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& Asylum Research and Documentation

# Ethiopia: COI Compilation

November 2019



Bundesministerium  
Inneres



ACCORD is co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, UNHCR and the Ministry of the Interior, Austria.

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November 2019

This report serves the specific purpose of collating legally relevant information on conditions in countries of origin pertinent to the assessment of claims for asylum. It is not intended to be a general report on human rights conditions. The report is prepared within a specified time frame on the basis of publicly available documents as well as information provided by experts. All sources are cited and fully referenced.

This report is not, and does not purport to be, either exhaustive with regard to conditions in the country surveyed, or conclusive as to the merits of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Every effort has been made to compile information from reliable sources; users should refer to the full text of documents cited and assess the credibility, relevance and timeliness of source material with reference to the specific research concerns arising from individual applications.

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Austrian Red Cross/ACCORD  
Wiedner Hauptstraße 32  
A- 1040 Vienna, Austria

Phone: +43 1 58 900 – 582  
E-Mail: [accord@redcross.at](mailto:accord@redcross.at)  
Web: <http://www.redcross.at/accord>



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## List of abbreviations

ADP - Amhara Democratic Party  
AEDP - All Ethiopian Democratic Party  
ADFM - Amhara Democratic Forces Movement  
AG - Attorney General  
AHRE - Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia  
ANDM - Amhara National Democratic Movement  
ARENA - Arena Tigray For Democracy and Sovereignty  
ARRA - Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs  
ATP - Anti-Terrorism Proclamation  
BAITONA - National Congress of Great Tigray  
BGR – Benishangul-Gumuz regional state  
CRVS - civil registration and vital statistics  
CSO - civil society organisations  
DHS - Demographic and Health Survey  
E-ZEMA - Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party  
ECPSJ - Ethiopian Citizens Party for Social Justice  
EDF - Ethiopian Defense Forces  
EDP - Ethiopian Democratic Party  
EFP - Ethiopian Federal Police  
EHRC - Ethiopian Human Rights Commission  
EHRCO - Ethiopian Human Rights Council  
ENDF - Ethiopian National Defence Force  
EOC - Ethiopian Orthodox Church  
EPLF - Eritrean People's Liberation Front  
EPRDF - Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front  
ESAT - Ethiopian Satellite Television  
ESDP - Ethiopian Social Democracy Party  
FBC - Fana Broadcasting Corporate  
FBI - US Federal Bureau of Investigation  
GAM - Global Acute Malnutrition  
GBV - Gender Based Violence  
GRM - Gambella Regional Movement  
HNL - Harari National League  
IDP - internally displaced person  
INSA - Information Network Security Agency  
LGBT - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender  
Medrek - Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum  
METEC - Metals and Engineering Corporation  
MoP - Ministry of Peace  
NAMA - National Movement of Amhara  
NEBE - National Electoral Board of Ethiopia  
NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation  
NGP - New Generation Party  
NISS - National Intelligence and Security Service  
ODF - Oromo Democratic Front  
ODP - Oromo Democratic Party  
OFC - Oromo Federalist Congress

OLA - Oromo Liberation Army  
OLF - Oromo Liberation Front  
OLF-SG - Oromo Liberation Front – Shane Group  
OMN - Oromia Media Network  
ONLF - Ogaden National Liberation Front  
OPDO - Oromo People Democratic Organisation  
PG7 - Patriotic Ginbot 7  
SGBV - sexual and gender-based violence  
SEPDM - Southern Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement  
SLM - Sidama Liberation Movement  
SOE - state of emergency  
SNNP(R) - Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (Region)  
SNNPRS - Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ regional state  
TAND - Tigray Alliance for National Democracy  
TPDM - Tigray People’s Democratic Movement  
TPLF - Tigray People's Liberation Front  
TRT - Third Revolution Tigray  
UAG - unidentified armed group  
UASC - unaccompanied or separated children  
UDJ - Unity for Democracy and Justice  
UP - Unity Party  
VPN - Virtual Private Network  
WBO - Waraana Bilisummaa Oromoo  
WCHR - Wolayta Committee for Human Rights  
WSLF - Western Somali Liberation Front

# 1 Background information

## 1.1 Geographical information

Ethiopia is a landlocked country in Eastern Africa that shares borders with six countries, namely Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. Ethiopia's territory extends over approximately 1,104,300 square kilometres.<sup>1</sup> The total population is estimated to be approximately 108 million<sup>2</sup>, second only to Nigeria on the African continent (CIA, last updated 5 November 2019). 87% of the total population live in rural areas, 4% in peri-urban areas and 9% in urban areas (IOM, May 2019, pp. 10-11), the major urban centres being the capital Addis Ababa (3,238,000) and Mekele (315,000) (Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019, 2019, p. 514).

### 1.1.1 Map of Ethiopia



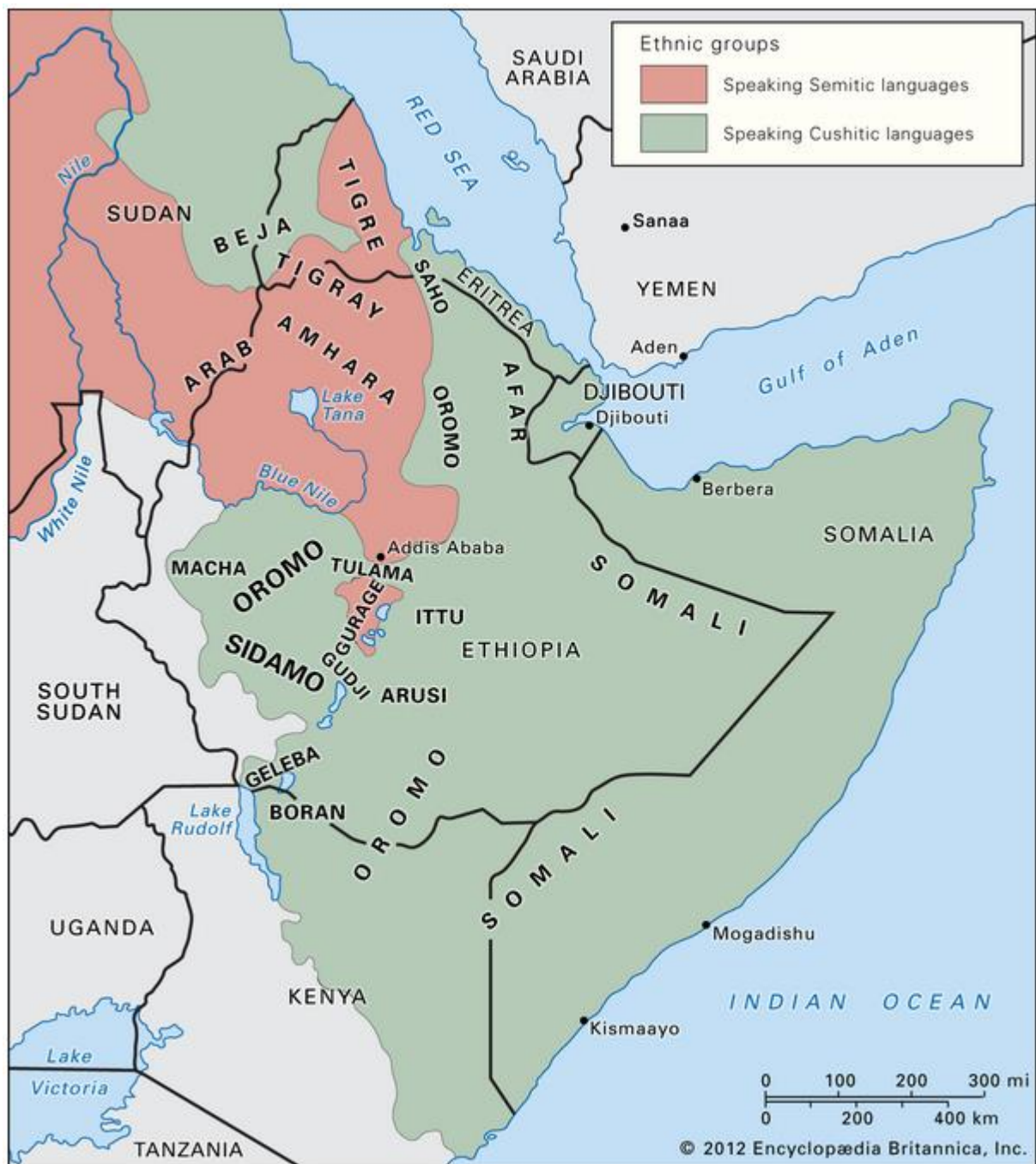
Source: [CIA, 2000](#)

<sup>1</sup> Numbers of area and population are approximate, because a large portion of the border between Ethiopia and Somalia is undefined (CIA, last updated 5 November 2019) and the most recent Census data dates back to 2007.

<sup>2</sup> The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs in its World Population Prospects 2019 report estimates the total population of Ethiopia in 2019 to be 112,079,000 (UNDESA, 2019, p. 22).



### 1.1.2 Territories of major ethnic groups



Source: [Encyclopædia Britannica, 2012](#)

For an overview on ethnic groups in Ethiopia, please see [section 1.3](#) of this compilation.

## 1.2 Brief overview of political institutions

According to the constitution, the head of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is the president, who is elected by the parliament and serves a six-year term (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Articles 69 and 70). The president fulfils a largely ceremonial role (DFAT, 28 September 2017, p. 8; compare powers and functions of the president in Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 71). In 2018 parliament elected the diplomat Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde as Ethiopia's first female president (BBC News, last updated 24 June 2019).

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is a federation comprising of states (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 46). The federal legislature consists of two chambers: the lower chamber, the House of Peoples' Representatives (currently 547 seats) and the upper chamber, the House of the Federation (currently 153 seats). Members of both chambers serve a five-year term respectively (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section A2). The members of the House of Peoples' Representatives decide issues related to national infrastructure, nationality, war and federal statutes (International IDEA, undated; compare Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 55). They are elected directly on the basis of universal suffrage (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 54). Of the maximum 550 seats of the house, at least 20 seats are reserved for "minority Nationalities and Peoples" (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 54). The members of the House of the Federation are representatives of Ethiopia's Nations, Nationalities and Peoples. They are elected by state councils and decide issues related to the states' rights. Within the House of the Federation each "Nation, Nationality and People" shall be represented (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Articles 61 and 62).

According to the constitution, the highest executive powers of the federal government are vested in the prime minister and in the Council of Ministers (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 72/1). The powerful prime minister is head of government and is designated by the ruling party in the lower chamber, which is also responsible to nominate a candidate for the presidency (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 71; Encyclopaedia Britannica, last updated 22 August 2019). The prime minister is also Commander-in-Chief of Ethiopia's armed forces (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 74). In April 2018, Abiy Ahmed took office as prime minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 3; ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 15; Addis Standard, 2 January 2019).

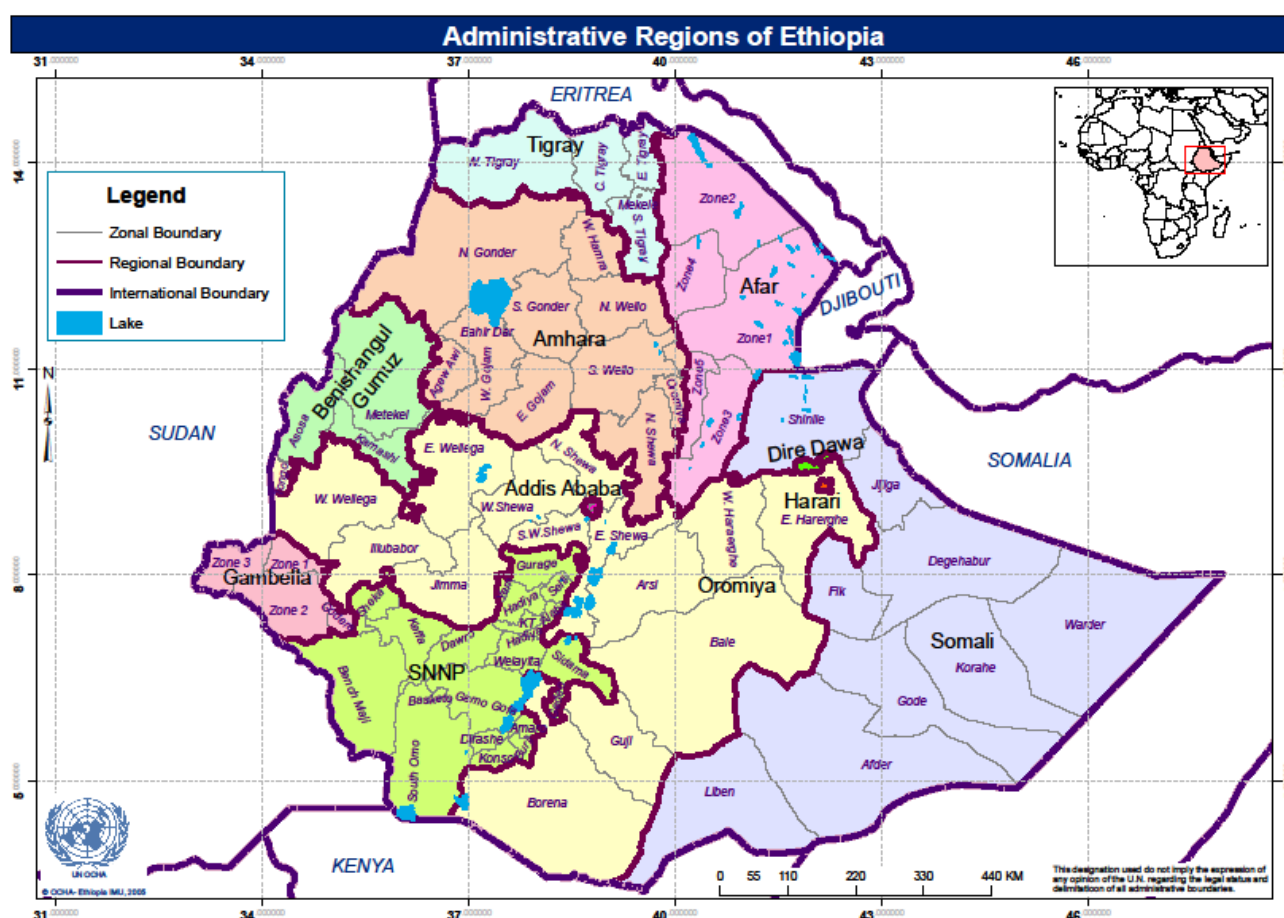
The constitution provides for an independent judiciary and determines that "Supreme Federal judicial authority is vested in the Federal Supreme Court". On state level, it provides for State Supreme Courts, High Courts and First-Instance Courts (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 78).

According to the regime typology used in the Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), the research and analysis division of The Economist Group, Ethiopia is governed by an "authoritarian regime" (EIU, 2019). Freedom House, a US-based NGO which conducts

research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom and human rights, designates the Federal Republic of Ethiopia in 2018 as “not free” (Freedom House, 4 February 2019).

Since 2011 the country has been ruled, up to the present day, by a coalition of four parties, the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) (for information on EPRDF, please see [section 1.2.2](#) below). There are no opposition parties represented in parliament (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section B2), the military has been influential in the country’s politics (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section B3), the judiciary is subject to political interventions (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section F1) and results of the 2015 elections have been predetermined (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018, p. 9).

### 1.2.1 Federal structure



Source: UNOCHA, 31 October 2005

For a more detailed administrative map of Ethiopia see:

- UNOCHA - UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Ethiopia – Administrative Map, 15 August 2017  
<https://reliefweb.int/map/ethiopia/ethiopia-administrative-map-15-aug-2017>

The foundation of Ethiopian federalism was established in 1995, when a new constitution became effective as the result of major political changes in the country (Halabo, January 2016, p. 2). In May 1991 the communist military Derg regime (Derg literally means committee), came

to an end, when the liberation movement took over. The Derg had ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991 under the leadership of Mengistu Hailemariam and was ousted by joint action of ethno-nationalist liberation groups, the most prominent being the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) (Halabo, January 2016, pp. 6-8; FES, January 2011, p. 9).

After the Derg had been deprived of power, a Transitional Government of Ethiopia was set up to prepare a new constitution (FES, January 2011, p. 9). The Derg had pursued a policy of Ethiopian nationalism and centralization of power and was responsible for human rights abuses against opposing ethnic groups. The 1995 constitution, which was drafted against the background of the decision to build a political system based on ethnicity, reflects a backlash against the ethnic violence (International IDEA, undated) and the centralized authoritarian state structure of the Derg regime. It introduced a federal system that stipulates ethnic right to self-determination up to secession (Halabo, January 2016, p. 2). The constitution was ratified on 8 December 1994 and came into force on 21 August 1995 (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995), defining the existing federal arrangement (FES, January 2011, p. 9; DFAT, 28 September 2017, p. 5).

#### *The regional states and their population*

Articles 1 and 2 of the 1995 constitution establish the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, which comprises the territories of the members of the federation (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Articles 1 and 2). Article 47 lists the nine member states of the federation, often referred to as regions or Killil (Plural: Killiloch) (FES, January 2011, p. 10), as follows:

The State of Tigray,  
The State of Afar,  
The State of Amhara,  
The State of Oromia,  
The State of Somalia,  
The State of Benshangul-Gumuz,  
The State of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples,  
The State of Gambela Peoples,  
The State of the Harari People (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 47).

Additionally there are two self-governing administrations: the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa and the city of Dire Dawa, located in east-central of the country (CIA, last updated 5 November 2019). The administration of Addis Ababa is responsible to the Federal Government and residents of Addis Ababa shall be represented in the House of Peoples' Representatives (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 49). The city of Dire Dawa "has been accountable to and directed by the Federal Government since 1993" (Proclamation No. 416/2004, p. 1).

With regard to demographic data it must be noted that the most current data available derive from the latest National Population and Housing Census, which was conducted by the Ethiopian Central Statistical Agency (CSA) in 2007 (CSA, 2007, p. i). A subsequent census was originally

due in 2017 but has been postponed since several times<sup>3</sup>. Despite upcoming elections in 2020, parliament voted in June 2019 to delay the census again (Reuters, 10 June 2019). The total population of Ethiopia in 2007 was declared 73,750,932 by the CSA (CSA, 2007, p. 73). Estimates show that this number has increased significantly up to an estimated 108 million people in 2018 (CIA, last updated 5 November 2019) and 112 million in 2019 (UNDESA, 2019, p. 22). For this reason, the following numbers should be treated with caution, as significant changes might have occurred along with the large population growth.

The 2007 Census shows that regional states differ largely in size and population, yet they share equal rights and powers (FES, January 2011, p. 13). According to the constitution, borders of the federal states shall be drawn along ethnic lines, “on the basis of the settlement patterns, language, identity and consent of the people concerned” (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 46). Therefore, Ethiopia’s system has been described as “ethnic federalism” (USIP, 31 July 2019; Birru, 3 December 2018; ICG, 4 September 2009). In a 2009 report The International Crisis Group (ICG), an international NGO working to prevent deadly conflict, states that the result of the creation of nine ethnic-based regional states and two federally administered city-states is “an asymmetrical federation that combines populous regional states like Oromiya and Amhara in the central highlands with sparsely populated and underdeveloped ones like Gambella and Somali” (ICG, 4 September 2009). The 2007 Census enumerated the population of Ethiopia’s federal states (regions) and of the two self-governing administrations Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa as depicted in the table (based on CSA, 2007, p. 7) below:

States and self-governing administrations	total population
Oromia Region	26,993,933
Amhara Region	17,221,976
SNNP	14,929,548
Somali Region	4,445,219
Tigray Region	4,316,988
Affar Region	1,390,273
Benishangul- Gumuz	784,345
Gambella Region	307,096
Harari Region	183,415
Addis Ababa City Administration (self-governing administration)	2,739,551
Dire Dawa City Administration (self-governing administration)	341,834
Especial Enumeration Area <sup>4</sup>	96,754
total	73,750,932

<sup>3</sup> In a 5 April 2019 article, the Addis Standard reports that in March 2019 the government has postponed the population and housing census indefinitely, due to security reasons (Addis Standard, 5 April 2019). For an analysis of the reasons for postponement please see the full article: Addis Standard, In-depth analysis: the postponement of the 4th Ethiopian Census: was it justified and what next? 5 April 2019, <http://addisstandard.com/in-depth-analysis-the-postponement-of-the-4th-ethiopian-census-was-it-justified-and-what-next/>

<sup>4</sup> Special enumeration areas indicate national parks, forest reservations and collective quarters with more than 100 individuals such as boarding schools, university dormitories, police camps, correctional facilities, orphanages and hospitals (CSA, April 2012, pp. 30-31).

Relatively bigger ethnic groups form their own state. The states Oromia, Amhara, Somali, Tigray and Afar are named after the predominant ethnic group within their territory, accountable for 88% up to 97% (according to the 2007 census) of the respective states' population. The other states are ethnically more diverse, and the vast majority of the around 80 ethnic groups listed in the "country total" table of the 2007 Census (CSA, 2007, pp. 73-74), are joined in multi-ethnic regions (Halabo, January 2016, p. 13).

The introduction of ethnic-based states might lead to the impression that Ethiopia consists of ethnically homogenous states, which is not the case. Although, for example, according to the enumeration in 2007, 88% of the population of the state of Oromia are ethnic Oromos, Oromos live in all of Ethiopia's states as a minority and even form the majority (51%) in the Harari Region (CSA, 2007, pp. 85-86). In a January 2019 opinion piece published in the *The New York Times* (NYT), Mahmood Mamdani<sup>5</sup> refers to this situation emphasising that "nonnative ethnic minorities live within every ethnic homeland" and thus "the fiction of an ethnic homeland creates endless minorities" (NYT, 3 January 2019). In the three states SNNP, Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz none of the census-listed ethnic groups constitutes a majority within the state. In the state of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) the largest ethnic group, the Sidama, are accountable for 19% of its population, followed by the Wolayta (11%), the Hadiya (8%), the Guragie (8%) and the Gamo (7%) (CSA, 2007, pp. 73-90).

#### *The relationship between the federation and the regional states*

The powers and functions of the federal government include the spheres of defence, foreign relations, interstate and international trade and commerce. Furthermore, it determines utilization and conservation of natural resources and it is within its jurisdiction to set national standards regarding public health and education (FES, January 2011, p. 10; Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 51). The constitution grants the states, amongst others, the power to enact and execute a state constitution and to establish a state administration and a state police force (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 52). They also have limited powers over taxation (East Africa Monitor, 1 September 2019; Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 52).

ConstitutionNet, a project of International IDEA, an intergovernmental organisation headquartered in Sweden, summarises the rights of the states briefly as follows:

"Each state maintains its own legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The State Council is the highest authority in each state, and it has the authority to amend the state constitution. Each state is subdivided into smaller local governments. The Constitution calls for each State Council to decentralize the administration to the local authorities."

---

<sup>5</sup> Mahmood Mamdani is the director of the Institute of Social Research at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, and a professor at Columbia University.



