petty bribery and corruption, often involving local officials and police, are widespread. Corruption within the justice system remains a significant challenge. The Prosperity Party has accused public servants and opposition politicians of corruption as a political weapon to punish dissent.

Among other incidents, in December 2023, the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission accused federal and regional officials of dismissing anticorruption personnel in their offices for exposing misconduct carried out by those officials. Food-aid distribution has been impacted by official corruption, prompting the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to temporarily suspend food deliveries in 2023.

Media outlets and other monitors described a sharp increase in the number of kidnappings in Amhara and Oromia throughout 2024, with victims frequently alleging that officials or security forces were involved and had taken a share of high ransoms. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission attributed the abductions to both criminal gangs and members of the government security forces.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to pervasive corruption in Ethiopia, including recent, credible reports of security forces' involvement in kidnappings for ransom.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

1/4

Government transparency is generally poor. Processes for hiring civil servants are opaque, facilitating patronage appointments. Public consultation on economic reforms is lacking. The government's Corridor Development Project in Addis Ababa has been implemented with minimal public input, and aspects of funding are opaque.

Very little information is available about counterinsurgency operations and ethnic conflicts in Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, and Oromia. The extent of the human rights abuses and war crimes committed in these areas remains difficult to verify.

Add Q

Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group?

-2

Since the war in northern Ethiopia began in 2020, Amhara regional forces have taken control of and attempted to annex areas in Western Tigray, with the support of Ethiopian and Eritrean forces. Regional officials and Amhara security forces reportedly ordered the removal of thousands of Tigrayans, while Amhara forces were implicated in an ethnic-cleansing campaign against Tigrayans. Ethnic displacement has continued to occur in Tigray after the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) was reached in 2022. In April 2023, the Associated Press reported that Amhara forces had displaced some 47,000 Tigrayans from the Mai Tsebri area, citing UN data. In June 2023, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that regional authorities and Amhara security forces were engaged in ethnic cleansing, targeting Tigrayans in the Western Tigray Zone. Members of the Fano militia, an ethnic Amhara group, were also accused of forcibly expelling civilians.

In Oromia, Amhara militants have been implicated in the killings of Oromo civilians and displacement of tens of thousands of people in areas bordering Amhara. Fano

militants were also accused of attacking ethnic Oromo residents within Oromia during the 2020–22 Tigray conflict.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	1/4
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Journalists in Ethiopia are constrained by security concerns that limit their ability to work and travel, government pressure, arrest, and the threat of expulsion. International and Ethiopian journalists and outlets often come under government pressure over their coverage of internal conflict and other political dynamics. Ethiopian journalists, who risk arrest without charge or violent attack, are known to use pseudonyms or self-censor. Most private media outlets are established with a goal of satisfying distinct political or ethnic groups’ interests. Reports from state media agencies must follow the ruling party’s narrative; content that contradicts that narrative is removed.

Media repression continued in 2024. In February, a French journalist for the Paris-based Africa Intelligence outlet left the country after he was arrested and briefly detained following allegations of conspiracy. Journalist Muhiyadin Mohamed Abdullahi was sentenced to two years in prison in May after facing charges under the Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation for a video in which he criticized road closures in Somali Region. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) documented six journalists imprisoned in Ethiopia in 2024, five on “antistate” charges and one for whom charges were not disclosed. In September, the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center condemned “escalating pressure on journalists, including arbitrary arrests, intimidation, threats, and forced self-censorship,” saying journalists are consequently “forced to leave their jobs and some to flee the country.”

The board of the Ethiopian Media Authority (EMA) is supposed to be selected in an open and transparent process. But in 2022, Parliament violated a 2021 media law, which provided a more liberal media framework, to appoint Prosperity Party members to the EMA board. In 2024, Parliament introduced a draft amendment that would move responsibility for appointing the director general of the EMA to the prime minister's office from the House of Peoples' Representatives. The amendment drew criticism from media bodies and civil society, who argued that it would increase the government's control over the EMA. The amendment had not been passed at year's end.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

1 / 4

The Ethiopian constitution guarantees religious freedom, and different faith groups have coexisted in the country for centuries. However, religion has increasingly become a divisive factor in Ethiopian politics, and local conflicts have featured violence along religious lines.