(International IDEA, undated; compare Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Articles 50 and 52)

While the working language of the Federal Government is Amharic, the states have the right to choose their own working language (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 5). Regardless of the chosen working language of the state, in all states

“[...] ethnic groups are free to use their own languages in schools, local councils, courts, administration and of course in their dealings with the federal government. (It’s important to note that every ethnic group has the right to self-governance [compare Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 39] and as a result have the right to institute its own local government in its territory where, among other things, it can use its language.” (Regassa, 2004, p. 5)

For a detailed summary of state constitutions please see the following research paper:

- Regassa, Tsegaye: State Constitutions in Federal Ethiopia: A Preliminary Observation, A summary for the Bellagio Conference, March 22-27, 2004  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258152597\\_State\\_constitutions\\_in\\_federal\\_Ethiopia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258152597_State_constitutions_in_federal_Ethiopia)

### *The Constitution and its implementation*

Sources describe a major gap between the broad power frame of the states as envisaged in the constitution and the actual implementation. The Bertelsmann Stiftung, a German non-profit think tank, describes the situation during the rule of the TPLF-led EPRDF (before Abiy became prime minister; for information on EPRDF, please see [section 1.2.2](#) below) as follows:

“Following the 1991 overthrow of the Mengistu regime, the country was restructured as a federal state to respond to the demands for autonomy and self-rule. Though a large measure of self-government and liberalization were enunciated in the constitution, the realities on the ground did not change much for most groups. Ethnic Tigrean elites, who purportedly represent the Tigray people (about 6% of the country’s population), dominate the nation’s political, military, economic and security apparatus, leaving others to feel like second-class citizens in their own country. This group resorts to various strategies and techniques to justify its legitimacy and title to rule. Several ethnic tensions in the south-eastern Oromo areas demonstrate that the legitimacy of the nation-state is seriously questioned by some oppressed people. This is one of the most significant challenges to the government’s legitimacy and the identity of the state as a truly federal and democratic state that respects and values its diverse population.” (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018, pp. 7-8)

“In a federal country with ninety individual languages, with powerful churches, a growing urban middle class and hundreds of thousands of refugees from neighboring countries, it is obvious that the interests of these diverse people are reflected in various institutions of representation. But the degree of their institutional and political autonomy is rather small and even deteriorated during the last decade.” (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018, p. 16)

In a 2016 academic paper, Temesgen Thomas Halabo also refers to the discrepancies between the constitutional setting and the realities in Ethiopia under the TPLF-led EPRDF:

“[D]espite the constitutional commitment for federal system and generously granting broader powers to the regional states, a centralized federal system with monolithic power structure has emerged in Ethiopia. With the exception of opening space for linguistic and ethnic cultural autonomy, so far regional states cannot exercise political autonomy due to the emergence of a dominant one-party system under the EPRDF. The ethnic-based federal system is overly centralized and operated almost like a unitary centralized state. [...] [D]espite constitutional commitment for broader ethnic autonomy up to secession, ethnic federalism has not realized its promises of ethnic self-administration and autonomy. It seems that Ethiopia has not so far entertained the right to self-determination in accordance with the constitutional promise to its ethnic groups except linguistic and cultural autonomy. [...] The EPRDF is instrumentally using the right to self-determination for political mobilization rather than genuinely empowering ethnic groups as per the promise of the constitution. Due to this instrumental approach to ethnicity, ethnic groups are still far from exercising the right to self-determination.” (Halabo, January 2016, pp. 9-11)

The Constitution grants the different nationality groups of the existing nine Federal States, under certain circumstances, the right to establish their own state. One condition is the support of the majority vote in a referendum held in the Nation, Nationality or people that made the demand. The referendum has to be organized by the State Council (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 39). The Sidama people, accountable for 19% (CSA, 2007) of the State of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, have been demanding, sometimes violently, their own region since the ruling EPRDF party came to power in 1991 (Halabo, January 2016, p. 11; Ethiopia Insight, 5 May 2019). Although the constitution stipulates that a referendum should be conducted by the State Council within three years (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 39), the government failed to do so until 20 November 2019, when more than two million people of the Sidama ethnic group voted on creating the 10<sup>th</sup> autonomous federal state (BBC News, 20 November 2019).

#### *Discourse on ethnic federalism and conflict*

Halabo in the above mentioned paper notices that ethnic federalism has been disputed:

“Two contending perspectives have been put forward on the use of ethnic-based federal system to manage ethnic diversity and conflicts. Some hold the view that ethnic federal system helps to democratically manage ethnic diversity and conflicts. While others claim that ethnic federalism leads to the exacerbated levels of ethnic tensions and conflicts instead of pacifying inter-ethnic relations in deeply divided society.” (Halabo, January 2016, p. 11)

The International Crisis Group (ICG) in a 2009 report comments with regard to ethnic federalism that “[w]hile the concept has failed to accommodate grievances, it has powerfully promoted ethnic self-awareness among all groups” (ICG, 4 September 2009). In the above-mentioned



opinion piece in the New York Times from January 2019, Mahmood Mamdani writes on the subject of Ethiopia's ethnic federation:

"Ethnic federalism also unleashed a struggle for supremacy among the Big Three: the Tigray, the Amhara and the Oromo. Although the ruling E.P.R.D.F. is a coalition of four parties, the Tigray People's Liberation Front representing the Tigray minority, has been in the driving seat since the 1991 revolution. The Amhara, dominant before 1991, and the Oromo, the largest ethnic group in the country, complained they were being treated as subordinate minorities. [...] Nearly a million Ethiopians have been displaced from their homes by escalating ethnic violence since Mr. Abiy's appointment [...]. Fears of Ethiopia suffering Africa's next interethnic conflict are growing." (NYT, 3 January 2019)

Another opinion piece by Goitom Gebreluel, a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge, published in April 2019 by Al Jazeera, doubts theories that make ethnic federalism responsible for ethnic violence. He argues that "federalism has only been nominally practised in Ethiopia" and "the notion of self-rule – which is the fundamental principle of ethno-national federalism – has never been practised". Thus the ethno-national groups only attained "cultural autonomy and the opportunity to be governed by non-elected political elites from their own ethnic group." Thus Gebreluel concludes that the reason for a surge in violence is not mainly the Ethiopia's "ethno-national federal arrangement", but "other more significant sources of ethnic tensions and conflicts" (Al Jazeera, 5 April 2019).

### *1.2.2 Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)*

The EPRDF is a coalition of four ethnically based parties, and has been in control of Ethiopian politics (USDOS, 13 March 2019, Executive Summary) since it ousted the Derg military regime in 1991 (The Guardian, 8 July 2018). Four major parties form the coalition of the EPRDF: The Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM) (Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019, 2019, p. 522).<sup>6</sup>

With the objective to unite insurgent groups fighting against the military government and to expand its influence beyond Tigray Province, the TPLF founded the EPRDF in 1989 (Global Security, 9 July 2019). Although the four parties occupy the EPRDF's Council in equal parts, 45 members of a total of 180 members each (Addis Standard, 27 March 2019), the parties do not share equal influence and power, as the Bertelsmann Stiftung describes in its 2018 report (still referring to the period before Abiy Ahmed took office as prime minister in April 2018):

"The Tigray Peoples Liberation Front, the oldest and most powerful member of the party, is responsible for creating and shaping the other parties. Indeed, the other parties representing major ethnic groups in the country such as the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) are not

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<sup>6</sup> The ODP's former name was Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) (Borkena, 20 September 2018), the ADP was known as the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) (Africanews, 1 October 2018), and the SEPDM as the Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Front (SEPDF) (Fiseha, 7 August 2008, p. 90).

considered as movements born out of the struggles of the people they purportedly represent. Instead of serving the interest of their people, they are considered servants of the TPLF among the Oromos and the Amharas.” (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018, p. 14)

The TPLF was founded in 1975 by former marxist-leninist students with the original aim of independence or at least extensive autonomy for the Tigray Province. By the mid-1980s, the TPLF had developed into one of the country’s most active anti-government groups with the main objective of independence swapped for ousting the Derg regime and establishing a new government which should involve all ethnic groups (Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019, 2019, p. 521).

About the founding of the ODP (formerly OPDO) the Political Handbook of the World states the following:

“The OPDO was formed in April 1990 under the direction of the TPLF, its membership reportedly comprising Oromo prisoners of war captured by the TPLF in sporadic clashes with the OLF [Oromo Liberation Front, a party claiming to represent the ethnic group of the Oromo]. The OLF immediately challenged the creation of the OPDO as an ‘unfriendly and hostile gesture’, and the OPDO’s existence remained a source of friction between the TPLF and the OLF.” (Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019, 2019, p. 522).

The ADP (formerly ANDM) was, under the guidance of the TPLF, founded in 1980 by former members of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP) (Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019, 2019, p. 522). The EPRP was almost an exclusively Amhara organisation and later opposed the creation of the Tigrayan-led EPRDF (MAR, 31 December 2003b).

In the SEPDF (which later became the SEPDM) many small parties are merged, most of them ethnically based in the State of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019, 2019, p. 522).

Together with the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front and the Oromo Liberation Front, the EPRDF ousted the then ruling military regime in 1991 (Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019, 2019, p. 521). Within the EPRDF the Tigrayan used to be the dominant party and has since 1991 provided most of Ethiopia’s military and political leadership (Global Security, 9 July 2019), enforcing the interests of the Tigrayan elite (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018, p. 6), until in April 2018 Abiy Ahmed from Oromia’s ruling party ODP became Prime Minister (Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019, 2019, p. 521).

Since the EPRDF’s takeover of power in 1991, elections were held in 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015, all of them won by the EPRDF and affiliated parties. Only in the 2005 elections opposition parties made significant gains. After the results had been questioned by opposition parties, protests led to violent incidents between followers of the opposition and government security forces (DFAT, 28 September 2017, p. 8). In 2009 the government implemented the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation and the Charities and Societies Proclamation, which were used against political opposition groups, critical journalism and human rights organisations. In the following elections in 2010 the EPRDF secured all but one of the 547 seats (Bertelsmann

Stiftung, 2018, p. 9). In the 2015 general election the EPRDF together with its affiliated parties won 100% of the seats and therefore the coalition remains in power for a fifth consecutive term (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 3).

Regarding the 2015 elections, the US-based NGO Freedom House and the German Bertelsmann Stiftung have made the following statements:

“The 2015 parliamentary and regional elections were tightly controlled by the EPRDF, with reports of voter coercion, intimidation, and registration barriers. The opposition lost its sole parliamentary seat, as the EPRDF and its allies took all 547 seats in the House of People’s Representatives.” (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section A2)

“Regarding the elections for the 108-member House of Federation and the nine regional assemblies in 2015, no opposition candidate secured a seat. The results of these elections were already predetermined since all the essential ingredients of a fair and competitive election, such as an independent electoral board, free media, and transparent electoral processes were systematically integrated into the executive branch of the government either through cooption or coercion. Several prominent opposition leaders were jailed before the elections, including those of the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party. Four opposition party members were reportedly killed in the post-election months, and some 400 people were killed in the Oromo revolt against the government.” (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018, p. 9)

The EPRDF controls political institutions as well as the public sphere and discrimination based on political views prevails. On the other hand, membership in the EPRDF entails many advantages as the party owns many businesses and awards jobs to its members and supporters. Likewise, to be considered for employment in the public sector, being a member of EPRDF is expected (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018, p. 9, p. 23; Global Security, 9 July 2019).

Since the election of Abiy Ahmed as new chair of the EPRDF and prime minister of Ethiopia in April 2018, the situation of political opposition and the human rights situation in general has so far improved. Abiy Ahmed is a former military officer (Freedom House, 4 February 2019) who entered politics in 2010 and moved up quickly within the OPDO (The Guardian, 8 July 2018).

In a July 2018 article the British daily newspaper The Guardian writes about Abiy Ahmed:

“Abiy was seen as a relative political outsider before being picked for the top job by the EPRDF council. He is the first leader from Ethiopia’s largest ethnic community, the Oromo, who have complained for decades of economic, cultural and political marginalisation. [...] Analysts say Abiy’s mixed Christian and Muslim background, and fluency in three of the country’s main languages allow the new leader to bridge communal and sectarian divides.” (The Guardian, 8 July 2018)

Global Security, a US-affiliated non-profit think tank providing information and analysis on security-related issues, notes:

“Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed rolled out a package of economic and political reforms since taking office in April 2018. He has lifted a ban on political parties, released journalists, rebels and prisoners, and prosecuted officials accused of abuses. [...] His government was also struggling to contain discontent from Ethiopia’s myriad ethnic groups fighting the federal government and each other for greater influence and resources. Outbreaks of ethnic violence have displaced around 2.4 million people, according to the United Nations.” (Global Security, 9 July 2019)

BBC News observes in an article from 29 June 2019 that Abiy Ahmed’s reforms have brought more freedom to political players and movements and by doing so have lifted a lid on ethnic tensions (BBC News, 29 June 2019). The US-affiliated Think Tank Global Security sees ethnic politics responsible for ethnic tensions:

“Ethnic politics have come at the expense of meritocracy and economic efficiency. Ethnic politics provide the four EPRDF parties with ethnic constituencies whose support is guaranteed through the perpetuation of a discourse of ‘ethnic-interests’ and fear of other groups. Party officials consistently and systematically frame disputes in nationalistic terms and mobilize their ethnic constituencies. Political elite competition has consequently spilled over into communal conflicts.” (Global Security, 9 July 2019)

Freedom House notices that the EPRDF is internally divided by tensions between the coalition partners:

“Ongoing friction inside the ruling coalition between the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which previously dominated decision-making as well as resource allocation, and the other ethnically based parties, including Prime Minister Abiy’s Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO), continues.” (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section B4)

From 16 to 18 November 2019 an EPRDF Executive Committee meeting took place regarding the establishment of a new party called “Prosperity Party” (FBC, 19 November 2019; Addis Standard, 18 November 2019; see also Ezega, 27 November 2019). On 28 November 2019 Ezega notes:

“In urgent sessions held on Wednesday, the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) and the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) unanimously approved the merger of the ruling coalition EPRDF, he said. The premier also said he is sure that the general assembly of the Southern Ethiopian Peoples’ Democratic Movement (SEPDM) will approve the merger.” (Ezega, 28 November 2019)

### 1.3 Ethnic groups in Ethiopia

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is an ethnically diverse country, which according to the 2007 Census is home to about 80 different ethnic groups. The 2007 National Population and Housing Census enquired about ethnic identity of the population:

“In the 2007 Census, ‘Ethnic identity’ of respondents was obtained through the question ‘What is (NAME’S) ethnic group?’ Ethnic group (nation/nationality) of a person is traced through his/her national or tribal origin. A detailed list of ethnic groups in the country was obtained from the House of Federation.” (CSA, 2007, p. 71)

The CIA World Factbook lists the largest ethnic groups as follows:

ethnic group	% of total population
Oromo	34.4%
Amhara (Amara)	27%
Somali (Somalie)	6,2%
Tigray (Tigrinya)	6.1%
Sidama	4%
Gurage	2,5%
Welaita (Wolayta)	2.3%
Hadiya	1.7%
Afar (Affar)	1.7%
Gamo	1.5%
Gedeo	1.3%
Silte	1.3%
Kefficho	1.2%
other	8.8%

Table based on CIA World Factbook (est. 2007), last updated 5 November 2019

As all Ethiopian languages enjoy equal recognition, there is no national language (Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019, 2019, p. 514). Amharic is spoken by approximately 60% of Ethiopians (The Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019, 2019, p. 515).

Of the country's 70 spoken languages (The Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019, 2019, p. 515) the most commonly spoken languages in Ethiopia, as cited by the CIA World Factbook (CIA, last updated 5 November 2019, est. 2007) are:

language	% of total population
Oromo (official working language in the state of Oromiya)	33.8%
Amharic (official working language of federation)	29.3%
Somali (official working language of the state of Sumale)	6.2%
Tigray (Tigrinya) (official working language of the state of Tigray)	5.9%
Sidamo	4%
Wolaytta	2.2%
Afar (official working language of the state of Afar)	1.7%
Hadiyya	1.7%
Gamo	1.5%
Gedeo	1.3%
Opuuo	1.2%
Kafa	1.1%
other	8.1%

Table based on CIA World Factbook (est. 2007), last updated 5 November 2019

## *Oromo*

According to the 2007 Census, the Oromo are accountable for more than one third of Ethiopia's population. They live mainly in southern Ethiopia with settlements in most of the central and western Ethiopian provinces including the southern parts of the Amhara region. Historically the Oromo were pastoralists and a large number of Oromos in the southern provinces pursue this way of life until today. In the east and north, however, the Oromo are sedentary agriculturalists, due to assimilation of local customs and continuous mingling with the Amhara and Sidama (Encyclopaedia Britannica, last updated 2 March 2018). The original language of the Oromo people is a Cushitic language, Afaan Oromo (Oromifa, Oromo), but the majority of the Oromos speak Ethiopia's official language of Amharic (MAR, 31 December 2003a).

Oromo are in their majority Sunni Muslims (Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019, 2019, p. 515) or Christians of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The southern, semi-nomadic Oromo groups, however, kept their traditional faith, believing in a sky god (Encyclopaedia Britannica, last updated 2 March 2018; MAR, 31 December 2003a).

Although the Oromo form the biggest ethnic group in Ethiopia, historically, they have been politically marginalized (MAR, 31 December 2003a) and have suffered a history of exclusion by the Ethiopian government (MRG, last updated January 2018). In consequence of their relative dispersal throughout the country and varying beliefs they have generally been less socially united than the Tigrayans or Amhara (MAR, 31 December 2003a).

## *Amhara*

The Amhara are the second numerous ethnic group in Ethiopia, accounting for more than one-fourth of the population. The Amhara live predominantly in the central and western parts of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian central highlands, and are primarily agriculturalists. The Amharic language belongs to the Ethiopian Semitic languages and is the official working language of the federation. The Amhara are in general Christian and together with the Tigrayans the principal adherents of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Encyclopaedia Britannica, last updated 4 October 2018). Ethiopian history was for a long time dominated by the Amhara, many of whom perceive their ancestors as the original founders of the Ethiopian nation (MAR, 31 December 2003b).

## *Somali*

Approximately 6 percent of Ethiopian population are ethnic Somali (CSA, 2007). The Ethiopian Somali belong by language, religion and custom to the larger ethnic group of Somali people, occupying all of Somalia and parts of Djibouti and Kenya (Encyclopaedia Britannica, last updated 18 March 2014). In Ethiopia they live mainly in the eastern part of the country, near the border of Somalia. Traditionally the Somali are nomadic herdsman, a rural and pastoral people (Encyclopedia Britannica, last updated 18 March 2014), who rely on cattle and other animals for their livelihood. Frequent droughts in the Somali state have a terrible impact on the livestock and in consequence on the Somali people (DW, 23 September 2019).

Their society is based on kinship group and clans (Encyclopaedia Britannica, last updated 18 March 2014; MAR, 31 December 2003c). The Somali language belongs the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family (Encyclopaedia Britannica, last updated 18 March 2014). Since the 14th century Somali converted to Islam (Encyclopedia Britannica, last updated 18 March 2014), which is their predominant confession.

### *Tigray*

According to the 2007 Census, the Tigray (Tigrai, Tigrinya) are accountable for 6% of Ethiopia's population (CSA, 2007). The Tigray inhabit the State Tigray in the North of the country and central Eritrea. Traditionally they are sedentary agriculturalists. They speak Tigrinya, which belongs to the Ethiopian Semitic languages. Most Tigray adhere, as do the Amhara, to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Although the Tigray share religious and cultural common features with the Amhara, the two groups are separated by linguistic differences and political rivalry (Encyclopaedia Britannica, last updated 19 January 2015).

The ethnic Tigray have since 1991 through the TPLF dominated the ruling party EPRDF (Global Security, 9 July 2019), until Abiy Ahmed from Oromia's ruling party became Prime Minister in April 2018 (Ethiopia Insight, 28 September 2019). Therefore, they were perceived as a powerful minority and as dominating Ethiopia's political and business elite (The Guardian, 8 July 2018). Abiy's leadership faces headwinds in Tigray, as a 28 September 2019 Ethiopia Insight Article reports:

"In Tigray, his [Abiy Ahmed's] leadership was disputed. No party and people have opposed Abiy's administration as vehemently as the TPLF and Tigrayans. They accuse the federal government of failing to deliver justice regarding crimes committed by previous administrations and criticize allegedly selective arrests of Tigrayans; a concern shared by Human Rights Watch. To many Tigrayans, Abiy is a demagogue, whipping up ethnic-based resentment and tying them to TPLF abuses to shore up his base." (Ethiopia Insight, 28 September 2019)

## 2 Main political developments

### 2.1 Anti-government protests 2015-2017

#### 2.1.1 *Planned expansion of Addis Ababa*

The International Crisis Group (ICG) in February 2019 notes that protests “first erupted in Ethiopia’s largest and most populous regional state, Oromia, in April 2014, in response to the federal government’s Addis Ababa Integrated Regional Development Plan (also referred to as the Master Plan), which aimed to widen the capital city’s jurisdiction over parts of Oromia.” (ICG, 21 February 2019, pp. 3-4)

The Rift Valley Institute (RVI), an independent, non-profit research and training organisation working with communities and institutions in Eastern Africa, in a September 2018 report mentions that the “protests were initially driven by Oromo opposition to the so-called Addis Ababa Master Plan - a top-down, poorly communicated plan for integrated development of the city - perceived to be administrative encroachment and absorption of Oromia territory by the federal government.” (RVI, September 2018, p. 1)

The Berlin-based civil law foundation Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) mentions that “tens of thousands have been protesting against the compulsory purchase of land set aside for expanding the capital, Addis Ababa” since the end of 2015. (SWP, July 2018, p. 1)

ICG goes on to provide the following account of the protests:

“Oromo youths took to the streets in over two hundred locations across the region, defying security forces that deployed in ever larger numbers. Protesters opposed not only what they perceived as continued TPLF [Tigray People’s Liberation Front] domination of federal political, economic and security institutions, but also what they viewed as the pliant and corrupt OPDO [Oromo People Democratic Organisation], which they accused of selling off Oromia’s resources – land in particular. They also gave voice to the deep Oromo resentment of historical neglect by the capital. Demonstrations continued sporadically throughout 2014 and early 2015, when the EPRDF [Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front] finally halted the Master Plan in its tracks. But in November 2015, just six months after the EPRDF’s massive electoral win, protests broke out again. The government responded with a mix of repression and vague promises of reform (*tiluq tihadeso*). In January 2016 the ruling party formally abandoned the Master Plan and promised to change the OPDO leadership. It did not, however, follow through right away on the latter pledge.” (ICG, 21 February 2019, pp. 3-4)

The Congressional Research Service (CRS), which provides research for the United States Congress, in a November 2018 report states that “as protests over the perceived marginalization of the Oromo (the largest ethnic group) and the Amhara (second largest) escalated”, the authorities “responded with force and large-scale arrests” in late 2015. (CRS, 27 November 2018, p. 2)

In September 2016 Lemma Megersa was elected as Oromo People Democratic Organisation (OPDO) (renamed to Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) in 2018) chairman. The former speaker of the Oromia State Assembly “had grown more popular since he openly supported the protests



that began in 2015.” Nonetheless protests continued and gained “critical momentum in early October.” (ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 4)

On 2 October 2016 “scores of people, possibly hundreds, died at the annual Irreecha cultural festival of Ethiopia’s ethnic Oromo people, following a stampede triggered by security forces’ use of teargas and discharge of firearms in response to an increasingly restive crowd” (HRW, 19 September 2017). After these events the “protesters blocked the main roads in Oromia, attacking government properties and foreign-controlled businesses” (ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 4).

In Amhara regional state protests began in mid-2016. The initial grievances included “the incorporation into Tigray regional state of historically Amhara-populated lands” and the “resentment of Tigrayan domination and neglect”. As in Oromia region, “some local elites and elements of the regional security forces sympathised with the protesters”. (ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 4)

In March 2019 the TV station Africanews, which is headquartered in Pointe-Noire, Republic of the Congo, reports on protests “tied to land rights of the Oromo people”. The article further notes:

“The Oromia regional government in Ethiopia has slammed the Addis Ababa city administration over its handling of allocation of condominium houses. The government issued a statement on Thursday shortly after multiple protests were held across the region after low-cost buildings were distributed by the deputy mayor of the city, Takele Uma Banti. Oromia rejected as unnecessary what it said was the handing over of condominium units found within a special zone of the region while disputes still remain over the exact boundaries of Addis Ababa. The city administration earlier this week allocated about twelve thousand of the estimated 51,000 flats built by government. The move was mainly to solve acute shortage of housing.” (Africanews, 8 March 2019)

### *2.1.2 State of emergency (October 2016 - August 2017)*

On 9 October 2016 the government “declared a state of emergency throughout the country” (Addis Standard, 9 October 2016) “allowing it to deploy the army nationwide, shut down communication lines, limit freedom of speech and make arbitrary arrests” (ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 5). According to the US Department of State (USDOS) the State of Emergency established “an executive body called the Command Post” that “managed security policy under the leadership of the minister of defense”. The Command Post had the power “to detain individuals, restrict speech, and restrict movement”. (USDOS, 20 April 2018, Executive Summary)

An October 2017 article published by Open Democracy, a UK-based political website funded by a number of philanthropic organisations, mentions that the Command Post “was de facto under the control of the heads of the army and the security services. In reality, the country’s entire administration was ‘militarised’”. This meant in particular that the Command Post took over

the authority over the armed structures (e.g. regional police, security, militias) of Ethiopia's nine states from their governments. (Open Democracy, 22 October 2017)

At the beginning of November 2016 “the government finally made a political concession” (ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 6) as Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn “announced a Cabinet reshuffle” and the parliament approved 21 new appointees, including two new ministers - both members of the Oromo - replacing members of the Tigrayan ethnic group (VOA, 2 November 2016). According to ICG the “move did not stop the protests, but in the meantime the state of emergency allowed the government to ratchet up repression” (ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 6).

On 13 November 2016 Qatar-based TV news network Al Jazeera reports that around 11,607 people were arrested since the announcement of the state of emergency in October 2016 (Al Jazeera, 13 November 2016). According to the February 2019 ICG report the “arrests quickly halted the protests’ momentum” (ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 6). The international human rights organisation Amnesty International (AI) similarly notes that under “the state of emergency, more than 11,000 people were arrested” adding that the detentions were carried out “without access to a lawyer, their family or a judge” (AI, 22 February 2017). The State of Emergency was lifted on 4 August 2017 (USDOS, 20 April 2018, Executive Summary; Addis Standard, 22 August 2017).

## **2.2 Resignation of Hailemariam Desalegn and selection of Abiy Ahmed Ali**

ICG in its February 2019 report notes that the government “was convinced it had the discontent under control and lifted the state of emergency” in August 2017, but “protests quickly resumed.” (ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 12)

In January 2018 British online news The Independent mentions that Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn “announced plans to drop charges against political prisoners and close a notorious prison camp in what he called an effort to ‘widen the democratic space for all’” (The Independent, 3 January 2018). Freedom House notes that in January 2018 hundreds of political prisoners were released, including the leader of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), Merera Gudina (Freedom House, 4 February 2019). The German international broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW) notes that “Merera was released along with 115 others from a federal prison on the outskirts of the capital” (DW, 17 January 2018). DW also reported on the release of journalist Eskinder Nega and opposition leader Andualem Arage on 14 February 2018 and Bekele Gerba of the OFC the day before. DW called them “the most prominent political prisoners” to be freed in that particular week, in which 700 prisoners were promised to be released by the government (DW, 14 February 2018). On 22 February 2018 the US broadcast institution Voice of America (VOA) reports that within the last month „up to 6,000 prisoners across Ethiopia” have been released (VOA, 22 February 2018).

On 15 February 2018 several media sources report that Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned (Al Jazeera, 15 February 2018; BBC News, 15 February 2018; The Guardian, 15 February 2018). BBC quotes Hailemariam as noting that his resignation was “vital in the bid to carry out reforms that would lead to sustainable peace and democracy” (BBC News, 15 February 2018). According to the ICG, Hailemariam surprisingly resigned from his functions

as prime minister and EPRDF chairman. ICG further notes that “security forces struggled to contain further protests, prompting the government to declare another six-month state of emergency.” (ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 12)

In September 2018, the RVI notes that neither the state of emergency from October 2016 to August 2017 nor the internal-party reform (called “deep renewal”) could prevent a second outbreak of protests in February 2018 and the declaration of another state of emergency. The source goes on to elaborate:

“This time protests also exposed the internal EPRDF divisions with two of its constituent parties - the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) and the Oromo Peoples’ Democratic Organization (OPDO) - publicly siding with the protestors’ demands. The long-standing EPRDF discipline of democratic centralism was further eroded when significant numbers of EPRDF parliamentarians voted against the second SoE [state of emergency].” (RVI, September 2018, p. 1)

The ICG report notes that “in February the EPRDF’s ethnic parties convened their respective executive and central committees to prepare for the election of a new EPRDF chairman”, resulting in the OPDO passing its chairmanship from the popular Oromo regional state president Lemma Megersa to the region’s vice president Abiy Ahmed Ali. In the EPRDF Central Committee chairman election, Abiy Ahmed Ali was surprisingly backed by ANDM chairman Demeke Mekonnen after the TPLF had “declined to offer its own candidate, suspecting the other coalition members would not support another Tigrayan prime minister” (ICG, 21 February 2019, pp. 14-15). Abiy Ahmed was elected as EPRDF chairman on 27 March 2018 and became prime minister on 2 April 2018 (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 3; ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 15; Addis Standard, 2 January 2019).

### **2.3 Political reforms from February 2018 to November 2019**

In April 2019 DW reports that “in his inaugural speech, Abiy pledged to reform the judicial and political systems” (DW, 1 April 2019). In June 2018 the state of emergency was lifted two months earlier than planned (Al Jazeera, 5 June 2018; CNN, 5 June 2018). The United States Institute of Peace (USIP), which is funded by the US Congress, mentions that among the most commonly cited achievements attributed to Abiy’s tenure are “the freeing of political prisoners, the rapprochement with archenemy Eritrea, the easing of restrictions on civil liberties, and the appointment of a gender-balanced cabinet.” (USIP, 2 April 2019)

In its World Report covering 2018, Human Rights Watch (HRW), an international non-governmental organisation that conducts research and advocacy on human rights, provides an overview on the developments after Abiy Ahmed took office:

“After years of widespread protests against government policies, and brutal security force repression, the human rights landscape transformed in 2018 after Abiy Ahmed became prime minister in April. The government lifted the state of emergency in June and released thousands of political prisoners from detention, including journalists and key opposition leaders such as Eskinder Nega and Merera Gudina. The government lifted restrictions on access to the internet, admitted that security forces relied on torture, committed to legal

reforms of repressive laws and introduced numerous other reforms, paving the way for improved respect for human rights. In July, Ethiopia and Eritrea resolved a decades-long stalemate, signed a peace agreement and agreed to implement the 2002 international boundary commission decision. Relations between the countries had been violent or frozen since their troops clashed in the border town of Badme in 1998. Parliament lifted the ban on three opposition groups, Ginbot 7, Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in June. The government had used the proscription as a pretext for brutal crackdowns on opposition members, activists, and journalists suspected of affiliation with the groups. Many members of these and other groups are now returning to Ethiopia from exile.” (HRW, 17 January 2019)

Foreign Affairs, an American magazine of international relations and U.S. foreign policy, summarises Abiy’s reforms in September 2018 as follows:

“The government has released political prisoners, allowed exiled dissidents to return home, decriminalized armed opposition groups, and lifted a contentious state of emergency. The speed of the changes has been dizzying. In April, Abiy suggested that Ethiopian prime ministers should adhere to strict term limits. In June, he admitted that the state had engaged in serious human rights abuses, going so far as to call the government’s past conduct a form of terrorism. And in July, he committed himself to holding free and fair elections in 2020.” (Foreign Affairs, 10 September 2018)

In June 2019 British public service broadcaster BBC News reports that Abiy “had released political prisoners, appointed women to more than half of his cabinet posts, persuaded a noted dissident to head the country’s election board, and staged an historic rapprochement with neighbouring Eritrea after decades of conflict” (BBC News, 29 June 2019). In March 2019 British daily newspaper The Guardian notes that since April 2018 Abiy “has been lauded for opening up Ethiopia’s political space and making peace with neighbouring Eritrea” (The Guardian, 14 March 2019). The same article further notes:

“Last month, Abiy was nominated for a Nobel peace prize. His government has also been praised for passing a new refugee policy hailed as a model of compassion and forward-thinking. Yet the dire situation facing millions of people forced from their homes by conflict, and the new regime’s approach to their plight, has invited a more sceptical response from some observers.” (The Guardian, 14 March 2019)

And the ICG in February 2019 notes:

“To date, however, much as Abiy’s pronouncements have generated great excitement and enthusiasm, many policy details remain unclear and critics question how far he has thought through his program of change. In particular, the details of the Ethiopian-Eritrean rapprochement and the peace agreements with the OLF and ONLF have yet to be fully revealed.” (ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 19)

In October 2019 The Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded Prime Minister Abiy “for his efforts to achieve peace and international cooperation, and in particular for his decisive initiative to

resolve the border conflict with neighbouring Eritrea” (The Nobel Foundation, 11 October 2019).

The New Humanitarian (TNH), formerly the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), in October 2019 cites commentators and critics and notes the following regarding challenges the Prime Minister is facing:

“In the aftermath of Abiy’s reforms – most of which were achieved within his first 100 days in office – some commentators are suggesting he moved too fast: especially in a large country whose political system is based on ethnic federalism to maintain harmony across nine regions that are home to more than 80 different ethnic groups. ‘In Ethiopia, everything is based on ethnicity; it’s the first thing people think about – it is even on your ID card,’ said Obang Metho, founder and executive director of The Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia, a local civic organisation that promotes dialogue to achieve change. ‘Ethnicity is anti-democratic by definition, as it excludes,’ said Metho. ‘Changing a country planned on ethnicity will take a lot.’ The rapid pace of reforms, critics argue, has given breathing room to some of the ethnic-based ambitions that Abiy’s more repressive predecessors, such as Meles Zenawi, kept in check. Increasing numbers of ethnic parties have emerged, many with an openly bigoted message. Some have played on historic grievances between the different ethnic groups and reignited territorial border disputes that have resulted in mass displacement.” (TNH, 16 October 2019)

### *2.3.1 Expansion of civil and political rights*

#### *Organisation of Civil Societies Proclamation*

According to the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL)<sup>7</sup> a Legal and Justice Affairs Advisory Council was established by the new Prime Minister to review amongst others the Charities and Societies Proclamation of 2009 and the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ICNL, last updated 11 October 2019). The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), a coalition of non-governmental organisations, notes that in July 2018, “a 13-member Law and Justice Advisory Council was appointed with the task of reviewing the CSO [civil society organisations] Law, the Anti-terrorism Law (Proclamation No. 652/2009, 28 August 2009) and the Media Law. The first of the three reforms, concerning the revision of the CSO Law of 2009, was finally concluded in February 5, 2019” (OMCT, April 2019). As noted by ICNL, the new CSO Proclamation entered into law in March 2019 (ICNL, last updated 11 October 2019). In July 2019 the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) concludes that the repealing of the Proclamation on Charities and Societies and its replacement with the new Proclamation on Civil Society provides “robust protection for freedom of association while putting in place a reasonable regulatory and accountability mechanism” (HRC, 5 July 2019). HRW notes that “significant progress has been made, particularly around the revision of the Charities and Societies Proclamation, which regulates the conduct of civil society. Questions

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<sup>7</sup> The ICNL is a non-governmental organisation based in Washington, D.C., that provides information on the legal environment for civil society and public participation

remain however about how the law, including registration, will be implemented” (HRW, 4 April 2019). The report further details the new law:

“In February, the government approved the Organization of Civil Societies Proclamation and repealed the 2009 CSO law. The new law lifts the 10 percent foreign funding limit, the intrusive powers of the CSO agency, and the lack of appeal process over registration. There are some concerns with the law, including limitations on foreign lobbying, but overall the law is a marked improvement on the previous law. It is not yet clear when new civil society organizations will be able to register under this new law. While some domestic civil society organizations were given the opportunity to provide comment on draft versions of the law, there was little opportunity for public comment, a concern given that domestic civil society groups working in these areas had been decimated since the 2009 law. There was also little transparency around the contents of the final version of the law that was passed, even within some government circles.” (HRW, 4 April 2019)

In April 2019 the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to peaceful assembly and of association, Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, commend Ethiopia’s reforms of its laws on civil society organisations. The UN experts however say that “a number of worrying provisions were added to the text during its revision by Ethiopia’s Council of Ministers, including changes to the Civil Society Agency Board, compromising its independence and granting it additional powers to dissolve organisations” (OHCHR, 4 April 2019).

Jon Temin, the director of Africa programs at Freedom House, explains that “while there are several concerning provisions in the law, including those that put limits on the activities of international nongovernmental organizations and the broad powers of the Civil Society Agency, the new law is a substantial break from its predecessor” (Freedom House, 9 February 2019).

According to the March 2019 proclamation, the former “Charities and Societies Regulation No.168/2009 and Directives issued by the Agency prior to the enactment of this Proclamation shall be [valid] for one year from the promulgation of this Proclamation in the Federal Negarit Gazette to the extent that they do not contravene with the provisions of this Proclamation” (Proclamation No. 1113/2019, 12 March 2019, Article 88; see also ICNL, last updated 11 October 2019).

For detailed findings and information on the Organizations of Civil Societies Proclamation please see pp. 8 to 9 of the April 2019 OMCT report:

- OMCT - World Organisation Against Torture: Ethiopia: The 2019 CSO Law: Winds of change for human rights defenders in Ethiopia?, April 2019  
[http://www.omct.org/files/2011/04/25315/omct\\_ethiopia\\_briefing\\_web\\_version.pdf](http://www.omct.org/files/2011/04/25315/omct_ethiopia_briefing_web_version.pdf)

The Organizations of Civil Societies Proclamation of 12 March 2019 can be accessed under the following link:

- Proclamation No. 1113/2019 - Organizations of Civil Societies Proclamation, 12 March 2019 (published in the Federal Negarit Gazeta of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia)  
<http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Ethiopia/CSOproc2019.pdf>

### *Anti-terrorism draft law*

On 2 March 2019 The Reporter Ethiopia newspaper states that a “revised document of the contested anti-terrorism law has been tabled for discussions with legal experts this week introducing a number of new provisions in a bid to protect the rights of those convicted or charged of terrorism and related crimes” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 2 March 2019). The Ethiopian Embassy in Brussels notes that the anti-terrorism draft law was approved by the Council of Ministers on 18 May 2019 and was referred to the Parliament for approval (Ethiopian Embassy in Brussels, 21 May 2019). In June 2019 The Reporter Ethiopia mentions that Members of Parliament referred the anti-terrorism draft law with a “unanimous vote to the Legal, Justice and Administration Standing Committee for further revisions to be conducted jointly with the Foreign Affairs and Peace Standing Committee” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 8 June 2019). According to the July 2019 report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review the 2009 Proclamation on Anti-terrorism was “at an advanced stage of revision” (HRC, 5 July 2019).

### *Media law and Computer Crime Proclamation (“hate speech law”)*

HRW mentions in April 2019 that “the Freedom of Mass Media and Information Proclamation was one of the laws Abiy pledged to revise”, however “a new draft of the law is not yet available” (HRW, 3 April 2019). According to the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review “the legal regime governing the press” was “at an advanced stage of revision” (HRC, 5 July 2019).

In July 2019 Addis Fortune, a private newspaper based in Addis Ababa, notes that the Media Law Reform Working Group, operating under the Justice and Legal Advisory Council identified four laws dealing with media issues in its amendment process (Addis Fortune, 27 July 2019; see also The Reporter Ethiopia, 16 March 2019). The Freedom of Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation (Proclamation No. 590/2008, 4 December 2008) was split up into the freedom of mass media section - which is bundled together with the Broadcast Service Proclamation (Proclamation No. 533/2007, 23 July 2007) – and the access to media information section, which became a separate proclamation. The first draft of the merged Mass Media Proclamation was sent “for stakeholder deliberation” in June 2019. Regarding the contents of the draft bill and further process the article notes:

“Along with allowing the opening up of non-nationals' equity ownership in media companies, the bill proposes the decriminalisation of defamation. Besides liabilities arising from the criminal law, the current broadcasting service law gives power to the Ethiopian Broadcast Authority to confiscate property used for broadcasting defamatory content. In the draft law, defamation can only be raised in civil suits with a claim ceiling of 300,000 Br. ‘Defamation is proposed not to be considered a crime to protect freedom of speech as well as to stop the abuse of the provision by government officials,’ Solomon [Solomon Goshu, the secretariat of the Media Law Reform Working Group] told Fortune. The law also proposes to lift current law restrictions when it comes to cross-platform media ownership. The draft allows a media institution to own a newspaper, magazine, radio and television channel. Owners of print media companies can also own whatever number of print outlets. The final validation workshop took place last Saturday, July 27, 2019, and the bill is



expected to move to the Council of Ministers in August 2019. The team also wishes the legislation to take place when parliament returns from recess this October. The bill also proposed the establishment of a transparent and impartial regulatory body by restructuring the Ethiopian Broadcast Authority and making it report to parliament. It also proposes that media operators step into a judicial review if they are discontented with the decisions of the Authority.” (Addis Fortune, 27 July 2019)

As of mid-November 2019 no further information regarding the current status of the Mass Media Proclamation could be found.

In November 2018 the Office of the Attorney General began drafting a law on hate speech. Some international organisations fear that the law could curtail free speech (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section D4; see also Addis Fortune, 13 April 2019). Amnesty International for instance notes in May 2019 that the draft law “criminalizes intentional publication, distribution and possession of hate speech that incites discrimination, demonization, belittling, and violence” while the definition of the elements of these crimes remains unclear. AI is concerned that the “proposed law could be misused to criminalize the right to freedom of expression and press freedom” (AI, 3 May 2019). The US-based NGO Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) in April 2019 notes that the “proposed law on hate speech is splitting opinion” (CPJ, 29 April 2019).

According to a blog entry published on the website of the public research university London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), on 6 April 2019 “the Ethiopian government released a draft of a piece of criminal legislation aimed at tackling the ever-increasing problem of hate speech and disinformation in the country.” (LSE, 4 June 2019)

The blog entry written by Halefom H. Abraha, a PhD candidate and Marie Curie research fellow at the University of Malta, contains further information on the proposed legislation on hate speech and misinformation:

- LSE - London School of Economics and Political Science: The problems with Ethiopia’s proposed hate speech and misinformation law, author: Halefom H. Abraha, 4 June 2019 <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2019/06/04/the-problems-with-ethiopias-proposed-hate-speech-and-misinformation-law/>

In November 2019 the Council of Ministers approved “the bill drafted by the Attorney General to prevent fake news and hate speech” and sent it to the House of Peoples Representatives for approval (FBC, 9 November 2019). The official name of the bill is the Computer Crime proclamation. Only few details are available regarding the content of the law (Ezega, 9 November 2019; Africanews, 11 November 2019). According to media sources the bill “could be controversial with the public and international human rights bodies” (Ezega, 9 November 2019), and “receive some backlash from journalists and human rights activists especially” (Africanews, 11 November 2019). Ethiopian online portal Ezega cites information from the attorney general’s office, noting that “defamatory speech could get someone at least three years in prison per the new law” (Ezega, 9 November 2019).



As of mid-November 2019 no further information regarding the current status of the Computer Crime Proclamation could be found.

For further information on freedom of the media, please also refer to [section 5.2](#) of this compilation.

### *Electoral law*

In November 2018 HRW mentions that “former opposition leader, lawyer and judge Birtukan Midekssa was named head of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)” (HRW, 22 November 2018). HRW further explains:

“Following years of almost completely closed political space, Ethiopia’s government continues to institute an important series of reforms. The appointment of a highly respected - and crucially, independent - new elections chair is another step in the right direction.” (HRW, 22 November 2018)

In July 2019 Ezega reports that “the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia has introduced a new electoral law”. The draft law faced strong resistance in parliament and “is expected to be approved at the extraordinary session of the national parliament before recess” in August (Ezega, 24 July 2019). The Reporter Ethiopia, a private newspaper published in Addis Ababa, notes that 33 opposition parties issued a statement on 1 August 2019 demanding “the revocation of 20 articles and the amendment of 13 others from the newly drafted electoral law which is now tabled before the House of People’s Representatives.” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 3 August 2019a)

Reuters news agency notes that on 24 August 2019 that lawmakers “revised election laws to pave the way for polls next year, but some opposition parties said the changes would make it more difficult for them to challenge the ruling coalition.” (Reuters, 24 August 2019)

Canada-based online news Borkena in August 2019 notes with regard to the new electoral legislation:

“Ethiopian Parliament whose members are entirely from the ruling coalition called an emergency meeting on Saturday to debate and approve draft legislation which will govern elections, political party formation and ethics. The bill was prepared by Law, Justice and Democratic Affairs standing Committee in the parliament. The committee amended 149 articles including the name of the draft bill, according to state-affiliated Fana Broadcasting Corporation (FBC). The House of People’s Representative endorsed the bill unanimously after debate on the draft. FBC report said that ‘Ethiopian Election, Political Parties Registration, and Election Ethics’ is the new name given to the proclamation. Political parties activities, candidates activities, legal activities during election and use of mass media are among the issues amended in the legislation.” (Borkena, 25 August 2019a)

For a draft version of the Ethiopian Electoral and Political Parties Proclamation, please see:

- The Ethiopian Electoral and Political Parties /DRAFT/ Proclamation, undated (uploaded on chilot.me on 19 July 2019)  
<https://chilot.me/2019/07/the-ethiopian-electoral-and-political-parties-draft-proclamation/>

As of mid-November 2019 no further information regarding the current status of the Ethiopian Electoral and Political Parties Proclamation could be found.

## 2.4 Sidama referendum

The BBC notes in an article published in July 2019 that shortly after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office “Sidama activists submitted their request for a referendum on having their own officially recognised region” within Ethiopia’s Federation (BBC News, 22 July 2019).

According to the ICG, “Sidama demands are rooted in Ethiopia’s imperial history and the construction of the multinational federation in the mid-1990s” (ICG, 4 July 2019, p. 3). The ICG report provides the following brief overview on the history of the Sidama statehood struggle:

“Violence associated with the Sidama’s statehood struggle has periodically erupted in Hawassa, a diverse city with a population of almost 400,000 that is growing at around 4.8 per cent a year. It is both the capital of Southern Nations regional state and the administrative centre of Sidama Zone (zones are administrative sub-units within regions and in the highly diverse Southern Nations mostly have a single ethnic character), which sits on the eastern edge of Southern Nations and probably has slightly more than four million residents. In 2002, police allegedly killed dozens of protesters on Hawassa’s outskirts during demonstrations against measures removing the city from Sidama Zone and making it directly accountable to the regional government. Four years later, then-Prime Minister Meles Zenawi persuaded Sidama leaders to suspend their pursuit of a regional state after the Sidama zonal council voted for a referendum on statehood.” (ICG, 4 July 2019, p. 4)

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) mentions “Ethiopia’s federal constitution required the authorities to organize a referendum within a year of the statehood request being made” (USIP, 6 August 2019). Similarly, the BBC reports that a referendum must be held “within a year of a request from any ethnic group which wishes to form a separate entity” (BBC News, 22 July 2019). In May 2019, Ethiopia Insight<sup>8</sup> notes that to achieve statehood, “two-thirds of the legislature of the relevant district must vote for the move, and then the next tier of government, in this case the SNNPRS [Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ regional state] administration, must organize a ‘referendum’ within one year of receiving the request” (Ethiopia Insight, 5 May 2019).