In February 2024, four Orthodox Christian priests were killed at a monastery in East Shewa Zone, Oromia, with local authorities blaming the OLA. In March, two Orthodox clergymen were killed by unknown assailants in Dodola, also in Oromia, along with five of their family members. In April, violence targeting Muslim civilians was reported in several towns in Amhara, with at least 10 reported deaths, according to ACLED; the Amhara Region Islamic Affairs Council said 80 Muslim civilians had been killed in the previous eight months.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

1 / 4

Academic freedom remains restricted in Ethiopia. Self-censorship remains common in the context of ongoing conflicts and political tensions.

Most institutions of higher education are funded and administered by the federal government, which also sets admission standards and student quotas. The

Ministry of Education still monitors and regulates official curriculums.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

1 / 4

The government's crackdown on opposing views has pushed individuals to refrain from commenting on sensitive topics, including political issues. Ethiopians fear expressing personal views due to ongoing civil conflict and the government's conduct; authorities have engaged in extrajudicial executions, mass killings, nationwide sweeps, raids, and arrests. Public figures have made statements inciting violence, particularly against Amhara and Oromo people.

Government security agencies surveil individuals and politicians through wire-tapping. Digital surveillance is widespread. Ethiopian authorities are able to hack into detainees' mobile phones after purchasing a surveillance system from Cellebrite, an Israeli firm. Security-agency personnel are trained to observe suspicious discussions or statements critical of the government, which also employs informants.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

0 / 4

Free assembly is restricted by insecurity and associated declarations of states of emergency or martial law. Parts of Amhara and Oromia are under the de facto control of command posts that can restrict local freedoms in the areas under their purview. Government crackdowns on critical and opposing voices have further curtailed freedom of assembly throughout the country.

Government authorities at times violently disperse protests. In September 2024, Amhara police and local militias clashed with protesters in Gondar city in Amhara

after thousands of people gathered to protest the killing of a child by an unidentified armed group. Security forces and militias used lethal force against protesters, with reports of the number of deaths ranging between 4 and 25.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

1 / 4

Under a civil society law passed in 2019, the federal Authority for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO) retains broad powers. Human rights– and governance-related nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are generally able to legally operate, but many are unable to access large parts of Ethiopia in practice due to security challenges or a lack of official approval. Some discourse is tolerated in civil society but NGOs face threats and warnings for advocating for issues contrary to the government’s position, especially in relation to internal conflict.

In June 2024, dozens of local human rights NGOs issued a statement condemning the increasing crackdown on civil society, including intimidation campaigns, arbitrary arrests, and state pressure against human rights defenders.

In August, a press conference organized by women’s rights organizations to raise awareness about child abuse was dispersed by the police, who reportedly said the event was unauthorized. In December, three human rights NGOs—the Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy, the Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia, and Lawyers for Human Rights—were suspended by the ACSO on allegations of political bias and acting contrary to national interest. Later that month, two additional NGOs, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council and the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center, were also suspended by the ACSO following allegations that they had acted beyond their mandate and lacked independence.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?

1 / 4

The constitution recognizes the right of workers to join trade unions, and more than 700,000 workers are organized under the umbrella of the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions. However, independent unions have faced harassment in the past, and there has not been a legal strike in Ethiopia since 1993.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	1 / 4
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The constitution guarantees judicial independence, but courts face political interference and lack autonomy in practice. Recent reforms have embedded structural flaws and institutional biases, such as granting military courts exclusive jurisdiction over crimes involving military personnel, which contradicts international standards and undermines prosecutorial independence.

Judges who attempt to exercise independence face removal from cases or arrest. According to Amnesty International, several judges in Amhara were detained in 2024 for pushing back against government interference in cases. Courts remain complicit in ensuring impunity for security forces, especially in relation to the treatment of political prisoners.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	0 / 4
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Due process rights are generally not respected. The right to a fair trial is often not respected, particularly for government critics. In civil matters, due process is hampered by the limited capacity of the judicial system, especially in the peripheral regions where access to government services is weak. As a result, routine matters regularly take years to be resolved. Prosecutors, meanwhile, face pressure from politicians. Human rights abuses and extrajudicial punishments by security forces occur throughout the country, and those who commit such abuses go unpunished. The attorney general's office was placed under the

Ministry of Justice in 2021, giving the ministry considerable powers over investigations and limiting prosecutorial independence.