The deadline for the Sidama referendum was 18 July 2019 (USIP, 6 August 2019; BBC News, 22 July 2019; DW, 18 July 2019). ICG notes that the government “largely neglected the problem” and did not prepare to meet “its constitutional obligation to hold the referendum”

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<sup>8</sup> Ethiopia Insight is a news website providing analysis and commentary on Ethiopia and is owned and edited by Crisis Group Senior Analyst William Davison.

(ICG, 19 July 2019). Some Sidama activists “threatened to unilaterally declare Sidama’s statehood” on 18 July 2019, “arguing that the undue delay in holding the referendum justified such a declaration” (USIP, 6 August 2019; see also BBC News, 22 July 2019). A day before the deadline the “Sidama community’s leadership deferred a formal declaration of statehood, acceding to a plan by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)” to hold a referendum within five months (USIP, 6 August 2019). According to DW there were “fears that a unilateral announcement could lead to violence and possible bloodshed” (DW, 18 July 2019).

USIP notes that the announcement came “too late to prevent the loss of life. Some citizens protested in favor of statehood demands, and in a heavy-handed crackdown, government security agencies clashed with civilians. Fatalities, injuries and property losses were reported in towns including Aleta Wendo, Hagere Selam, Melga, Yirgalem, and the SNNPR state capital and largest city, Hawassa.” (USIP, 6 August 2019)

Reuters reports that according to state-affiliated Fana Broadcasting “at least 17 people were killed in clashes between security forces and activists seeking a new autonomous enclave for the Sidama community” (Reuters, 23 July 2019). According to the BBC “at least 25 people have died in clashes between Ethiopian security forces and activists in southern Ethiopia” (BBC News, 22 July 2019). The Africa Report, an English-language monthly magazine created by Paris-based Groupe Jeune Afrique, mentions that the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) said that “60 people were killed in the days following the 18 July clashes” (The Africa Report, 2 August 2019). According to an August 2019 article by the news portal East Africa Monitor “more than 50 people were killed in clashes between activists and security forces” (East Africa Monitor, 8 August 2019). The regional police called the figure given by the SLM exaggerated, however the government “acknowledged that 53 people died and 54 others were wounded between 18-22 July [2019]” (The Africa Report, 2 August 2019).

Trying to calm the unrest “government forces took over security of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Regional State” (East Africa Monitor, 8 August 2019). Online news magazine Addis Standard notes on 19 July 2019 that Sidama activists “accuse security forces in various places in Sidama zone and Hawassa city of arresting dozens of activists, including several leaders of Ejjeetto, a Sidama youth group spreading the campaign for Sidama statehood” (Addis Standard, 19 July 2019). On 17 August 2019 state-affiliated Fana Broadcasting Corporate (FBC) reports that “481 out of the 1,384 suspects detained in connection with the July 18 violence” were released (FBC, 17 August 2019).

In August 2019 the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) announced that the Sidama referendum on regional statehood would be held on 13 November 2019 (FBC, 30 August 2019). In October 2019 the NEBE postponed the referendum by a week (FBC, 16 October 2019). In November 2019 NEBE released the preliminary results of the referendum, which had finally been held on 20 November 2019. 98.51 percent of about 2.3 million people voted in “favour of the formation of a new regional state”. According to the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) the referendum was peaceful (FBC, 23 November 2019).

## 2.5 June 2019 events (“attempted coup”)

On 22 June 2019 the president of Amhara regional state, Ambachew Mekonnen, was killed in Amhara’s regional capital Bahir Dar, and the chief of staff of the national security forces, Seare Mekonnen, was shot in Addis Ababa. The government described both attacks as a “coup”, and identified Amhara regional security chief Asaminew Tsige “as the mastermind behind the plot” (African Business Magazine, 19 August 2019; also see Reuters, 23 June 2019; DW, 24 June 2019). Asaminew Tsige was killed on 24 June, he was alleged to have trained ethnic militias and having links to the National Movement of Amhara (NAMA) (African Business Magazine, 19 August 2019; FP, 4 July 2019; DW, 24 June 2019b).

The senior adviser of Ambachew Mekonnen, Ezez Wasie, and another general, Gezai Abera, were also killed in the attacks on 22 June 2019 (BBC News, 23 June 2019). Amhara’s attorney general, Migbaru Kebede, was wounded and later died (DW, 24 June 2019b; also see Borkena, 24 June 2019). French state-owned international news television network France 24 gives the following overview of the events in June 2019 in Amhara region:

“Dozens of people were killed in fighting during a foiled coup by a rogue state militia in Ethiopia’s Amhara region at the weekend, the regional government spokesman said on Wednesday, the first official report of significant clashes. The militia attacked the police headquarters, ruling party headquarters and president’s office where they executed three top officials in Amhara’s regional capital of Bahir Dar on Saturday, Asemahagh Aseres told Reuters on the sidelines of a state burial for the officials who were killed. The militia was a recently formed unit of the region’s security services. It had appealed for others to join its take-over but were rebuffed, Asemahagh said.” (France 24, 26 June 2019)

On 28 June 2019 DW notes that “dozens of people have been killed since Saturday’s [22 June] coup attempt, when a rogue state militia tried to grab power in the regional capital of Bahir Dar” (DW, 28 June 2019).

American news publication Foreign Policy (FP) provides the following overview on the alleged coup mastermind Asaminew Tsige:

“On April 24, 2009, the National Intelligence and Security Service and Federal Police Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force arrested 35 people allegedly involved in plotting a coup against Prime Minister Meles Zenawi’s government; most were members of the military or the police. Asaminew was one of them, and he was imprisoned for nearly a decade. Last February, Asaminew emerged from prison, having allegedly faced solitary confinement and torture, among tens of thousands of prisoners released following a 12-point reform plan handed down by Ethiopia’s ruling politburo in December 2017.” (FP, 4 July 2019)

After Asaminew’s release from prison in 2018, he was serving as the head of the Amhara region’s security forces (DW, 24 June 2019a).

According to Reuters “men in camouflage uniforms killed more than 50 people and injured 23 others in the Metakal zone of Ethiopia’s Benishangul-Gumuz region”. Reuters quotes the region’s peace and security bureau head, Abera Bayeta, as noting that “we are still investigating

but we have our suspicion that those attackers might be the same people who were involved in the coup in Amhara region” (Reuters, 26 June 2019). According to an article by DW, the government confirmed on 28 June 2019 “that more than 260 people have been arrested over a failed coup in the northern region of Amhara. The arrests included the spokesman of a political party that supports the Amhara ethnic group” (DW, 28 June 2019).

France 24 on 27 June 2019 quotes Christian Tadele, a spokesperson for the National Movement of Amhara (NAMA), as noting “that 56 party members and sympathisers had been arrested in the capital, Addis Ababa, on Wednesday, and that ‘dozens’ more had been arrested in the ethnically-based Oromia region, which borders Amhara.” (France 24, 27 June 2019)

With regard to arrests in Addis Abeba and other parts of the country, the Addis Standard reports in August 2019:

“Several arrests were also made in Addis Abeba and elsewhere in the country. Suspects include members of National Movement of Amhara (NaMA), which said more than 100 of its members were detained including Christian Tadele and Belete Kassa, NaMA public relations officer and secretariat respectively. Christian was arrested on July 11 whereas Belete was arrested on July 26 in Addis Abeba. On July 30, 26 of those held in Addis Abeba were released on bail ranging from 2000 to 3000 birr.” (Addis Standard, 1 August 2019)

Al Jazeera also reports on arrests in a June 2019 article:

“Ethiopian authorities have arrested hundreds of people in different parts of the country, stepping up a crackdown on suspected supporters of a failed regional coup attempt over the weekend. The office of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said on Friday on Twitter that 212 suspects had been apprehended in connection with the June 22 coup bid in the region of Amhara, with 43 others held in the capital, Addis Ababa. The investigations were ‘still ongoing with potential for more arrests’, it added.” (Al Jazeera, 28 June 2019)

In July 2019 Ethiopian online publication New Business Ethiopia mentions that the “number of suspects arrested in Ethiopia in relation to the last month coup attempt has reached 223 in Bahir Dar city, over 140 in Addis Ababa, while 59 Kalashnikov guns with thousands of bullets are seized so far.” (New Business Ethiopia, 7 July 2019)

In August 2019 Reuters quotes the Prime Minister as noting that “a total of 350 people, including soldiers and civil servants, had been arrested in connection with the attacks”, and adding “out of those, 120 were later released” (Reuters, 1 August 2019).

### 3 Political opposition

Please also see [section 5.1.1](#) for information on the treatment of political opposition groups and activists.

#### 3.1 Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)

The think tank Global Security, which is headquartered in the Washington, D.C., notes in a profile dated August 2016 that the “OLF was formerly a partner of the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)” and goes on to describe:

“The lack of power sharing by the EPRDF led it to advocate armed struggle against the GoE [Government of Ethiopia] in 1992. When the EPRDF overthrew the Derg regime in 1991, the OLF registered as a political party, and was given 4 minister-level positions in the transitional government. [...] The OLF’s participation in national government was short-lived, however, as it rejected the TPLF’s [Tigray People’s Liberation Front] demands that the OLF disband its army and allow the formation of a national army of Ethiopia. This led the OLF to leave parliament and subsequently to call for armed uprising and become an outlawed party in Ethiopia.” (Global Security, 9 August 2016)

In September 2018 Al Jazeera describes the group as follows:

“The OLF was founded as a political organization in 1973 to advocate the ‘right to national self-determination’ for the Oromo people, Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group, against what they perceived as ‘Abyssinian colonial rule’. The group had a falling out with the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1992 and soon began launching armed attacks. In response, the government banned it and later declared it a terrorist organisation.” (Al Jazeera, 15 September 2018)

On 5 July 2019 the parliament removed the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) from the list of terrorist organisations (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a; Al Jazeera, 5 July 2018). On 7 August 2018 “the government signed a reconciliation agreement to end hostilities with the OLF’s exiled leader Dawud Ibsa, who lives in exile in Asmara, the capital of neighbouring Eritrea”. A month earlier, after it was removed from the list of terrorist organisations, the OLF had declared a unilateral ceasefire (Reuters, 7 August 2018; see also France 24, 7 August 2018). In September 2018 the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) merged and agreed to work together (The Africa Report, 14 May 2019; Africanews, 11 September 2018). On 15 September 2018 “Hundreds of thousands of people have gathered in the capital of Ethiopia to welcome leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).” A concert was held in Addis Abeba to welcome the group’s leader Dawud Ibsa and others. Similar events were held in Ethiopia’s Oromia region. Also, “nearly 1,500 OLF fighters returned from neighbouring Eritrea” (Al Jazeera, 15 September 2018).

The ICG notes that the return of OLF leaders in September 2018 “sparked ethnic skirmishes, as Oromo youth replaced national flags in the capital and surrounding areas with the OLF banner, provoking the anger of, and clashes with, other groups” (ICG, 19 July 2019).

On 13 January 2019 Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) started airstrikes in western Oromia. According to a military source the army's targets military training camps run by OLA, the armed group of the Oromo Liberation Front – Shane Group (OLF-SG) (Addis Standard, 13 January 2019). Addis Standard notes that "a peace agreement was officially signed between the government and leaders of OLF-SG" on 24 January 2019. The article further notes:

"Accordingly both parties have agreed for an immediate ceasefire (as of today), to be followed by demobilization and encampment of OLF-SG's armed members within the next 20 days following which OLA members will undergo reintegration training programs." (Addis Standard, 24 January 2019)

In March 2019 Ethiopia Insight notes that several hundred OLF fighters are to "begin integration into the regional security forces in line with a January peace pact", however the source also mentions that the western and southern Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) commanders said they distrusted mediators and had not participated (Ethiopia Insight, 1 March 2019). In April 2019 The Reporter Ethiopia mentions that the armed wing of the OLF has separated from the party. The army of the OLF which is also known as Waraana Bilisummaa Oromoo (WBO) released a statement saying "it no longer has any relationship with the party as well as the party's leadership in Addis Ababa". The article further gives a detailed account on developments leading to the split:

"Even if we had previously agreed to a ceasefire and settle our difference with the government, the government has continued to arrest our members and wage war on us," reads the statement. 'Since the agreement in Asmara, Eritrea, we have been expressing our commitments for the implementation of the agreement. However, the government was not showing similar gestures.' [...]

The process where OLF agreed to lay arms, however, was interrupted by another turn of events whereby OLF's army in West Oromia was said to have refused to lay arms. For months, the situation continued and was in fact becoming a source of security problems across West Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz Regional State. In addition, after months of cold relationship between the two parties as well as conflicting statements, back in late January 2019, OLF and ODP officials agreed to solve their problem. Accordingly, a committee consisting of Abba Gadaas (community elders) as well as a number of well-known influential figures including Jawar Mohammed was established. The committee, which has 71 members, was mainly working to peacefully disarm OLF's army. OLF's party leaders had also gave full responsibility of the army to the committee and agreed not to interfere in the process of disarming the army. Since then, only 800 army members of OLF have agreed to lay their arms. [...]

'From now on (April 1, 2019), we have decided to detach ourselves from the party in Addis Ababa and we have already established our own army command,' said the statement. 'The army which has seven command regions across Oromia has already established its army leaders which, from now on, will be led by a committee of army commanders,' sources from OLF told The Reporter." (The Reporter Ethiopia, 6 April 2019a)



On 29 May 2019 the Addis Standard mentions that the leader of OLF-SG, Dawud Ibssa, said that “his party will from now on disown any armed groups operating in its name in the country and that it will cooperate with the government in securing peace in areas where armed groups are still operating” (Addis Standard, 29 May 2019).

An August 2019 article by Borkena notes that the OLF has a strong support throughout Oromia region, “despite the splitting of the party into different factions due to internal power struggle”. The article goes on to describe:

“The reception of OLF’s leader Abbo Dawud Ebsa at Addis Ababa from his self imposed exile had attracted millions of people. Main streets and road junctions in many cities of Oromia region are still painted with the flag of OLF.” (Borkena, 25 August 2019b)

In September 2019 an article published by Ethiopia Insight mentions that “there are still OLF-linked elements who have not adopted peaceful struggle, and whose relationship with OLF is not clear”. However, according to the article, “an OLF faction led by Abba Naga Jaarra” has “recently entered peaceful politics” (Ethiopia Insight, 24 September 2019). As reported by Ezega in November 2019 leading figures of political parties operating in the Oromia regional state, including Dawud Ibsa of the OLF and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of ODP, “once again agreed to resolve their political differences peacefully and avoid violence” (Ezega, 4 November 2019).

Please also see [section 7.1.6](#) on continued armed activities of Oromo liberation groups for further developments regarding OLF/OLA.

### 3.2 Oromo Democratic Front

Ethiopia Insight notes in October 2018 that the Oromo Democratic Front (ODF) is “an OLF splinter group formed in 2013 that renounced armed struggle and pursues self-determination within a ‘genuinely’ democratic multinational federation” (Ethiopia Insight, 30 October 2018). It is led by Leenco Lata, who also co-founded the OLF (Ethiopia Insight, 30 October 2018; Borkena, 7 August 2019). According to an article by The Reporter Ethiopia, the chairman of the ODF, Leenco Lata, and his deputy, Dima Nagawo, returned to Ethiopia after 25 years in exile. The purpose of the visit is to discuss the terms of the ODF’s reentry into the local political scene and is a follow-up meeting after a high-level delegation of the government visited ODF abroad, inviting them to come to the country and discuss how party members can politically participate in the country” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 26 May 2018). In November 2018 Africanews reports that the Oromo Democratic Front (ODF) merged with the political party of prime minister Abiy Ahmed, the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP). The article further notes:

“Oromia state president, Lemma Megersa, who is ODP’s deputy chair signed a memorandum of understanding with ODF’s chair, Lencho Leta on Wednesday. The merger could play a significant role in the Oromia region, where the largest ethnic group (Oromos), have agitated for political power in recent years.” (Africanews, 28 November 2018)

In May 2019 The Africa Report similarly mentions the merger of the Oromo Democratic Front (ODF) with the political party of prime minister Abiy Ahmed, the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP). (The Africa Report, 14 May 2019)



### 3.3 Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)

The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) was founded in 1984 by former members of the youth league of the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), a Somali rebel group that was active in the Ogaden region (RVI, 2014, p. 17, p. 37). Since then it has been fighting for the rights of ethnic Somalis, including advocacy for secession. After an attack on a Chinese-run oil field in April 2007, which killed 65 Ethiopians and nine Chinese nationals, ONLF became internationally known. The Ethiopian government responded with a “massive counterinsurgency campaign”, that was criticized by rights groups. (DW, 22 October 2018)

A 2014 report by Tobias Hagmann published by the Rift Valley Institute (RVI) provides detailed background information on the ONLF starting on page 37:

- RVI - Rift Valley Institute: Talking Peace in the Ogaden; The search for an end to conflict in the Somali Regional State in Ethiopia, author: Tobias Hagmann, 2014  
<https://riftvalley.net/download/file/fid/3297>

In February 2018 VOA reports on a “first round of three-day talks” between Ethiopian officials and representatives from the ONLF at a secret location in Nairobi, facilitated by Kenyan officials (VOA, 11 February 2018). The Ethiopian parliament removed the ONLF from the list of terrorist organisations on 5 July 2018 (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a). In August 2018 the ONLF declared a ceasefire (Reuters, 22 October 2018). In a press statement the group said it arrived at the decision after “taking into account the positive steps taken by the Ethiopian government to lay the ground work for talks and peaceful negotiations to find an available and lasting solution to the Ogaden conflict” (Africanews, 12 August 2018). On 21 October 2018 the ONLF and the government signed a peace deal in Asmara (Reuters, 22 October 2018; Ethiopian Embassy in Brussels, 22 October 2018; Addis Standard, 22 October 2018). According to the agreement, the ONLF would “pursue its political obligations through peaceful means” (Reuters, 22 October 2018). After the peace deal, the group started to return from exile in October 2018 (Africanews, 21 November 2018). On 1 December 2018 top officials of the ONLF returned to Ethiopia from Eritrea. The delegation led by Mohamed Omar, the chairman of the ONLF, was received by the Ethiopian Finance Minister and the president of the Somali regional state. About two weeks earlier hundreds of ONLF fighters had flown from Eritrea to Jijiga (Shabelle Media Network, 2 December 2018).

An August 2019 article by Addis Standard gives the following overview on current developments regarding the ONLF:

“ONLF, formerly a rebel group active in the Eastern part of Ethiopia, is currently undergoing the process of transforming itself into a political party and processing its registration with the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) the chairman said, and that was happening along side the group’s intent to participate in the ongoing peace process and reconstruction efforts both in the regional state and the country in particular and the horn of Africa in general. In October 2018, Ethiopian government delegation led by former Foreign Minister Workneh Gebeyehu signed a historic peace agreement with ONLF delegation led by Admiral Mohamed Omar Osman in the Eritrean capital, Asmara. Since then the formerly exiled liberation front, which was branded a terrorist organization by the

Ethiopian government, has returned home and begun the process of transforming itself into a political party. The group held its first party congress since returning home in April 2019. Now, despite its name as a 'Liberation Front' which will remain the same, ONLF says it is processing its registration with NEBE not as a regional party but a national party in order to be able to pursue its agenda of participating in peace building and democratization process not only for the people of Somali but 'for all the nations' in Ethiopia. 'ONLF categorically declares that it will pursue the rights of Somali people and that of all nations in Ethiopia through peaceful political means,' Abdirahman said. In doing so, it has set its primary target to be 'peace building, reconstruction and democratization of Ethiopia,' he said. To that end, ONLF will work towards ensuring the constitutionally enshrined rights of 'full and genuine self-rule for Somali people and all nations in Ethiopia through peaceful means.'" (Addis Standard, 21 August 2019)

According to a February 2019 article by state news media Fana Broadcasting Corporate the ONLF disarmed 1,740 armed members. The disarmed will receive rehabilitation training and then be integrated as security forces or as civil servants into the Somali regional state (FBC, 9 February 2019). In April 2019 Al Jazeera notes the following:

"Up to 2,000 fighters have now disarmed and are preparing to reintegrate into society. Former rebels belonging to Ethiopia's Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) are going through rehabilitation after recently returning to the country from bases in the neighbouring countries. The reintegration process forms part of a peace deal reached with the federal government." (Al Jazeera, 13 April 2019)

In August 2019 the communication head of the Somali region, Mohamed Olad, said that "the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) is fully repatriated and integrated back to the society" and some weeks earlier "opened its office in Addis Ababa" (The Reporter Ethiopia, 3 August 2019b).

### **3.4 Ginbot 7 (aka G7, Arbegnoch Ginbot 7, Patriotic Ginbot 7, PG7)**

In September 2018 Borkena provides the following overview on Ginbot 7:

"Arbegnoch Ginbot 7 movement is one of the leading Ethiopian opposition groups. It has been struggling to bring about democratic change in Ethiopia and has been employing both armed and non-violent strategies to achieve its goal. Berhanu Nega, chairman of the movement, and Andargachew Tsige, secretary, were sentenced to death in absentia. In 2014, the secretary of the movement was abducted from Yemen on his way to Eritrea, where the base of the armed wing of the movement was training and operating from and was put on death row and in solitary confinement at least for a year. This year, Andargachew was released [...], though his release specifically caused acute controversy from within the ruling party. Then, prime minister Abiy Ahmed called on all armed opposition groups to end their armed struggle and return to Ethiopia for a peaceful and legal struggle." (Borkena, 9 September 2018a)

In January 2018 BBC reports that 30 alleged members of Ginbot 7 were sentenced to 15 and 18 years. The article further notes that "dozens more have been jailed by the courts over the past weeks due to their association with the group" (BBC News, 12 January 2018). In June 2018

BBC reports that rebel group Ginbot 7 “has suspended its armed resistance against the government” (BBC News, 22 June 2018). Africanews similarly notes that the armed opposition group, Patriotic Ginbot 7 (PG7), “announced that it has unilaterally suspended all operations using firearms”. The article further notes:

“In a recent Press Release, the rebel group, unequivocally stated its strong support for this bold move and pledged to stand with the Ethiopian people and the reformist group leading the change. ‘As of June 22, 2018, Patriotic Ginbot 7 has suspended all self-defense operations using firearms in all regions of Ethiopia. Our forces have received strict orders to refrain from any form of armed resistance,’ the groups said in a statement. The group has based itself in neighboring Eritrea in the last few years and insisted its armed operations inside Ethiopia were to defend the people from violence perpetrated by the TPLF regime. ‘It has to be noted that the only reason armed resistance became necessary in our country is to defend our people and country from the repression of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) regime that terrorizes its citizens,’ the statement said. Earlier this week, the group, declared that it wants to return to Ethiopia to pursue a peaceful struggle. In a statement confirmed by PG7 leader, Dr. Bernahu Nega, the party said they have been encouraged by reforms undertaken by the new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed.” (Africanews, 22 June 2018)

On 5 July 2018 the parliament removed Ginbot 7 from the list of terrorist organisations (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a; Al Jazeera, 5 July 2018; Africanews, 5 July 2018). In September 2018 the leadership of Ginbot 7 returned to Ethiopia and was welcomed by government officials (Borkena, 9 September 2018; Africanews, 9 September 2018). In September 2018 sources quoting FBC report that Arbegnoch Ginbar split from Ginbot 7 as a result of “leadership difference and financial matters” (Borkena, 23 September 2018; Ezega, 26 September 2018). Borkena provides a brief overview on the two different groups:

“Arbegnoch Ginbot 7 was a coalition of two opposition groups which were operating in Eritrea; Arbegnoch Ginbar and Gibot 7. They formed coalition in Eritrea were operating as guerrilla group in Eritrea. Ginbot 7 is led by Berhanu Nega who used to be professor of economics at Bucknell University in the United States. He and the secretary of the party, Andarchagew Tsige who had been in jail after he was abducted in Yemen in 2014 until May of this year, returned to Ethiopia on September 4 – just two days before the Ethiopian New Year. Ginbot 7 has a considerable support base in urban centers in most parts of Ethiopia where as Arbegnoch Ginbar was mostly active as an armed rebel operating in the Northern parts of Ethiopia.” (Borkena, 23 September 2018)

In January 2019 FBC reports that “Semayawi Party (Blue Party), Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP), Patriotic Ginbot 7 and Unity Party (UP) said they are forming a new party.” The party is to be formed at the end of March 2019 (FBC, 1 January 2019). In May 2019 FBC mentions the formation of a new party by seven opposition parties. The party called Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice consists of Ginbot 7 and Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP), All Ethiopian Democratic Party (AEDP), Semayawi Party, New Generation Party (NGP), Gambella Regional Movement (GRM) and Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) (FBC, 10 May 2019; see also The Africa Report, 14 May 2019).

In September 2019 The Reporter Ethiopia also mentions the creation of the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party by seven parties. The article uses E-ZEMA as abbreviation for the party (The Reporter Ethiopia, 21 September 2019).

Africanews in May 2019 also reports on the formation of Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice and developments regarding Ginbot 7:

“The Patriotic Ginbot 7 (PG7) party in Ethiopia does not exit less than a year after its activities were regularized by the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed-led administration. The group until July 2018 was considered a terrorist organization by the government. Parliament voted to lift that label on the group and others like the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). The state-run FBC reported on Thursday that PG7’s General Assembly had disbanded it for the sole purpose of forming a new party. The FBC report said its senior members in the persons of Andargachew Tsige and Ephrem Madebo, had quit their positions because they held foreign passports. Under the Abiy administration, Andargachew Tsige was pardoned despite being on death row. Abiy also met leader Berhanu Nega during a visit to the United States in August. The new party to which PG7 is allied is the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice. The privately-owned Addis Standard said it was formed out of 7 parties including PG7. The other six have also dissolved their parties, the Addis Standard added.” (Africanews, 10 May 2019)

A May 2019 article by The Reporter Ethiopia notes that the Ethiopian Citizens Party for Social Justice (ECPSJ) elected Berhanu Nega and Andualem Arage as leader and deputy leader of the party. According to the article “Berhanu from defunct Ginbot 7 and Andualem from the dissolved Unity for Democracy Justice (UDJ), are expected to spearhead the ECPSJ which is planning to mainstream citizenship and social justice politics in Ethiopia and mount a formidable competition in the upcoming national election.” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 11 May 2019a)

### 3.5 Youth groups

According to a July 2019 article by Ethiopian Press Agency “youth organizations are formed under the major ethnic political parties,” however “they remained weak, ethnic focused and exclusive”. This led to the “formation of ethically politicized amorphous youth political activists” (Ethiopian Press Agency, 24 July 2019). Sources mention different youth groups in Ethiopia - Qeerroo, Fanno, Zerma, Ejeto, Aeigo, Nebro and Dhaldiim (Borkena, 9 October 2018; ECADF, 1 March 2019; Nazret, 9 April 2018; Ethiopia Observer, 13 October 2018).

In July 2019 the European Institute of Peace (EIP) published a policy paper authored by Yonas Adaye Adeto, Assistant Professor of Global Security and Peacebuilding at the Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Addis Ababa University. The report notes that “sports fields, colleges and university campuses, and social gatherings are used to disseminate [...] propaganda”. The report further notes:

“In universities, as a result, youth identify and socialise increasingly along ethnic lines: in canteens, ‘the Oromo would sit with the Oromo, the Amhara with Amhara, etc.’ In itself, this mirrors the fracturing of the EPDRF, where similar dynamics of congregating along

ethnic lines have been observed. Youth are made to disseminate false propaganda and hate speech over social media, to spread fear and uncertainty among the public as well as among diplomatic circles. This trend was witnessed in a number of places in Ethiopia recently: in most cases, youth are paid a small amount to spread information on social media, especially on Facebook.”(EIP, July 2019, p. 28)

Regarding recruitment and manipulation of youth for different purposes the EIP report further states:

“In Benishangul Gumuz, for example, it was reported that young men were hired as ‘hit squads’, many of whom had received higher education but were unable to find employment. A large number were said to have been involved in ‘criminal acts’. As in-depth interviews have shown, in an attempt to nip reform in the bud, these individuals apparently use the youth, ‘brainwashing’ and paying them to demonstrate, stir up riots, and in some cases, commit acts of ethnic violence. In short, these are ongoing efforts to recruit and manipulate young and unemployed people - most often men - into violent extremism.” (EIP, July 2019, pp. 28-29)

### *Qeerroo*

In October 2016 an article by The Conversation, a network of media outlets that publish news stories written by academics and researchers, describes the Qeerroo as Oromo youth that are “predominantly students from elementary school to university, organising collective action through social media” (The Conversation, 3 October 2016). The article further provides an overview of the group:

“It is believed that underground activist networks, known as Qeerroo, are organising the Oromo community. The Qeerroo, also called the Qubee generation, first emerged in 1991 with the participation of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in the transitional government of Ethiopia. In 1992 the Tigrayan-led minority regime pushed the OLF out of government and the activist networks of Qeerroo gradually blossomed as a form of Oromummaa or Oromo nationalism. [...] It is not clear what kind of relationship exists between the group and the OLF. But the Qeerroo clearly articulate that the OLF should replace the Tigrayan-led regime and recognise the Front as the origin of Oromo nationalism. What are their demands? Their immediate demands are for the Ethiopian government to halt the so-called Addis Ababa Master Plan, land grabbing, corruption, and the violation of human rights. Their extended demands are about achieving self-determination and sovereignty by replacing the Tigrayan-led regime with a multi-ethno-national democratic government. These demands gradually emerged to create solidarity with other ethno-national groups, such as the Amharas, who also have grievances with the regime.” (The Conversation, 3 October 2016)

The term Qeerroo “means bachelor in Afaan Oromo and now refers to any youthful Oromo protester; positively by Oromo activists and pejoratively by opponents” (Ethiopia Insight, 2 January 2019). The term could also bear broader connotations, “symbolising both the Oromo movement - a struggle for more political freedom and for greater ethnic representation in

federal structures - and an entire generation of newly assertive Ethiopian youth” (The Guardian, 13 March 2018). In January 2019 Ethiopia Insight provides the following overview on the Qeerroo group:

“A major factor in Oromo politics is the so-called Qeerroo, who everyone seems to want a piece of. Though the word Qeerroo means bachelor, the group was formed by OLF in 2011 to recruit youths that can fight against the EPRDF government from inside Oromia. Qeerroo then became very popular in 2014 after almost every Oromo youth joined protests and all of them were called Qeerroo. But the organized Qeerroo group is still active and widespread. There are also youths that are not associated to a party and join protest they think is worth joining, or wait for instructions from activists they support. ODP also tried organizing some Qeerroos by training loyal youths. The term therefore serves mostly to confuse, as each Oromo element has their own Qeerroo, and any Oromo youth who engages in a political act is called Qeerroo.” (Ethiopia Insight, 1 January 2019)

Other sources describe the Qeerroo as “clandestine Oromo youth movement linked both to ethnic Oromo opposition and ruling party as well” (Borkena, 26 September 2018) and as “a youth network in the Oromo region of Ethiopia” (Esat, 12 March 2018).

The Addis Standard notes that the “Qeerroo is an organized social movement that shattered EPRDF’s shroud of unassailability and invincibility” (Addis Standard, 17 October 2018). In March 2018 The Guardian interviewed two local Qeerroo leaders providing information on the methods of the group:

“According to the two men, who are both in their late 20s, each district of the city has one Qeerroo leader, with at least 20 subordinates, all of whom are responsible for disseminating messages and information about upcoming strikes. They say their networks have become better organised in recent months, explaining that there is now a hierarchical command chain and even a single leader for the whole of Oromia. ‘This gives us discipline and allows us to speak with one voice,’ says Abiy. Their job has become more difficult in the absence of the internet [The source mentions a total shutdown of mobile internet in all areas beyond the capital since the end of 2017, remark ACCORD]. ‘With social media you can disseminate the message in seconds,’ says Abiy. ‘Now it can take two weeks, going from door to door.’ Instead of using WhatsApp and Facebook, they now distribute paper flyers, especially on university campuses.” (The Guardian, 13 March 2018)

According to an Ethiopian journalist based in Canada “it is thanks to prominent social media activists that the Qeerroo have acquired the political heft that youth movements in other parts of the country still lack”. In Ethiopia, the assumption that Jawar Mohammed, the founder of the US-based Oromia Media Network, remote-controls the protests of the Qeerroo is widespread (The Guardian, 13 March 2018). According to a September 2019 article by The Conversation “Mohammed is believed to be the de facto leader of the mysterious Qeerroo movement, which was part of the groundswell that put Abiy in power” (The Conversation, 11 September 2019). Borkena describes Jawar Mohammed as “a political firebrand of the Qeerroo movement” (Borkena, 25 August 2019b). A November 2018 article by Reuters provides the following information on Jawar Mohammed:

“Activist Jawar Mohammed promotes an ‘Oromo first’ ideology. The 32-year-old with 1.4 million Facebook followers returned to Ethiopia in August from the United States. He told Reuters that although he used social media to coordinate Oromo youths in strikes and protests, he also ‘built a solid ground network’ in every town in the region. Jawar is the movement’s hero. ‘Jawar Mohammed is my pride,’ said Dambal, the accountant. ‘He took the Oromo struggle to the next level. We were lacking someone to lead the youth ... he made us line up all together all over Oromiya and win.’ Interviewed in a villa in Addis Ababa surrounded by bodyguards provided by the government, Jawar justified Oromo nationalism: ‘When the state particularly represses an ethnic identity, you are forced to defend it.’ But his ‘Qeerro’ are disciplined, he said, and will stick to non-violent resistance. At a rally in the town of Kemise, north of the capital, Jawar told thousands of young men chanting ‘Qeerroo’s Father is here!’: ‘Obey Abiy. Don’t be emotional in order to help the reforms.’ But on social media, his language is often less restrained.” (Reuters, 2 November 2018)

For further information on the Qeerroo please also see the following article:

- Open Democracy: Twofold crisis in Ethiopia: the elites and the street, 12 April 2018  
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/twofold-crisis-in-ethiopia-elites-and-street/>

### *Ejeto*

According to sources Ejeto are Sidama youth groups (The Africa Report, 2 August 2019; Addis Insight, 14 March 2019a; New Business Ethiopia, 4 September 2019). A July 2019 Borkena article describes the Ejeto as “radical Sidama ethno-nationalist youth” (Borkena, 22 July 2019). A March 2019 article by the Ethiopian Current Affairs Discussion Forum (ECADF), a diaspora news website, takes a critical look at the role of the Ejeto:

“The literal meaning of Ejjeetto in Sidama language is ‘a young person’. It was created to mimic Querros, Fanos, Zermas, and other youth groups who showed incredible feats of bravery in the fight against the TPLF. Unlike these groups, no one heard about Ejjeetto during the TPLF’s reign of terror. If Ejjeetto had existed before the change that swept the country, we would have seen its members throw pebbles at the TPLF criminals. Its members appeared to the scene right after the election of the current prime minister and the new government promised to take the country in a different direction. For this reason, many think that the members of Ejjeetto were late, at least, by three years and considered as johnny come latelies. The members of Ejjeetto include gullible Sidama youths and extreme Sidama politicians who work in various sectors of the government. The leaders of the group work as police officers, judges, mayors, heads of government and non-government organizations, and business men in Awassa and Sidama zone in the region. The youth is merely a tool the extremists use to advance their political agenda. Orders to carry out missions come from the extremist politicians. A day before a mission, members of the Ejjeetto, including those who work in government, would gather in an undisclosed location and plot the impending assignment. For example, an operation which took place last month at Addis Ketema high school was coordinated by people who are heads of Woredas and Kefele Ketemas in Awassa. On the day of the mission, most of these people didn’t show up for work. A source told me that most of the politicians who instigate the



violence in the city ran to the countryside to hide hoping to absolve themselves from the crimes they have orchestrated.” (ECADEF, 1 March 2019)

### *Dhaldiim*

The Gambella youth is organised under the name Dhaaldiim (Ethiopia Observer, 13 October 2018). The head of the youth group is Omot Ouguta Adew (Ethiopia Observer, 10 October 2018).

For further information on youth organisations please also see pp. 15 to 16 of the following report by the Danish Immigration Service:

- DIS – Danish Immigration Service: Ethiopia: Political situation and treatment of opposition, September 2018  
[https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1450527/1226\\_1542183917\\_ethiopia-political-situation-report-2018.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1450527/1226_1542183917_ethiopia-political-situation-report-2018.pdf)

## **3.6 Other opposition parties and alliances**

According to a September 2019 article by Borkena the “Ethiopian Political Party Council, mainly draws membership from major opposition parties legally registered with and recognized by the country’s election board”. It has 107 political parties as members (Borkena, 3 September 2019). On 14 March 2019 these parties signed a code of conduct. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed signed the document representing the Ethiopian People’s Democratic Front (EPRDF) (Addis Insight, 14 March 2019b). An article published by New Business Ethiopia in March 2019 also mentions the signing of an election governing pact by 107 political parties and further mentions:

“As part of the preparation for the upcoming May 2020 national election, 107 political parties in Ethiopia, including the ruling coalition today signed a pact that governs the relationship among them during the upcoming election and positively contribute to the overall democratization process of the country. [...] Of the signatory political parties 66 are already officially registered by the national electoral board to run for the upcoming election. The remaining political parties, especially the pro-unity groups, are expected to form alliances and merge to challenge the ruling coalition, which recently announced its plan to merge with its affiliates. The multiple political parties, which claim to represent the same ethnic group, such as different Oromo parties and Amhara parties, are also expected to narrow their differences form alliances to become strong and competent in the May 2020 national election.” (New Business Ethiopia, 14 March 2019)

The Joint Council of Political Parties “is tasked to govern the unilateral and joint activities of its members based on the code of conduct” signed in March 2019 and to “resolve disputes between political parties” (FBC, 13 April 2019). In April 2019 “Mussa Adem from the Afar People’s Party (APP) has been elected as Chairperson of the Joint Council of Political Parties” (FBC, 13 April 2019; Ezega, 31 August 2019). In July 2019 the Deputy Chairperson of the council, Girma Bekele, encouraged “opposition political parties to merge based on ideology and program” (ENA, 23 July 2019). In January 2019 The Reporter Ethiopia mentions the following regarding the Semayawi Party:

“In a bid to form a nationwide, unified and strong opposition political party together with other like-minded opposition parties; the general assembly of the Semayawi Party a.k.a. Blue has decided to cease the existence of the party as of December 30, 2018, Getaneh Balcha, vice chairman of the party told The Reporter.” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 5 January 2019)

In May 2019 the African Press Agency (APA) reports that nine political parties established the Ethiopian Unity National Front (National Front) and further notes:

“Accordingly, the two national and seven regional ethnonationalist political organizations that have agreed to establish the front are: Ethiopian National Unity Congress, Ethiopian Hibrehizeb National Movement, Gambela Peoples Liberation Movement, Gambela People Justice for Peace and Development Movement, South Ethiopia Democracy Congress, Agew Democratic Party, South West Ethiopia Peoples Unity, Sheko and Democratic Organization, and Argoba Nationality Democratic Movement.” (APA, 25 May 2019)

In February 2019 the political parties “All Ethiopia Unity Party, Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party, Ethiopian Democratic Union, Ethiopian National Unity Party, Afar People Justice Democracy Party, Afar People Liberation Party and Oromo People’s Justice Democracy Party agreed to work together” (ENA, 27 February 2019). In July 2019 Ezega mentions that the seven parties signed a deal to merge (Ezega, 25 July 2019). In May 2019 the five opposition parties “Ethiopian National Transitional Council, South Ethiopia Green Stars Coalition, Omo People’s Democratic Union, Ethiopian people’s Movement, and Ethiopian Renaissance Democratic Organization agreed to unite to achieve their political goals.” The new coalition is called Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party (Borkena, 13 May 2019). According to an August 2019 article by Borkena there are “four opposition parties in Tigray: National Congress of Great Tigray (BAITONA), Third Revolution Tigray (TRT), ARENA Tigray, and TAND (Tigray Alliance for National Democracy)” (Borkena, 25 August 2019).

The Tigray People’s Democratic Movement (TPDM) was formed in 2001 (Africanews, 10 October 2018). In October 2018 FBC mentions the return of 2,000 fighters of the TPDM from Eritrea. The article provides the following overview:

“More than 2,000 fighters of the Tigray People’s Democratic Movement (TPDM) has returned to Ethiopia from Eritrea today. Upon arrival at Zalambess, the fighters were welcomed by residents and local officials of the areas. The fighters will join the society after they are given training, it was noted. TPDM reached an agreement with the government of Ethiopia to engage in a peaceful political activity following the meeting held on 28 August in Asmara, The meeting was attended by an Ethiopian government delegation led by General Adem Mohammed, Director of the Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Agency and the Chairman of the TPDM, Mr. Mekonen Tesfay.” (FBC, 10 October 2018)

In October 2018 Arena Tigray For Democracy and Sovereignty (Arena) and the Tigray Alliance for National Democracy (TAND) signed an agreement to work together (The Reporter Ethiopia, 27 October 2018). An October 2018 article by Ezega also mentions the agreement and provides the following overview of the two parties:

“Arena Tigray for Democracy and Sovereignty (Arena) and Tigray Alliance for National Democracy (TAND) have signed an agreement to work together, according to the Reporter. Citing deputy chairperson of Arena, Goytom Tsegay, the two parties have agreed to work together and possibly merger in future. Both Arena Tigray and TAND were established by former members of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Arena Tigray was established by former members of the TPLF, including former Tigray President Gebru Asrat, after fallout with Meles Zenawi over Ethio-Eritrea war in 1998-2000. TAND was established in exile 24 years ago by former TPLF leader Aregawi Berhe who also had a fallout with Meles Zenawi and his supporters in 1979, and expelled from the front in 1985. [...]

Arena is one of the parties in Medrek, a coalition of four political parties. Other parties within the coalition includes: the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Ethiopian Social Democracy Party (ESDP). TAND is a party which was established some 24 years ago in exile and returned home recently. The party was mainly founded by former chairperson of TPLF Aregawi Berhe, who left his position and went into exile during the struggle days, and other senior members of the same party such as Geday Zeratsion, who also left TPLF around the mid-80s.” (Ezega, 29 October 2018)

In January 2019 The Reporter Ethiopia mentions the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum (Medrek), a coalition “of four parties, which includes the Ethiopian Socialist Democratic Party (ESDP), Arena for Sovereignty and Democracy (Arena), Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) and Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 12 January 2019a). In September 2018 fighters of the Amhara Democratic Forces Movement (ADFM) returned to Ethiopia. The group “terminated their armed guerrilla operation from Eritrea after the Ethiopian government negotiated their return to the country for a peaceful struggle” (Borkena, 9 September 2018b). In November 2018 the ADFM agreed to merge with the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) (FP, 4 July 2019; Addis Standard, 12 November 2018). The ADP is “one of the four parties that constitute the ruling coalition, EPRDF” (Borkena, 24 February 2019). In June 2018 the National Movement of Amhara (NAMA) was founded (Borkena, 10 June 2018). Desalegne Chane is the chairman of the party (Addis Standard, 19 June 2018; Africanews, 26 August 2019; Borkena, 10 June 2018).

In June 2018 Addis Standard published an interview with the President of NAMA:

- Addis Standard: The Interview: NaMA is expected to be the guardian of a fully fledged Amhara Nationalism: Dr. Dessalegn Chanie, 19 June 2018  
<http://addisstandard.com/the-interview-nama-is-expected-to-be-the-guardian-of-a-fully-fledged-amhara-nationalism-dr-dessalegn-chanie/>

For further information on opposition groups please see pp. 37 to 42 of the following report:

- UK Home Office: Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Opposition to the government, August 2019  
[https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2014641/Ethiopia\\_-\\_Oppn\\_-\\_CPIN\\_-\\_v3.0e\\_August\\_2019\\_.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2014641/Ethiopia_-_Oppn_-_CPIN_-_v3.0e_August_2019_.pdf)

## 4 Security forces

In March 2019 the USDOS lists several actors of law enforcement in Ethiopia: The Federal Police which report to the Ministry of Peace, a regional or special police force in each of the nine regions, reporting to the respective civilian authorities, and local militias (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1d). With regard to these militias, USDOS notes:

“Local militias operated across the country in loose and varying coordination with these regional police, the Federal Police, and the military. In some cases militias functioned as extensions of the ruling party. Local militias are members of a community who handle standard security matters within their communities, primarily in rural areas. 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.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1d)

USDOS also mentions an expanded role of the military with respect to internal security during the state of emergency (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1d).

In August 2019 an article by London-based African Business Magazine notes the following on federal arrangements regarding security forces in Ethiopia:

“[...] the central government doesn’t wield a monopoly of force. Ethiopia’s federal arrangement grants each region the right to its own security forces alongside Ethiopia’s federal army, the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), which is undergoing reform. ‘There are about three to four different groups that have the use of force in each of these states up to and including the federal army,’ says Martin Plaut, fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. ‘It starts at the regional level and moves all the way up to the ordinary police and the special police forces. Then there are paramilitary forces who resemble something of an army and are usually answerable to just one influential figure.’ Individual loyalties between the nation and the regional ethnicities are fluid. The balance of power between the central administration in Addis Ababa and its regional components is therefore up for debate.” (African Business Magazine, 19 August 2019)

In October 2019, an article published by The Africa Report also reports on regional autonomy regarding security forces:

“Each village, or ‘kebele’, chairman heads a militia consisting of, on average, 50 armed men. Each region commands its own police, including thousands or even tens of thousands of constitutionally dubious ‘special police’ equipped with combat weaponry. [...] ‘Under the constitution regional states are supposed to have police forces just to maintain law and order – nothing more than that. The special forces are much more than that. They are readied for combat,’ says Zemlak Ayele, director of Addis Ababa University’s Centre for Federalism and Governance Studies. In a recent interview Mustafa Omer, the acting president of Ethiopia’s Somali Region, concurred: ‘One of the biggest mistakes made along the way [was] creating autonomous security structures in the regions. No country can survive that.’” (Africa Report, 11 October 2019)

The July 2019 EIP report notes that a “deeper reform in the security sector may be needed to ensure that the complex configuration of security forces – military, federal police, regional police, regional special police, and militia – will effectively cooperate in addressing ethnic violence, rather than fanning its flames.” (EIP, July 2019, p. 33)

With regard to human rights violations by security forces, Freedom House notes:

“Security forces frequently commit human rights violations including torture and extrajudicial killings, and often act with impunity. However, the new government has shown some willingness to hold police and military personnel accountable. In November, 36 senior intelligence officials were arrested for human rights abuses including torture, and awaited trial at year’s end.” (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section F3)

The USDOS country report on human rights practices covering the year 2018 mentions that impunity remained a problem within the police and security apparatus. The report further notes:

“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. There were no public reports documenting internal investigations of the federal police for possible abuses during the SOE [state of emergency]. The government rarely disclosed the results of investigations into abuses by local security forces, such as arbitrary detention and beatings of civilians.