Authorities continued to engage in mass arrests. Thousands of people, including academics and prosecutors, were arbitrarily arrested in Amhara in September and October, including a number of academics and civil servants.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

O / 4

Ongoing conflicts have contributed to insecurity in several regions of Ethiopia, and government forces and armed groups have committed serious abuses with impunity. The TPLF waged an armed campaign against the federal government from 2020 to 2022 before the two sides accepted the CoHA. While violence in Tigray has subsided, violent clashes between the TPLF and ethnic Amhara militias occurred in February and March 2024.

Armed conflict and political violence worsened in Amhara and Oromia in 2024. An ongoing government campaign to suppress armed opposition groups in the regions has led to repeated clashes. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission in February reported that government forces had killed 45 civilians in Amhara over suspicions they were affiliated with the Fano. Beginning in July, the Fano increased attacks against federal forces in Amhara, leading to greater insecurity and attacks on civilians. The government denied its involvement in a November attack in Amhara where a drone dropped bombs on a market and an adjacent health center, reportedly killing more than 40 people. The OLA in Oromia were also blamed for civilian casualties in 2024 amid clashes with federal forces. From January through November 2024, ACLED recorded over 9,000 fatalities from the ongoing conflicts in Amhara and Oromia.

In December, the government said it had signed a peace deal with a splinter faction of the OLA.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

0/4

Ongoing conflicts in some regions and political tensions throughout the country have inflamed ethnic divisions, contributing to discriminatory policies and actions.

Conflicts in Amhara, Oromia, and other areas have contributed to internal displacement. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 4.5 million people were internally displaced as of June 2024.

Same-sex activity is prohibited by law and punishable by up to 15 years' imprisonment.

Women face discrimination in education. A gender gap persists in many aspects of economic life, including pay.

Despite near-universal primary school enrollment, access to quality education and other social services varies widely across regions and is particularly poor in lowland states.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

0/4

While the constitution establishes freedom of movement, local conflicts impede people's ability to travel freely, particularly in Oromia and Amhara. Most Ethiopians feel safer in their home region than elsewhere. States of emergency empower authorities to restrict movement and impose curfews.

In January 2024, three drivers were killed by OLA forces for alleged violations of transport strikes.

Media outlets and other monitors described a sharp increase in the number of kidnappings for ransom in Amhara and Oromia throughout 2024. In July, 100 people, mostly students, were kidnapped by suspected members of the Oromo Liberation Army.

Education Cannot Wait, a project operated under UNICEF, reported in December 2024 that 18 percent of schools in Ethiopia had been destroyed or damaged.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

1 / 4

Conflict has hindered people's ability to exercise property rights and resulted in the destruction and looting of private property.

In 2024, thousands of residential homes and businesses were demolished in Addis Ababa as part of the government's Corridor Development Project. Thousands of citizens were displaced, many of whom received little advanced notice or adequate compensation for resettlement.

All land must be leased from the state. A gender gap persists in many aspects of economic life including land and access to finance.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

1 / 4

Legislation protects women's rights, but these rights are routinely violated in practice. Enforcement of laws against rape and domestic abuse is inconsistent, and cases routinely stall in the courts. Particularly in conflict-affected areas, people have few legal protections in practice. The UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) in 2023 noted that federal forces, regional forces, and militants engaged in sexual violence during the Tigray conflict. A survey of women in Tigray by health experts released in 2023 found that 43

percent of some 5,100 respondents had experienced some type of gender-based violence.

Forced child marriage is illegal but common in Ethiopia, and prosecutions for the crime are rare. Female genital mutilation is also illegal, but the law is inconsistently enforced.

LGBT+ people do not have social freedoms and do not publicly identify themselves for fear of violent retaliation.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

1/4

Protections from labor abuses are lacking in practice. However, reports from industrial parks suggest that working conditions can be precarious, and child labor is prevalent in many agricultural households despite a labor law setting the working age at 15. The government has been hesitant to implement a minimum wage law for fear of deterring investors and businesses.

An antitrafficking law stipulates strict punishments for crimes such as sexual exploitation and human trafficking. People in Ethiopia, particularly women and girls, continue to experience forced labor, debt bondage, and other forms of exploitation.



On Ethiopia

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Country Facts

Population

123,400,000

Global Freedom Score

18/100 **Not Free**

Internet Freedom Score

27/100 **Not Free**

Other Years

2024

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