The government supported limited training on human rights for police and army personnel. It accepted assistance from NGOs and the EHRC 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.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1d)

In August 2019 Ethiopia and the United States signed an agreement on law enforcement and administration of criminal justice to improve Ethiopia’s justice sector through capacity-building of law enforcement organs (FBC, 20 August 2019).

#### **4.1 Police**

The Law on Police Use of Force Worldwide, a website managed by the Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa (ICLA) and the Centre for Human Rights of the Faculty of Law of the University of Pretoria, notes the following regarding police forces in Ethiopia:

“Police forces are established under the Constitution at federal and state level. According to Article 51(6), the Federal Government is required to establish and administer national defence and public security forces as well as a federal police force. In turn, the states of the Federal Republic are obliged to ‘establish and administer a state police force, and to maintain public order and peace within the State’. The Constitution further obliges the House of Peoples’ Representatives to determine the organization of national defence,

public security, and a national police force. If the conduct of these forces infringes upon human rights and the nation's security, it shall carry out investigations and take necessary measures." (The Law on Police Use of Force Worldwide, last update August 2019)

Regarding oversight mechanisms the website further notes:

"In Ethiopia, most oversight mechanisms are in the form of internal disciplinary rules or regulations within the police and prison services, rather than an independent external body established for the purpose." (The Law on Police Use of Force Worldwide, last update August 2019)

#### *4.1.1 Federal Police*

Erwin van Veen, a senior research fellow with Clingendael's Conflict Research Unit published a report on the organisation of security in Ethiopia in September 2016. The report is based on literature research and 27 semi-structured, qualitative interviews (van Veen, September 2016, pp. 9-10). The report mentions that 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" (van Veen, September 2016, p. 27). In May 2019 the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) of the USDOS, which "promotes security cooperation between the State Department and U.S. private sector interests around the world" (USDOS, 8 February 2019), provides the following overview on the Federal Police:

"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." (OSAC, 14 May 2019)

The Federal Police Commission Proclamation No.720/2011 establishes the Federal Police Commission and stipulates that it is "accountable to the Ministry" (Proclamation No. 720/2011, 28 November 2011, Article 3; HRW, July 2018, p. 15 also mentions this proclamation).

According to the USDOS the "Federal Police report to the newly created Ministry of Peace" (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1d). Formerly it was accountable to the Ministry of Federal Affairs and to the Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs (Hauser Global Law School Program, April 2016).

The Ministry of Peace was created in October 2018. It is led by former parliament speaker Muferiat Kamil and oversees amongst others the Federal Police Commission, the National Intelligence and Security Service and the Information Network Security Agency (Reuters,

16 October 2018; VOA, 16 October 2018). As of September 2019, she was still Minister of Peace (Ethiopian Embassy in Brussels, 23 September 2019).

The Ministry of Peace was established by Proclamation No. 1097/2018. The Proclamation is available under the following link:

- Proclamation No. 1097/2018 - Definition of Powers and Duties of the Executive Organs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 29 November 2018 (published in the Federal Negarit Gazeta of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia)  
<https://chilot.me/2019/08/proclamation-no-10972018-a-proclamation-to-provide-for-the-definition-of-the-powers-and-duties-of-the-executive-organs/?download=15618>

The powers and duties of the Federal Police Commission are described in article 6 of the Establishment Proclamation No. 720/2011:

- Proclamation No. 720/2011 - Ethiopian Federal Police Commission Establishment Proclamation, 28 November 2011 (published in the Federal Negarit Gazeta of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia)  
<https://chilot.me/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/proclamation-no-720-2011-ethiopian-federal-police-commission-establishment.pdf>

#### *4.1.2 Regional Police*

According to Article 52 of the Constitution of Ethiopia the powers and functions of the states include to “establish and administer a state police force, and to maintain public order and peace within the State” (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 52). Regional police forces “handle local crime under their jurisdiction and provide officers for traffic control and immediate response to criminal incidents” (OSAC, 14 May 2019). The September 2016 report by Erwin van Veen provides an overview on regional police forces in Ethiopia:

“Ethiopia’s State Police Forces (regional police) maintain law and order in Ethiopia’s constituent 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 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.” (van Veen, September 2016, p. 28)

According to an article published by the British think tank Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in July 2019 “the government is currently drafting a bill which allows for regional militia with limited mandates and capabilities”. The article further provides a detailed account of the regional security sector:

“One of the keys to this puzzle lies in the development of the regional security sector, which comprises both formal and informal groups. The regional police forces already 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. The informal groups also include the Liyu Haile (Amharic for 'special force'), a force of well-trained professional soldiers, many of whom, according to author interviews with regional and federal officials, have defected from the national defence force and are attracted by a number of incentives including, certainly for some regions, higher pay. The 'special force' first emerged in the Somali regional state in 2007 in response to the insurgent Ogaden National Liberation Front, a group fighting for the self-determination of the region. During this period, this special force was accused of committing extra-judicial killings, torture, rape and violence. Its killing of hundreds, and displacement of thousands, of both Oromo and Somali residents in the Somali Regional State in 2018 led to the arrest of the Somali regional president.

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." (RUSI, 18 July 2019)

An article by Africanews published in September 2019 gives insights into the above-mentioned Liyu police for the Somali region:

"Ethiopian authorities created the Liyu ('special' in Amharic) police for the Somali region in 2007, when an armed conflict between the insurgent Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the government escalated. By 2008, the Liyu police had become a prominent counterinsurgency force recruited and led by then-regional security chief Abdi Mohammed Omar, known as 'Abdi Illey.' Abdi Illey became the president of Somali Regional State in 2010, and the Liyu police continued to report to him till his arrest in August 2018. He is currently facing a legal process instituted by federal government. The Liyu police have frequently been implicated in extrajudicial killings, torture, rape, and violence against people in the Somali region, as well as in retaliatory attacks against local communities. There has also been growing evidence of attacks by the group against communities outside of the Somali region, including in the Oromia region since late December 2016, and in Somalia." (Africanews, 5 September 2019)

In its February 2019 national report to the UN Human Rights Council the government announces that it was drafting new legislation on police use of force and accountability because "the existing legal framework lags behind the international standards and human rights principles." (Government of Ethiopia, 25 February 2019, pp. 6-7)

## 4.2 Military

According to Article 51 of the Constitution, the Federal Government “shall establish and administer national defence and public security forces” (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 51). Article 87 of the Constitution defines the principles for National Defence (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 87). In his September 2016 report van Veen provides the following overview of the Ethiopian National Defence Force:

“The Ethiopian National Defence Force is about 140,000 personnel strong (army and air force) and maintained at the estimated cost of 0.8% of GDP (2015). It has a reputation for quality and effectiveness despite its limited means. It is also among the top four contributing countries to UN peacekeeping missions (Somalia, Abyei and South Sudan) (2015). Finally, it has been accused of past human rights violations during operations in Somalia and Ogaden. Its legal basis is article 51 of the Constitution.” (van Veen, September 2016, p. 27)

In December 2018 Africanews gives an overview on the Ethiopian army:

“The army had till early this year been routinely accused of leading government crackdown on anti-government protests in the Oromia region. It is reputed as one of Africa’s most equipped armies. It has huge responsibilities given the volatility of the Horn of Africa region where till recently there was tense military standoffs and the issue of insurgents in Somalia, where Ethiopian forces are deployed. Even though most regional states have their security setup; the army is usually called in when insecurity goes out of the hand of local security apparatus. Earlier this year, it took the army to depose leader of the eastern Somali Regional State, SRS.” (Africanews, 13 December 2018)

In December 2018 The Reporter Ethiopia mentions a new draft bill that proposes a “significant amendment to the existing Proclamation of the National Defense Forces of Ethiopia.” The draft bill was presented to the parliament and includes the “re-establishment of a Naval Force along with Cyber and Space Forces”. It was referred to the Foreign Relations and Peace Affairs Standing Committee for further discussion. (The Reporter Ethiopia, 1 December 2018)

In December 2018 FBC reports that Ethiopia’s defence forces were restructured and the number of regional commands was downsized from six to four:

“The new regional commands are Eastern, Western, Southern, and Northern. It [Ethiopia] has also set up a committee tasked to reestablish a naval force and a special operation command. Based on these, the government has reshuffled military positions, according to Lieutenant General Mola Hailemariam, chief of special operation at the defense force. About 66 of the soldiers who had marched on the Prime Minister office last October were punished by a military court. Administrative measures were also taken against other soldiers.” (FBC, 14 December 2018)

In January 2019 Minister of Defence, Aisha Mohamed, presented her ministry’s six-month performance report noting that amendments were made on 20 articles of the Defence Forces Proclamation in order to “help the army to effectively fulfill their mission”. She added that in the previous six months, “army members who met the requirements were promoted and about

7,017 others retired from the military for failing to pass a psychometric test” (FBC, 8 January 2019).

According to the Defense Forces Proclamation No. 1100/2019, which came into force on 19 January 2019 the Defense Force Proclamation No. 809/2013 is repealed (Proclamation No. 1100/2019, 19 January 2019). For a full text version of the new proclamation please see:

- Proclamation No. 1100/2019 - Defense Forces Proclamation, 19 January 2019 (published in the Federal Negarit Gazeta of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia)  
<https://chilot.me/2019/08/proclamation-no-1100-2019-defense-forces-proclamation/?download=15610>

Since April 2019 Lemma Megresa is Minister of Defence (Africanews, 19 April 2019). Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is the Commander in-Chief of the Ethiopian Defence Forces (FBC, 11 January 2019). After the killing of army chief Seare Mekonnen in June 2019, General Adem Mohammed became the new army chief (Africanews, 20 July 2019).

For further data on the military strength of Ethiopia please also see:

- Global Firepower: Ethiopia Military Strength, undated  
[https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country\\_id=ethiopia](https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=ethiopia)

An overview on the Ethiopian Defence Forces can be found under the following link:

- Global Security: Ethiopian Ministry of Defense; Ethiopian National Defense Forces, last update: 23 November 2015  
<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/ethiopia/mod.htm>

In July 2017 an article by Ethiopian news website Nazret described the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) as “de facto the military branch of the TPLF/EPRDF party” which was “nothing but an accretion and expansion of TPLF’s liberation army.” The article further notes:

“While the very first statement of article 87 of the Constitution declares that: ‘the composition of the national armed forces shall reflect the equitable representation of the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia’, the reality on the ground is far more different. Just as the TPLF/EPRDF political apparatus has handed down all the plum positions to its members and persons related to it either by blood or friendship, it did quite obviously the same with the higher military positions.” (Nazret, 17 July 2017)

In April 2019 the advisor to the prime minister on national security affairs, Temesgen Tiruneh, said that over the past year the leaderships within the defence force which were held by individuals from one ethnic group have been “balanced in way that represented the nations and nationalities of the country”. (7D News, 6 April 2019)

In August 2019 the Ethiopian Defence Command and Staff College graduated 100 senior military officers (FBC, 10 August 2019). Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed “urged the graduates to serve the wellbeing of Ethiopians with the spirit of unity, saying ethnicity or race does not bother a soldier and cannot be confused or swayed by the agendas of politicians.” (ENA, 11 August 2019)

### 4.3 National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS)

The USDOS describes the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) in its Country Report on Terrorism published in September 2018 as follows:

“The National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), which has broad authority for intelligence, border security, and criminal investigation, is responsible for overall counterterrorism management in coordination with the ENDF [Ethiopian National Defense Force’s] and EFP [Ethiopian Federal Police]. The three security organizations comprise the Ethiopian Task Force for Counterterrorism, a federal-level committee to coordinate counterterrorism efforts. The NISS facilitated some coordination with the United States to include several domestic counterterrorism cases.” (USDOS, 19 September 2018)

In its November 2019 Country Report on Terrorism the USDOS notes that “the National Intelligence and Security Service is reorganizing and reforming to focus on collecting intelligence to detect and disrupt terrorism in support of the EFP and the Attorney General’s mission to increase law enforcement efforts and prosecutions related to terrorism.” (USDOS, 1 November 2019)

The Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service was established in 1995 and is tasked with “gathering information necessary to protect national security” (van Veen, September 2016, p. 28). Its core functions are “the collection and analysis of intelligence and the provision of security for the population and the state” (SWP, May 2017, p. 38).

In October 2018 a paper by Shimels S. Belete published in the European Scientific Journal mentions that Ethiopia re-established the NISS in 2013 with multiple mandates “both on general and specific intelligence and security matters” (Belete, October 2018, p. 211). The paper further gives an overview of the National Intelligence and Security Service:

“To sum it up, looking at the role of the National Intelligence and Security Service in the prevention and countering of terrorism, the article submits that the two legislative frameworks – the Ethiopian Anti-Terrorism Proclamation No 652/2009 and the National Intelligence and Security Service Re-Establishment Proclamation No. 804.2013 – have cemented the Service as a ‘lone-wolf’ institution portrayed as unique organ of its kind. In so doing, two paradoxical and perplexing approaches seem to have affected its original institutional legitimacy and its functional integrity. On the one hand, the two proclamations have unwarrantedly merged a multitude of mandates and powers, and have entrusted this organ as a sole authority to lead and carry out all the functions. On the other hand, these same legislations are short of firmly stipulating the strict normative standards, and in creating a commendable politico-legal controlling platform that is capable of watchdogging and monitoring the daily functioning of the Service. Notwithstanding the delicately articulated indications for executive, judicial, and legislative oversight mechanisms, given the very demanding nature of scrutinizing its operation, and in comparison to the corresponding regulatory and institutional frameworks adopted in other jurisdictions, the Service appears to enjoy unfastened immunity. And hence, the key task of ensuring its accountability is largely compromised if not totally overlooked.” (Belete, October 2018, p. 225)

For a full text version of the National Intelligence and Security Service Re-establishment Proclamation No. 804/2013 please see:

- Proclamation No. 804/2013 - National Intelligence and Security Service Re-establishment Proclamation, 23 July 2013 (published in the Federal Negarit Gazeta of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia)  
<https://chilot.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/proclamation-no-804-2013-national-intelligence-and-security-services-establishment.pdf>

According to Proclamation No. 1097/2018 the “Ministry of Peace shall have powers and duties to [...] oversee and follow up national intelligence and security, as well as information network and financial security functions” (Proclamation No. 1097/2018, 29 November 2018, Article 13). The National Information Security Service (NISS) is accountable to the Ministry of Peace (Proclamation No. 1097/2018, 29 November 2018, Article 33).

In June 2018 Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed removed Getachew Assefa - a member of the executive committee of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) – from his position as director of the NISS (Borkena, 17 July 2018) and named Adem Mohamed as successor (Reuters, 8 June 2018). After the death of Army Chief of Staff, General Seare Mekonnen, in June 2019, General Adem Mohammed was appointed Chief of the General Staff of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) and Demelash Gebremichael became his successor as Director of NISS. (The Reporter Ethiopia, 29 June 2019; Africanews, 28 June 2019)

In November 2018 Yared Zerihun, the former deputy chief of NISS was arrested (Xinhua, 15 November 2018). In November 2018 Al Jazeera mentions the arrest of “leading figures from the National Intelligence Service and Security (NISS)”. The article further notes:

“Since November 9, the Ethiopian government has arrested more than 60 leading figures from the National Intelligence Service and Security (NISS) and the state-owned conglomerate Metals and Engineering Corporation (METEC). They stand accused of committing egregious human rights and participating in organised corruption. This is the biggest campaign of mass arrests targeting powerful figures from the security and military establishment since the reformist Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power seven months ago. [...]

Announcing the charges against the accused, Attorney General Berhanu Tsegaye revealed gruesome details of heinous crimes committed by security forces. Tsegaye accused the top leadership of the Ethiopian intelligence of torturing political detainees suspected of holding critical views of the government, using cruel methods such as waterboarding, gang rape, electric shocks, hanging suspects on a tree and beating them, and tying suspects naked to a tree overnight. The attorney general also accused METEC, the largest military-industrial conglomerate in the country tasked with building major projects, including the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), of perpetrating an outrageous plunder of the national wealth. [...]

While the routine use of torture and the plunder of national wealth by a criminal underworld comprised of members of the national intelligence, financial institutions, and

other key state sectors had already been well documented by human rights organisations in the past, the latest revelations provided more substance to these allegations.” (Al Jazeera, 20 November 2018)

Reuters also gives an overview on some of the arrests in November 2018:

“Attorney General Berhanu Tsegaye said evidence showed ‘the senior leadership of the national security agency’ told members of Abiy’s Oromo ethnic group to attack him at a rally in June. The assertion is jolting in an ethnically diverse country that has seen recent ethnic clashes and because Abiy is the ruling coalition’s first Oromo leader. Berhanu said at a news conference that arrest warrants have been issued for 36 security agents accused of abusing prisoners and for more than 30 officials from a military-run firm, where he said inquiries had uncovered mismanagement. Reuters could not immediately contact the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), or the industrial conglomerate named by the attorney general - Metals and Engineering Corporation (METEC). Several hours later, 36 officials from branches of the security forces including NISS and the federal and Addis Ababa police forces and 26 officials from METEC appeared in the Federal High Court in the capital.” (Reuters, 12 November 2018)

In May 2019 Getachew Asefa, the former head of the NISS, was charged in absentia (Reuters, 7 May 2019; Xinhua, 7 May 2019). As reported by Borkena “the Federal Prosecutor has charged 26 individuals but four of them including Getachew Assefa are not yet in custody” (Borkena, 24 May 2019).

According to an article by The Reporter Ethiopia, Members of Parliament officially visited the headquarters of NISS located in Menelik II Avenue in Addis Ababa for the first time in January 2019. The article further notes:

“The NISS HQ and other facilities have never been accessible to any government officials for a long time until Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) came to power last year. Especially, for the past two decades, NISS, which was headed by the former Director General, Getachew Assefa, has been a very secretive place. Now, however, the new leadership has already pledge to turn the secretive institution to a more transparent and publicly trusted institution instead of a facility feared by its citizens. It has also been repeatedly accused of committing serious abuse of human rights. Currently, dozens of intelligence and security officials are detained and their trial process underway at the Federal High Court.” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 19 January 2019)

In August 2019 FBC reports on the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the NISS and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) “to jointly combat terrorism” (FBC, 14 August 2019).

#### *Information Network Security Agency (INSA)*

An April 2019 article by 7D News also mentions an institution called the Information Network Security Agency (INSA), which “was established with a mandate for safeguarding the country’s

information, including defending the country from cyber-attacks”. Regarding misconduct by the agency, the article elaborates:

“[...] it had been gathering all kinds of security information, detaining people and hiding suspects, said Temesgen Tiruneh, advisor to the prime minister on national security affairs in a briefing on Friday April 5th. According to the advisor, the intelligence agency had been engaged in abuse of power and meddling on the internal and security affairs of regional governments and different institutions. [...] The advisor highlighted the efforts made over the past year to reform the various intelligence agencies, including INSA. [...] He said a lot of work has been done to build up the image of security institutions, and those who were responsible for the crimes committed prior to the reforms, have also been prosecuted, the advisor indicated.” (7D News, 6 April 2019)

Like the NISS, the INSA is accountable to the Ministry of Peace (Proclamation No. 1097/2018, 29 November 2018). As reported by France 24, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had once been “the founding head of Ethiopia's cyber-spying outfit, the Information Network Security Agency” (France 24, 11 October 2019). In February 2019 Borkena notes that “Intelligence Officers graduated from Kifle National Security Studies Institute”. They were trained as part of the reform process at the NISS, Defence Forces and INSA. The premier minister attended the ceremony and “told the graduates they need to be free from political, ethnic or religious affiliation as their only allegiance is to Ethiopia and Ethiopians” (Borkena, 5 February 2019a).

## 4.4 Intelligence monitoring

### 4.4.1 *Monitoring of persons within Ethiopia*

In September 2019 the Collaboration on International ICT [information and communications technology] Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA), publishes a report on Internet Freedom. CIPESA is funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) and “focuses on decision-making that facilitates the use of ICT in support of development and poverty reduction” (CIPESA, undated). The report notes with regard to surveillance of citizens:

“The national security and intelligence apparatus consistently targeted opposition groups, activists, journalists, and researchers with malware attacks for years. In 2011, the Ethiopian government established the Federal Police Commission with power to investigate crimes relating to information network and computer system and install CCTV cameras. This move facilitated mass surveillance of citizens, in the absence of clear information as to the capabilities of the system and general oversight.” (CIPESA, September 2019, p. 29)

As reported by the USDOS, in 2018 “there were credible reports the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a). The report further notes that “opposition political party leaders and journalists reported suspicions of telephone tapping, other electronic eavesdropping, and surveillance” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1e). The Anti-Terrorism Proclamation of 2009 allows the National Intelligence and Security Service to “intercept or conduct surveillance on the telephone, fax, radio, internet, electronic, postal and similar communications of a person suspected of terrorism” (Proclamation No. 652/2009, 28 August 2009, Article 14).



According to reports cited by the USDOS, in 2018 “there was a pattern of surveillance and arbitrary arrests of Oromo university students based on perceived dissent, participation in peaceful demonstrations, or both” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a). Human Rights Watch reports that, when the organisation was visiting Ethiopia in February 2019, “people were speaking very openly about sensitive subjects in public spaces, cafes, and mini buses, which is a marked change from a country once consumed by fears of monitoring and surveillance” (HRW, 3 April 2019).

Similarly, Freedom House notes in February 2019:

“Wide-reaching surveillance programs and the presence of the EPRDF at all levels of society have inhibited private discussion. However, broad political changes in 2018, including the release of political prisoners and lifting of bans against prominent government critics in the media and other sectors has fostered a more open atmosphere for private discussion. And unlike in some previous years, in 2018 there were no reported arrests of private citizens in connection with antigovernment remarks.” (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section D4)

No further current information (since January 2018) regarding monitoring of persons within Ethiopia could be found. The following reports cover surveillance activities before Abiy Ahmed took office:

In May 2017 Saskia Brechenmacher details surveillance activities by the Ethiopian authorities in a book available under the following link:

- Brechenmacher, Saskia: Civil Society Under Assault: Repression and Responses in Russia, Egypt, and Ethiopia; Surveillance and State Control in Ethiopia, 18 May 2017  
<https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/18/surveillance-and-state-control-in-ethiopia-pub-69960>

In March 2014 HRW released a report on telecom and internet surveillance in Ethiopia, available under the following link:

- HRW – Human Rights Watch: ‘They Know Everything We Do’, Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia, 25 March 2014  
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/03/25/they-know-everything-we-do/telecom-and-internet-surveillance-ethiopia>

#### *4.4.2 Monitoring of Ethiopian diaspora*

A September 2018 report based on interviews in Ethiopia by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) cites information obtained from a researcher in the country in May 2018:

“The interlocutor noted that the Government monitors the Diaspora ‘every single day’, and is very active in this regard, because that is the only field of resistance that where Ethiopian law cannot be enforced by the Ethiopian authorities, since they cannot physically go there. The Diaspora community is composed of a certain number of ‘hardliners’ with no room for any ‘middle ground’. Their extremist positions might be explained by the fact that some of them have been victims of torture and persecution in Ethiopia and forced to leave the country.” (DIS, September 2018, p. 25)

The report also provides some information on the situation of the Ethiopian diaspora on p. 17:

- DIS – Danish Immigration Service: Ethiopia: Political situation and treatment of opposition, September 2018

[https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1450527/1226\\_1542183917\\_ethiopia-political-situation-report-2018.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1450527/1226_1542183917_ethiopia-political-situation-report-2018.pdf)

A November 2018 report by the DIS cites information obtained from the British Embassy and the US Embassy in Addis Ababa on 18 May 2018 and in July 2018:

“The interlocutor [British Embassy] expects that the Government ‘definitely’ is monitoring the activity of the diaspora, especially their social media activity, from Minnesota in the US to the UK. However, only activity, which was really into hatred and violence is likely be flagged in Ethiopia whereas political rhetoric such as ‘the Government needs to change’ or ‘the opposition should be heard’ would be monitored but not likely to lead to repercussions.” (DIS, 5 November 2018, p. 24)

“[US Embassy:] The situation of members of the diaspora is ruled by its own internal dynamic, which are not obvious to external observers. The Government conducts internet surveillance, monitors the activities of diaspora members who are active on YouTube canals or otherwise engaged in internet based communication. This surveillance also includes those diaspora members who are of a low profile and who are less vocal in their anti-government agitation. It is well know that the Ethiopian government periodically closes down the internet – also known as ‘internet blackouts’ – blocks certain websites, which are critical towards the Government and actively seeks to restrict freedom of expression domestically: to illustrate this practice examples were given of how the authorities had contacted foreign governments, hosting large diaspora communities, and requested a foreign government to take action in order to close down TV programs or YouTube channels which were run by the diaspora communities.” (DIS, 5 November 2018, p. 27-28)

The November 2018 DIS report also cites information obtained from an international NGO and from a legal source in July 2018 and May 2018 regarding the diaspora:

“The level of surveillance inside Ethiopia is high and, according to the interlocutor [international NGO], there is ‘no doubt’ that this surveillance extends to people who belong to the diaspora. The activities and utterances of those members of the diaspora who are active on social media such as YouTube are most possibly being followed closely by the secret service.

The internet and telecommunication sector in Ethiopia is highly controlled by the state. There are numerous examples of how the federal government has decided to shut down the internet to restrict citizens’ communication. The Government also blocks certain websites, in particular those of diaspora groups. In Ethiopia it is against the law to access the internet via a VPN [Virtual Private Network] connection. In practice the law does not, however, prevent ordinary people from using VPN connections. For individuals who are not on the radar of the security service it is possible to use VPN connections to access the internet.” (DIS, 5 November 2018, pp. 34-35)

“When asked whether the Ethiopian authorities were monitoring the diaspora, the source [Legal source] advised that the diaspora leaders would be watched. If members of the diaspora have not been very vocal and critical of the ruling party, they could return to Ethiopia. Actually some diaspora members were asked to return and would be offered land if they accepted.” (DIS, 5 November 2018, p. 55)

No further current information (since January 2018) regarding monitoring of the Ethiopian diaspora could be found. The following reports cover monitoring of the Ethiopian diaspora before Abiy Ahmed took office:

A February 2017 query response by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada contains information regarding the diaspora:

- IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: Ethiopia: Information on the ability of the Ethiopian government to monitor and censor Ethiopian dissidents living in Canada, including scope and type of surveillance, and technology used; treatment of returning dissidents from Canada, including whether particular profiles face greater risks upon return (2014-January 2017) [ETH105729.E], 2 February 2017  
<https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1423401.html>

In December 2017 HRW notes that Ethiopian authorities carried out digital attacks and monitoring of government critics abroad (HRW, 6 December 2017).

- HRW – Human Rights Watch: Ethiopia: New Spate of Abusive Surveillance, 6 December 2017  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/06/ethiopia-new-spate-abusive-surveillance>

## 5 General human rights issues

### 5.1 Freedom of expression, association, and assembly

The Ethiopian Constitution provides for “the right to freedom of expression without any interference”, including the “freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of his choice” (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 29), the right to freedom of association (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 31), and “the right to assemble and to demonstrate together with others peaceably and unarmed, and to petition” (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 30).

After Prime Minister Abiy stated that freedom of speech is essential for the future of Ethiopia, NGOs reported that “arrests, detention, abuse, and harassment of persons for criticizing the government dramatically diminished” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a).

According to Freedom House severe restrictions on freedom of assembly imposed in the past “eased somewhat in 2018”, however, security forces sometimes violently dispersed protests. Under the state of emergency (SOE) between February and June 2018 public protests were effectively banned (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section E1). The USDOS notes that “after the lifting of the SOE, security forces’ response to protests showed signs of increasing restraint” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2b).

In September 2018 authorities arrested 1,204 people. Including persons suspected of holding illegal rallies, according to police (VOA, 25 September 2018; see also AI, 24 September 2018). The USDOS further mentions that in 2018, the Ethiopian government severely limited the right to “freedom of association and the right to engage in unrestricted peaceful political activity” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2b). According to Freedom House the administration of the new prime minister “has pledged reforms that will ease the legal and practical requirements for opposition parties to operate, though substantial changes are necessary before political parties can carry out activities freely” (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section B1).

The USDOS provides a detailed account on freedom of expression under the SOE regulations in place between February and June 2018:

“The SOE regulations contained several prohibitions that restricted freedom of speech and expression and subsequently resulted in the temporary detention of some independent voices. The regulations, interpreted broadly, prohibited any covert or overt agitation and communication that could incite violence and unrest. Restricted activities also included any communication with designated terrorist groups or antipeace forces, storing and disseminating texts, storing and promoting emblems of terrorist groups, incitement in sermons and teaching in religious institutions to induce fear or incite conflict, and speech that could incite attacks based on identity or ethnicity. Under the SOE it was illegal to carry out covert or public incitement of violence in any way, including printing, preparing, or distributing writings; performing a show; demonstrating through signs or making messages public through any medium; or importing or exporting any publication without permission.

The SOE also prohibited exchanging any message through the internet, mobile telephones, writing, television, radio, social media, or other means of communication that may cause a riot, disturbance, suspicion, or grievance among persons. Police used suspicion of individuals possessing or distributing such media as a premise to enter homes without a warrant. The SOE prohibited any individual from exchanging information with a foreign government in a manner that undermined national sovereignty and prohibited political parties from briefing journalists in a manner deemed unconstitutional or that undermined sovereignty and security. Individuals self-censored because of these prohibitions. The protests and demands for change were driven by the EPRDF's attempts to impede criticism through intimidation, including continued detention of journalists, those who express critical opinions online, and opposition figures. Additionally, the government monitored and interfered in activities of political opposition groups. Some citizens feared authorities would retaliate against them for discussing security force abuses. Authorities arrested and detained persons who made public or private statements deemed critical of the government under a provision of the law pertaining to inciting the public through false rumors." (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a)

Please see [section 2.3.1](#) for further information on the proposed law on hate speech, the Organization of Civil Societies Proclamation and the electoral law, and [section 5.2](#) for freedom of the media.

#### *5.1.1 Treatment of political opposition groups and activists*

In January 2018 hundreds of political prisoners were released, including OFC chairperson Merera Gudina (Freedom House, 4 February 2019). In February 2018 Bekele Gerba, OFC deputy chair, was released (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section B2; USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1e). In May 2018 the government pardoned Andargachew Tsige, who had been sentenced to death for his membership in the banned opposition group Ginbot 7 (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section B1) and charges against Ginbot 7 leader Berhanu Nega and Oromo activist Jawar Mohammed were withdrawn (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1e). In July 2018 a "widespread amnesty for thousands of individuals charged with treason and other crimes against the state" was approved by parliament (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section B1).

According to Freedom House "opponents of the EPRDF have found it nearly impossible to operate inside Ethiopia and were subject to prosecution under restrictive antiterrorism and other legislation" (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section B1). However, with the implementation of changes by the government of Abiy Ahmed the conditions for opposition groupings improved (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section B2).

In its human rights report published in March 2019 the USDOS provides the following overview on the situation of the opposition in 2018:

"The government, controlled by the EPRDF, called on all diaspora-based opposition groups, including those in armed struggle, to return and pursue nonviolent struggle. Virtually all major opposition groups, including OLF, Oromo Democratic Front, ONLF, and PG7, welcomed the request and returned to the country. On February 14, authorities released

Mamushet Amare, former leader of the All Ethiopian Unity Party, whom authorities had detained on terrorism-related charges since March 2017. Constituent parties of the EPRDF conferred advantages upon their members; the party directly owned many businesses and allegedly awarded jobs and business contracts to loyal supporters. Opposition parties reported they rented offices and meeting halls in the Amhara and Oromia Regions without difficulty. There were reports unemployed youths not affiliated with the ruling coalition sometimes had trouble receiving the ‘support letters’ from their wards necessary to obtain jobs. Registered political parties must receive permission from regional governments to open and occupy local offices, with at least one major opposition party reporting it was able to open many offices during the year in advance of the 2020 national election. Laws requiring parties to report ‘public meetings’ and obtain permission for public rallies inhibited opposition activities.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 3)

The USDOS report also notes the following regarding treatment of opposition members:

“Opposition members, journalists, and athletes reported ruling party operatives and militia members made intimidating and unwelcome visits to their homes and offices. These intimidating contacts included entry and searches of homes without a warrant. There were reports that authorities dismissed opposition members from their jobs and that those not affiliated with the EPRDF sometimes had trouble receiving the ‘support letters’ from their kebeles (neighborhoods or wards) necessary to obtain employment.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1e)

According to Amnesty International 1,200 youths were arrested for taking part in protests on 15 September 2018 in Burayu (AI, 24 September 2018). In June 2019 the OFC accused “the government of closing down a branch office of the party in Guji zone” and “harassing party members in the region”. According to the government, “the offices were closed on grounds that they were not operating in accordance with the law” (Borkena, 21 June 2019). After the assassinations on 22 June 2019 (see [section 2.5](#)) activists and members of the opposition National Movement of the Amhara were targeted in arrests (AI, 9 July 2019). In August 2019 University lecturer Firew Bekele was charged under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP). He is accused of writing a book criticizing Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (AI, 20 September 2019).

In October 2019 a protest planned by the Addis Ababa Baladera Council against “ownership claim by Oromo politicians over Addis Ababa” was canceled. Eskinder Nega (see also [section 5.2.1](#)), the leader of the Baladera Council said that “the council called off the demonstration for two reasons: the first being not to go against law and order and second was to stop the arrest against members of the council.” Eskinder did not say how many members had been arrested. (Ezega, 13 October 2019)

For further information on the treatment of political opposition groups and activists please also see [chapter 2](#).

### *5.1.2 Treatment of human rights and women’s rights activists*

In the first half of 2018 very few local human rights groups operated, because of significant government restrictions in place. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) was the only

local independent human rights group operating in the country. According to the USDOS, the government's distrustful and wary attitude regarding domestic and international human rights groups and observers "appeared to be changing". USDOS further mentions the establishment of the Consortium of Ethiopian Rights Organizations on 16 August 2018 by four local charities and rights organizations. It focuses on advocacy for human rights groups. (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 5)

Please see the following link for the website of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO):

- EHRCO - Ethiopian Human Rights Council: Home, undated  
<https://ehrc.org/>

In August 2019 the Consortium of Ethiopian Rights Organizations (CERO) notes the establishment of a National Human Rights Defenders Coalition in collaboration with the Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE) and EHRCO (CERO, 6 August 2019). According to its website, the AHRE wants to advance the work of Ethiopian human rights defenders and perform advocacy and related tasks. It describes itself as a "non-governmental, non-partisan, and not-for-profit organization" (AHRE, undated).

According to Freedom House's report on civil rights in 2018 "NGOs can now more freely organize public events, renew registration, and make public statements that are critical of the government without facing harassment or intimidation by authorities." (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section E2)

In October 2018 human rights lawyer Henok Aklilu was arrested at his office in Addis Ababa along with his friend Michael Melak. Henok Aklilu is known for representing persons accused of terrorism-related offences. After three days in jail the two were released. (AI, 22 October 2018)

## 5.2 Freedom of the media

Article 29 of the Ethiopian constitution guarantees the "freedom of the press and other mass media and freedom of artistic creativity" (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 29). However, state of emergency regulations restricted the rights to freedom of speech and press. Political and religious organizations, as well as foreigners are banned by law from owning broadcast stations. Private newspapers reported editorial control by the government. Also, journalists routinely practiced self-censorship. Government interference for instance included "requests regarding specific stories and calls from government officials concerning articles perceived as critical of the government". (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a)

Since Prime Minister Abiy took office, the government "has eased restrictions on independent media, permitting both greater freedom for journalists and a more diverse range of news for consumers" (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section D1). Abiy invited diaspora media outlets to return and they began their operations without incident. According to the USDOS "several outfits printed hard-hitting and carefully investigated pieces exposing problems without repercussions" (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a).



AI however notes that the Ethiopian media regulatory agency “ordered two television stations to explain why they had not covered a pro-government rally in Addis” in June 2018. According to AI this points “to lingering administrative restrictions on media freedom.” (AI, 3 May 2019)

In March 2019 the USDOS provides the following overview of the media landscape in Ethiopia:

“Independent journalists reported access to private, affordable, independent printing presses was generally limited to a single government-owned facility, citing government intimidation. At least one outlet attempted to import a printing press for private use but was allegedly unable to secure permission to make it operational. Independent media cited limited access as a major factor in the small number, low circulation, and infrequent publication of news. In Addis Ababa six independent newspapers had a combined weekly circulation of approximately 43,000 copies; there were in addition two sports-focused newspapers. There were no independent newspapers outside of the capital. Eight independent weekly, monthly, and bimonthly magazines published in Amharic and English had a combined circulation estimated at 28,000 copies. State-run newspapers had a combined daily circulation of approximately 50,000 copies. Most newspapers were printed on a weekly or biweekly basis, except state-owned Amharic and English dailies and the privately run Daily Monitor.

Government-controlled media closely reflected the views of the government and ruling EPRDF party. The government controlled the only television station that broadcast nationally, which, along with radio, was the primary source of news for much of the population. There were two government-owned radio stations that covered the entire country, seven private FM radio stations broadcast in the capital, one FM radio station in the Tigray Region, and 28 community radio stations broadcast in other regions. State-run Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation had the largest broadcast range in the country, followed by Fana Broadcasting Corporate, generally regarded as affiliated with the ruling party. There were a few private satellite-based television stations, including the Ethiopian Broadcast Service.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a)

In April 2019 CPJ notes that the Ethiopian press is much freer after Abiy took power, however journalists and rights defenders say that the risk of attack and arrest, especially in restive regions, remains. The article cites Befekadu Hailu, an editor of the Addis Maleda weekly as noting that the reforms “are not legally nor institutionally guaranteed until now. They are so because the leaders on top are willing, but neither their willingness nor their hold on power is permanent.” (CPJ, 29 April 2019)

In March 2019 an article by the London-based weekly newspaper The Economist provides an overview on the history of free media in Ethiopia:

“This is not the first blossoming of free media. The EPRDF liberalised the press after it snatched power from a Marxist junta known as the Derg in 1991. More than 200 newspapers and 87 magazines were launched between 1992 and 1997. That did not last. Since 2001, 120 newspapers and 297 magazines received licences - but 261 of them were cancelled. At least 60 journalists fled the country between 2010 and 2015. Repression is

one challenge for Ethiopia's would-be press barons; a tough business environment is another. The average lifespan of an Ethiopian newspaper is nine months, reckons Endalk Chala, an academic who has studied the trade. Addis Zeybe, which was launched in October, stopped after only four issues. Advertisers 'don't want to be associated with media that is critical of the government', says its founder, Abel Wabella. New titles face especially long odds. The state owns the main printing press, which can pulp issues the government does not like and which increased prices by almost 50% in December. 'It's a death blow,' says Eskinder [Nega]. Abiy has spoken of the importance to democracy of a vibrant press, but state media still dominate, says Tsedale Lemma, the editor of Addis Standard, a feisty rag that recently returned from exile." (The Economist, 16 March 2019)

### *5.2.1 Treatment of journalists and bloggers*

Freedom House notes the release of the bloggers Eskinder Nega, Zelalem Workagegnehu, Yonatan Wolde, and Bahiru Degu in January and February 2018 (Freedom House, 1 November 2018). In February 2018 the charges against Natnael Feleke, Atnaf Berhane, and Befekadu Hailu, who all are members of the Zone 9 blogging group were dropped (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1e; Freedom House, 1 November 2018).

However, in March 2018 police arrested Seyoum Teshome for criticizing the state of emergency on his blog. He was released in April 2018. Also, several bloggers and journalists were re-arrested in March 2018 while at a social gathering, including the recently released Eskinder Nega. All the arrested persons were released after spending twelve days in prison. (Freedom House, 1 November 2018)

In July 2018 mobs attacked a crew from the state owned Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency, in Oromia region. Their driver sustained injuries and died a few days later. (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a; CPJ, 29 April 2019)

In October 2018 Seyoum Teshome criticized the mayor of Addis Ababa on Facebook. The following two days, Seyoum received constant death threats, after another user published Seyoums mobile phone number. (AI, 3 May 2019)

In its World Report covering the year 2018 HRW writes that "journalists who had been wrongfully detained or convicted on politically motivated charges" were released, including well-known persons like Eskinder Nega and Woubshet Taye. The report further notes:

"The federal Attorney General's Office dropped all pending charges against bloggers, journalists and diaspora-based media organizations, including the Zone 9 bloggers, Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT), and Oromia Media Network (OMN), which had previously faced charges of violence inciting for criticizing the government. OMN and ESAT television stations reopened in Addis Ababa in June, following calls by Prime Minister Abiy for diaspora-based television stations to return. Additionally, the government lifted obstructions to access to more than 250 websites. The restriction on access to the internet and mobile applications introduced during the 2015 protests was also lifted. Many of Ethiopia's repressive laws used to silence dissent and restrict citizens' meaningful engagement - including the Charities and Societies Proclamation, the Media Law, and the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation - were being revised at time of writing." (HRW, 17 January 2019)

In February 2019 two journalists of privately owned Mereja TV were briefly detained by regional police in Legetafo, a town in Ethiopia's Oromia region. The journalists were interviewing people displaced by home demolitions (CPJ, 8 March 2019). Police allegedly asked the journalists to explain why they did not inform the police about their trip to the site on the outskirts of Addis Ababa (HRW, 3 April 2019). Upon release they were attacked by a mob outside the police station (The Economist, 16 March 2019). In April 2019 Mereja TV chief executive Elias Kifle said that authorities had not investigated the crime (CPJ, 29 April 2019).

In June 2019 police blocked the entrance to a press conference by Eskinder Nega and turned journalists and other attendees away. A few days earlier, the police had also barred a previously organized press conference by Eskinder, where he wanted to announce his plans for a TV channel. (AI, 7 June 2019)

In July 2019 CPJ reports on the arrest of several journalists. The manager of privately-owned ASRAT TV, Berihun Adane, and Getachew Ambachew, a volunteer at the station, were detained under Ethiopia's anti-terror law following the events on 22 June 2019. On 26 June 2019 a court ordered Getachew, Berihun, and four others to be detained for 28 days on allegations of terrorism. ESAT television station reporter Amanuel Mengistu, said he was arrested from his home in Addis Ababa on 24 June 2019 and released unconditionally two days later, without being told why he was arrested. Mesganaw Getachew, a reporter with the Ethiopis newspaper, was arrested on 22 May 2019, while he was reporting on the demolition of homes in the Arat Kilo neighborhood of Addis Ababa. Tamirat Abera, a journalist with the privately owned Ahadu FM, said he was arrested in Addis Ababa by police from the Oromia region. Gettye Yalew, an online reporter, said he was arrested on 26 May 2019 when he went to visit the detained Tamirat. They were both freed on 27 May 2019. CPJ further mentions the organisation is investigating other reports of journalists being arrested and harassed, including Ethiopis contributor and activist Elias Gebru (CPJ, 9 July 2019). Elias Gebru is the editor of the Enqu magazine, defunct since 2014, and was arrested on 6 July 2019 (AI, 9 July 2019).

In July 2019 AI mentions “a wave of arrests of journalists in the past weeks” and notes that the government “announced plans to charge journalists and media outlets for their reporting on the armed forces” (AI, 9 July 2019). In August 2019 CPJ calls on the “authorities in Ethiopia to disclose the charges against three media workers from the Sidama Media Network or release them immediately”. They had been arrested on 18 July 2019 in Hawassa, in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region (CPJ, 9 August 2019). Also in August 2019, CPJ notes that Mesganaw Getachew from the privately owned Ethiopis weekly is “facing allegations of contravening Ethiopia’s Anti-Terrorism Proclamation”. He was arrested after interviewing a lawyer outside an Addis Ababa court (CPJ, 20 August 2019). In September 2019 five journalists who “have been prolific reporters on human rights violations and political developments in Ethiopia since 2011” were arrested on charges of “incitement to terrorism”. According to AI police failed to produce evidence for their alleged crimes (AI, 4 October 2019).

### *5.2.2 Internet and social media activism (incl. internet providers and censorship)*

The “status of internet penetration” in Ethiopia is rated at 18.6 percent (CIPESA, September 2019, p.9). Between 31 May 2017 and 1 June 2018 internet freedom remained highly

restricted but saw incremental improvements after the former prime minister resigned in February 2018 and Abiy Ahmed was appointed in April 2018, according to Freedom House. The organisation further notes that “despite the recent improvements, Ethiopia still has a nationwide, politically-motivated internet blocking and filtering scheme that can be redeployed at any time” (Freedom House, 1 November 2018).

In June 2018 the government “unblocked access to 264 websites, including blogs and news outlets”. Charges against the US-based Oromia Media Network (OMN) and the US-based Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT) were dropped and they operate back in Ethiopia without restriction (HRW, 3 April 2019; see also CPJ, 22 June 2018 and Freedom House, 1 November 2018). The websites Ayyantuu.net and Opride.com, which are known for reporting on protests, also became accessible (Freedom House, 1 November 2018). The USDOS notes that the unblocking included “blogs, opposition websites, websites of PG7, the OLF, and the ONLF, and news sites such as al-Jazeera, BBC News, and Real Clear Politics” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a). Regarding restrictions of internet connectivity in 2017 and 2018, Freedom House notes:

“Internet shutdowns were a frequent occurrence in Ethiopia throughout 2017 and 2018, as the government continued to disrupt network connectivity to stifle antigovernment protests and online criticism. The Ethiopian government’s monopolistic control over the country’s telecommunications infrastructure via EthioTelecom enables it to restrict information flows and access to internet and mobile phone services. [...] All connections to the international internet are completely centralized via EthioTelecom, enabling the government to cut off the internet at will. Network shutdowns have been common since November 2015, when large-scale demonstrations began against the government’s plan to appropriate land from the Oromia region of the country. [...] Mobile internet services were then shut down nationwide for several days following the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in February 2018, coinciding with the country being placed under a state of emergency. Oromia state experienced another unexplained internet blackout for over two weeks in March 2018. In a positive step, most network connectivity returned to the country in April 2018 when the new Prime Minister Abey Ahmed began instituting reforms, though network shutdowns were reported in August 2018 in the country’s eastern region during a conflict between federal troops and regional leaders.” (Freedom House, 1 November 2018)

Freedom House further mentions that “during protests in February 2018, the Facebook page of prominent political activist, Jawar Mohammed, who had over 1.2 million followers at the time of the incident, was continuously blocked” (Freedom House, 1 November 2018). In March 2018 Africanews reports that Facebook blocked the account of Jawar Mohammed on the basis of “posting too fast”. This was the third time his account has been suspended since mid-February 2018 (Africanews, 7 March 2018).

In August 2018 internet services were disrupted, when violence broke out in Jijiga, Dire Dawa and Harar (CNN, 15 July 2019). The Somali region and the cities Harar and Dire Dawa “have been without access to the internet for four days, while violence in Eastern Ethiopia has claimed the lives of many civilians” (Access Now, 7 August 2018).

During protests in September 2018, internet and mobile data were shut down by the government in parts of the country where there were demonstrations (HRW, 3 April 2019). From 17 to 19 September 2018 “mobile internet was unavailable in the capital, Addis Ababa” (CPJ, 21 September 2018). According to the USDOS, mobile internet data in and around Addis Ababa was briefly shut down in and around Addis Ababa in September and October 2018, while authorities responded to unrest (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 2a).

A March 2019 article by Ethiopia Insight on the Oromo Liberation Front mentions that “Internet has been blocked in swathes of western Oromia since mid-January” (Ethiopia Insight, 1 March 2019). Sources mention internet blackout following the events of 22 June 2019 in Amhara region (CNN, 15 July 2019; CPJ, 9 July 2019). The network was gradually restored after 100 hours, while mobile data only returned on 2 July 2019 (CNN, 15 July 2019). Already earlier, between 11 June 2019 and 18 June 2019, there were intermittent network disruptions affecting internet and SMS services. Ethio Telecom later apologized via statements posted to its Twitter account (CPJ, 9 July 2019). The two internet shutdowns in June 2019 followed “a potential fear of leakage of school exams over the internet, and high profile assassinations” (OxHRH, 18 July 2019). Rights activists believe “the government will continue to restrict access to the internet during politically sensitive moments as previous governments have” (CNN, 15 July 2019). Al Jazeera provides the following information on the June 2019 internet shutdowns:

“On June 11, many Ethiopians woke up to an online blackout. At the time, no explanation was offered by the state-run Ethio Telecom, the sole provider of internet services in the country. A week later, internet and text messages services were restored. While Ethio Telecom offered apologies to its subscribers, again, there was no explanation for what caused the disruption. News reports said the internet blackout was meant to block the leak of national exam answers. [...]

The internet blackout that followed the failed coup on June 22 forced Ethiopians to rely on national television and radio for information and updates. There have been claims and counterclaims by authorities since Saturday's killings. The failed coup is seen as the biggest challenge yet to sweeping political and economic reforms that Abiy kick-started after he took power in April 2018.” (Al Jazeera, 25 June 2019)

In September 2019 the Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) reports that Ethiopia “has over the years experienced multiple and long-running network disruptions” and further notes:

“Following uprisings in some regions, the government continuously blocks social media sites and carried out national and regional internet blackouts, often claiming national security threats or the need to stem cheating during national exams. More than 12 government-ordered internet disruptions have been recorded in Ethiopia over the last couple of years.” (CIPESA, September 2019, p. 28)

### 5.3 Freedom of religion

According to estimates from the 2007 census 44 percent of the population adheres to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 34 percent to Sunni Islam and 19 percent are Christian evangelical or Pentecostal. The northern regions of Tigray and Amhara are predominantly Orthodox, while Afar, Oromia, and Somali Regions are Muslim. Protestant churches are strongest in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region, Gambella, and parts of Oromia. Eastern Rite and Roman Catholics, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and practitioners of indigenous religions and others constitute less than 5 percent of the population. Rastafarians, numbering about 1,000 persons, are residing in Addis Ababa and the town of Shashemene in the Oromia Region. (USDOS, 21 June 2019, section I; compare CSA, 2007)

Freedom House notes that in 2018 "Prime Minister Abiy facilitated dialogues during the year to heal schisms in both the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and among the country's Islamic leaders" (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section D2).

Regarding Ethiopia's Jewish community, numbering approximately 2,000 persons, the USDOS mentions that "there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts, and the Addis Ababa Jewish community reported it felt protected by the government to practice its faith but did face limited societal discrimination" (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6).

#### *Situation of Christians*

On 20 January 2018, during the Timket festival - the Orthodox Christian Epiphany celebrations - security forces fired on a group of youth shouting anti-government slogans (USDOS, 21 June 2019, section III; BBC News, 21 January 2018). The Ethiopian Human Rights Council reported that security forces killed eight persons and wounded 16 others during the protest (USDOS, 21 June 2019, section III). Ethiopia Observer cites Voice of America's Amharic service that reported seven people killed, including a ten-year-old boy and two members of the defence forces (Ethiopia Observer, 25 January 2018). The incident happened in Weldiya, in the Amhara region, about 510km north of Addis Ababa (Africanews, 21 January 2018). Following the events in Weldiya further protests were reported in the towns of Mersa, Robit and Gobiye. According to the town residents of Mersa around 10 people were shot and killed on 27 January 2018 (Ethiopia Observer, 27 January 2018).

The Patriarch of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church, the exiled synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, returned to Ethiopia after 27 years of exile in the United States. He was greeted by Patriarch Abune Mathias when arriving at the airport in Addis Ababa. Abune Merkorios assumed spiritual leadership and Abune Mathias the administrative leadership of the reunited church (USDOS, 21 June 2019, section III; Ethiopian Embassy in Brussels, 2 August 2018; Borkena, 26 July 2018).

According to FBC the "Addis Ababa diocese of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has reinstated 300 priests suspended on various reasons" (FBC, 9 August 2018). An inquiry committee of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) "dismissed 14 individuals, including the

manager of the Addis Ababa Diocese, for illegally suspending the priests and violating their rights” (USDOS, 21 June 2019, section III).

According to a representative of an Amhara advocacy organisation quoted in a Washington Examiner article, “thirty churches, mostly Ethiopian Orthodox, have been attacked, 18 have been burned to the ground, and almost 100 worshippers have been killed since July 2018” (Washington Examiner, 21 September 2019).

In September 2019 The Africa Report notes that over 20 churches, most of them in Jijiga, in Somali regional state, were destroyed since July 2018. In August 2018 seven priests were killed and seven churches burnt. In March and April 2019 twelve people were killed in two attacks in Jijiga and in July 2019 five churches were attacked and three people killed. (The Africa Report, 18 September 2019)

According to reports, in August 2018, seven Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Churches were burnt and seven priests killed due to the violence in Jijiga, Somali region. Also, nearly ten Evangelical churches were looted and burned (Borkena, 6 August 2018). According to the USDOS “an organized group of Muslim youth killed six priests and burned down at least eight EOC churches in the Somali Regional State during widespread civil unrest in Jijiga” on 4 August 2018 (USDOS, 21 June 2019, section II).

In the Southern town of Halaba Kulito seven churches of the Ethiopian Protestant Church were destroyed and torched on 9 February 2019 (Addis Standard, 12 February 2019; also see Morning Star News, 1 March 2019). Officials say “the churches were destroyed after a fake news circulated on social media claiming that Mosques were attacked in Durame area” (Addis Standard, 12 February 2019). Africa Report notes that “10 churches belonging to eight different Christian denominations were destroyed in Southern Ethiopia after fake reports that mosques had been attacked in Durame, a town in south-east Ethiopia” on 9 February 2018. The article also mentions the attacks on three mosques (The Africa Report, 18 September 2019).

In May 2019 the Mekane Yesus Evangelical Church in the town of Robe was ordered by the authorities of Oromia regional state to leave its premises within 30 days (Christian Post, 7 July 2019). According to the authorities “complaints were made about the level of noise made by the church”, while the church pastor claims “the evacuation request is targeted at the church because of prejudice against the protestant churches in Ethiopia” (Christian News, 21 June 2019).

According to Deutsche Welle Amharic three Ethiopian churches in Sidama, Amaro and Burji dioceses were burnt in July 2019. Deacons fled to adjacent churches in Oromo region, following the attacks (Borkena, 22 July 2019). In September 2019 protests were held in 43 cities by mostly Amhara Christians “against the burning of churches and attacks on worshipers around the country” (Washington Examiner, 22 September 2019; see also Borkena, 15 September 2019).



## *Situation of Muslims*

Freedom House notes that “the government has historically discriminated against Muslims, who comprise about 34 percent of the population”, however, in 2018 the relationship with the Muslim community improved (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section D2). On 14 February 2018 the government released four members of the Ethiopian Muslim Arbitration Committee. The group was established in 2011 “to protest the government’s interference in religion and to advocate for the resolution of Muslim grievances” (USDOS, 21 June 2019, section III). Ahemedin Jebel, Ahemed Mustafa, Mohammed Abate and Kalid Ibrahim were released from Kality Prison (VOA, 14 February 2018; USDOS, 21 June 2019, section III). Ahmedin had been arrested in 2012 along with several other activists and sentenced to 22 years in prison (OPride, 16 February 2018; USDOS, 21 June 2019, section III). Between February and May 2018 “more than a dozen prominent Muslim activists who had been convicted under the country’s antiterrorism law in 2015 for protesting against the government’s treatment of Muslims were released from prison.” (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section D2)

In February 2019 three mosques were torched in South Gonder, Amhara regional state (Addis Standard, 12 February 2019). According to police “the torching was committed by a group of youngsters who said they have seen St. Mary’s picture being crushed at a Muslim wedding ceremony and that led to the violent attacks on the Mosques and looting and damaging properties” (Horn Observer, 13 February 2019).

### **5.4 Treatment of women**

Freedom House notes that “women hold nearly 39 percent of seats in the lower house and 32 percent in the upper house, but in practice, the interests of women are not well represented in politics” (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section B4). According to the USDOS, women “remained significantly underrepresented across both elected and appointed positions” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 3). During the year 2018, women were appointed to a number of prominent positions, including Sahle-Work Zewde as first female president (DW, 28 January 2019), Meaza Ashenafi as President of the federal Supreme Court, and Birtukan Mideksa as the head of Ethiopia’s electoral board (Africanews, 11 October 2019).

According to the USDOS “women’s access to gainful employment, credit, and the opportunity to own or manage a business was limited by their lower levels of educational attainment and by traditional attitudes” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6). A DW article notes that “the notion that girls do not belong in school persists in rural villages” and only 30 percent of the girls go to school after reaching eighth grade (DW, 28 January 2019).

The USDOS report further mentions widespread discrimination against women, especially in rural areas. Also, the law “contains discriminatory regulations, such as the recognition of the husband as the legal head of the family and the sole guardian of children older than five” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6).

According to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) the “legal framework, including the Criminal Code of 2005, does not cover all forms of

discrimination against women and is not being implemented properly” (CEDAW, 14 March 2019, p. 3).

An article by The Independent cites Ellen Alem, a gender and development specialist at Unicef Ethiopia, as noting that Ethiopia has “very progressive laws for gender equality enshrined in the constitution”, however, “the problem is in translating those to reality” (The Independent, 7 January 2019).

#### *5.4.1 Violence against women*

##### *Legal framework*

The Setawee Movement and Development Alternatives for a New Era (DAWN) in their February 2019 shadow report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) note “the absence of specific laws on gender-based violence, domestic violence and sexual harassment” and further mentions that “sexual harassment is yet to be well-defined in the Ethiopian context, and marital rape has not been criminalized yet” (Setawee Movement/DAWN, February 2019, p. 3).

In its December 2018 Ethiopia profile of the Social Institutions & Gender Index 2019, the Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that there “is no law addressing violence against women, including a comprehensive approach to address violence against women with specific provisions for investigation, prosecution and punishment of the perpetrator and protection and support services for survivors”. The OECD further explains that Article 564 of the Criminal Code criminalises domestic violence (OECD, December 2018, p. 4-5). This Article stipulates that the Articles 555-560 of the Criminal Code - which regard to injury - do also apply to persons committing “violence against a marriage partner or a person cohabiting in an irregular union” (Proclamation No. 414/2004, 9 May 2005, Article 564). The OECD mentions as a shortcoming in the legislation that Article 564 is limited to intimate partner violence and refers only to crimes against the person and health, thus encompassing physical and psychological violence, but not sexual or economic violence within the family. Also, the law does not provide for civil remedies for victims of domestic violence (e.g. protection order, compensation, custody order, residence order, shelter, medical benefits) (OECD, December 2018, pp. 4-5).

The Criminal Code provides for a penalty between five and fifteen years imprisonment for rape of a woman (under specific circumstances the maximum penalty can be twenty years or even life imprisonment) (Proclamation No. 414/2004, 9 May 2005, Article 620). Spousal rape is not expressly addressed by law (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6). Some judges interpret Article 564 (see above) to cover spousal rape cases, others do not (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6).

Sexual violence is also addressed under Articles 622 to 628 of the Criminal Code (Proclamation No. 414/2004, 9 May 2005, Articles 622-628). The Criminal Code refers to sexual harassment as “taking advantage of the distress or dependence of a woman” which is “punishable, upon

complaint, with simple imprisonment” (Proclamation No. 414/2004, 9 May 2005, Article 625). The USDOS mentions that “penalties of 18 to 24 months imprisonment are prescribed for conviction” of sexual harassment (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6), however, it is unclear where this information originates from.

### *Practical implementation*

In their February 2019 shadow report to CEDAW, the Setaweet Movement and DAWN note the following on measures by the government regarding gender-based violence:

“The role of police in gender-based violence cases needs serious oversight. ‘Women-and-Children’s Desks’ have been created throughout the government structure, including at police stations, and there are Child Justice projects throughout the Ethiopian court system. In addition, women police officers are usually the first contacts for survivors of violence. While this structure has had some success in gender-responsive legal services, there is also in our communities, a widespread mistrust of police, and we know of incidences where police officers have allegedly raped women and girls, particularly sex workers. The impunity enjoyed by the Police has meant that Incidences of sexual violence are further underreported. Lastly, weak accountability system and lax punitive measures combine with criminal acts by the police to normalize the violation of rights of women and girls.” (Setaweet Movement/ DAWN, February 2019, p. 14)

OECD mentions that the government established child and women protection units in police stations, the Violence against Women Investigation and Prosecution Team in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, and victim friendly benches within courts (OECD, December 2018, p. 4; see also Government of Ethiopia, 2014, pp. 24-25).

According to the USDOS, “sexual harassment was widespread” in 2018 (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6) and CEDAW reports that “women continue to face gender-based violence, including domestic violence, marital rape and emerging forms of violence such as acid attacks and gang rape” (CEDAW, 14 March 2019, p. 6). These forms of violence are “not sufficiently criminalized” (Setaweet Movement/DAWN, February 2019, p. 3). According to the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 23 percent of women aged 15-49 “have experienced physical violence and 10% have experienced sexual violence”, and 34 percent “of ever-married women age 15-49 have experienced spousal physical, sexual, or emotional violence” (CSA, July 2017, p. 289).

The Setaweet Movement and DAWN in February 2019 note that “although sex workers face violence to a great degree, crimes against them are hardly ever reported or prosecuted” (Setaweet Movement/ DAWN, February 2019, p. 4). The organisations further mention “persistent gender inequality, sexual harassment and violence against girl students” (Setaweet Movement/ DAWN, February 2019, pp. 6-7). According to the organisations, the “current displacements and ethnic-based clashes have a specific gender component to them with reports of the gang-rapes of girls as young as five, and with women reportedly raped in front of their husbands” (Setaweet Movement/ DAWN, February 2019, p. 13). The USDOS further reports on marriage by abduction and the situation of affected women:

“Marriage by abduction is illegal, although it continued in some regions despite the government’s attempts to combat the practice. Forced sexual relationships accompanied most marriages by abduction, and women often experienced physical abuse during the abduction. Abductions led to conflicts among families, communities, and ethnic groups. In cases of abduction, the perpetrator did not face punishment if the victim agreed to marry the perpetrator.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6)

#### *5.4.2 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)*

The Criminal Code provides for a minimum punishment of three months imprisonment or a minimum fine of 500 Birr for circumcising a woman of any age, and a prison sentence between three and five years for infibulation of the genitalia of a woman (or five to ten years in case of injury to body or health) (Proclamation No. 414/2004, 9 May 2005, Articles 565 and 566). OECD further notes the following regarding the legal situation:

“The law includes criminal penalties for medical practitioners, parents and other practitioners of FGM (Criminal Code, art. 565, 566 & 569). Victims are entitled to legal redress and compensation (Criminal Code, art. 101 & Criminal Procedure Code, art. 154). The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission dispenses legal assistance for victims (Proclamation to Provide for the Establishment of the Human Rights Commission, art. 6).” (OECD, December 2018, p. 6)

The UK-based charity 28 Too Many notes that although there have been arrests, the “enforcement of the law appears weak and few cases reach court”. The organisation further states:

“There is limited publicly-available information on any cases that have been taken to court and their outcomes, and cases appear to be settled more often through local, traditional justice systems. Ethiopia has a defined National Strategy in place and has committed public funds to tackling FGM, and public awareness of the harms of the practice continues to increase. Knowledge of the content and meaning of the law, however, remains limited in many practising communities.” (28 Too Many, July 2018, p. 8)

The USDOS notes that FGM was less common in urban areas and cites government sources as reporting that there had never been criminal charges regarding the practice. Limited application of the law was reported by the media. (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6)

In March 2019 CEDAW raised concerns that “the national strategy and action plan on harmful traditional practices against women and children” which had been adopted in 2013 to combat FGM, child marriage and abduction, “remains subject to a lack of proper implementation, monitoring and evaluation” and that the penalties envisaged under the Criminal Code “have not been implemented” (CEDAW, 14 March 2019, pp. 5-6).

The law “does not specifically criminalise medicalised FGM, cross-border FGM, or the failure to report the practice, although the Criminal Code does address such crimes in more general terms.” (28 Too Many, July 2018, p. 8)

The Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) in March 2019 mentions the following regarding current research and data on FGM:

“The phenomenon female genital mutilation (FGM) is a common practice in Ethiopia and has been so for centuries. Despite its importance for social, traditional, and religious reasons there is scarce research done in the country. Currently the main provider of statistical data is the Ethiopian government through its national statistical agency. As of late, a few organisations and scholars have also been able to carry out limited research, however since the scope and methods of the studies varies it is problematic to draw general conclusions on the phenomena.” (Migrationsverket, 14 March 2019, p. 5)

According to the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 65 percent of women in the age group between 15 and 49 years are circumcised. The data show that the prevalence of FGM/C increases with age: while more than 75 percent of the women between the age of 30 and 49 are circumcised, the rate among women in the age group from 15 to 19 is 47 percent. The highest prevalence is found in the Somali region with 99 percent, followed by Afar (91 percent). The lowest rate is found in Tigray (24 percent) and Gambella (33 percent) (CSA, July 2017, p. 317). Regarding age at circumcision, the DHS notes that 49 percent of the women were circumcised when they were younger than age 5. Six percent reported they have been 15 years or older when they were circumcised (CSA, July 2017, p. 318).

In August 2019 President Sahle-Work Zewde officially presented the National Costed Roadmap to end child marriage and FGM (FBC, 15 August 2019). The summary document of this Roadmap 2020–2024, published by the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MoWCY) in August 2019, notes:

“Overall, based on mothers’ reports, 16 per cent of girls under 15 years of age have experienced FGM/C. Similar to child marriage, the 2016 EDHS [Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey] shows that rates of FGM/C are dropping across age cohorts keeping in mind regional variations. The age at which women are cut also varies by region. Through further analysis of EDHS 2016 data, the National Roadmap includes the rate of acceleration needed to achieve the goal of eliminating child marriage and FGM/C by 2025 or 2030. [...] For FGM/C, progress needs to be a little over seven times faster than progress over the past ten years (looking at the average rate of reduction amongst girls and women aged 15 to 19 years) to eliminate the practice by 2030.” (MoWCY, August 2019, p. 3)

Further information on FGM can also be found in the following documents:

- Abathun, Asresash Demissie; Sundby, Johanne; Gele, Abdi A.: Attitude toward female genital mutilation among Somali and Harari people, Eastern Ethiopia, 6 October 2016  
<https://www.dovepress.com/attitude-toward-female-genital-mutilation-among-somali-and-harari-peop-peer-reviewed-fulltext-article-IJWH>
- Boyden, Jo; Pankhurst, Alula; Tafere, Yisak: Child protection and harmful traditional practices: female early marriage and genital modification in Ethiopia, 6 June 2012  
[https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:ad065460-bef4-4578-8fd4-b22d62ac599e/download\\_file?file\\_format=pdf&safe\\_filename=OA%2B2012%2BBoyden%2Bet%2Bal%2BHarmful%2BTraditional%2BPractices.pdf&type\\_of\\_work=Journal+article](https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:ad065460-bef4-4578-8fd4-b22d62ac599e/download_file?file_format=pdf&safe_filename=OA%2B2012%2BBoyden%2Bet%2Bal%2BHarmful%2BTraditional%2BPractices.pdf&type_of_work=Journal+article)

## 5.5 Treatment of individuals of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities

### 5.5.1 *Legal situation and treatment by the state*

The Criminal Code provides that “whoever performs with another person of the same sex a homosexual act, or any other indecent act, is punishable with simple imprisonment” (Proclamation No. 414/2004, 9 May 2005, Article 629), which is a penalty defined as lasting between ten days and three years, or may be extended to five years under aggravating circumstances (Proclamation No. 414/2004, 9 May 2005, Article 106). The penalties for “Homosexual and Other Indecent Acts Performed on Minors” are between three and 25 years rigorous imprisonment, depending on the age of the victim (Proclamation No. 414/2004, 9 May 2005, Article 631).

According to the USDOS human rights report for 2018, there were no reports of persons incarcerated or prosecuted for engaging in same-sex sexual activities (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6). The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) refers to an Ethiopian human rights lawyer, according to whom “no one has been charged or convicted under the new criminal provisions since they were introduced in 2004” because “the criminal system is overloaded and there is little judicial appetite to prosecute homosexuality” (ILGA, March 2019, pp. 323).

ILGA refers to a legal stipulation referring to public morality in a law regarding the registration of charities and societies, according to ILGA, this stipulation has led Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) activists in Ethiopia “to believe that they cannot be legally registered though it has not been tested” (ILGA, March 2019, p. 222). The new version of this law, the Organizations of Civil Societies Proclamation adopted in 2019, regulates that the Charities and Societies Agency “shall refuse to register an organization where it finds that: [...] The aim of the Organization or the activities description under the Organization’s rules are contrary to law or public moral” (Proclamation No. 1113/2019, 12 March 2019, Article 59).

### 5.5.2 *Treatment by members of society*

According to a 2007 survey by the Pew Research Center, 97 percent of the 710 surveyed persons in Ethiopia were of the opinion that homosexuality should be rejected (Pew Research Center, 4 October 2007, p. 35).

A 2017 report by the Pew Research Center refers to a 2008 survey, in which “nearly all Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia (95%) said ‘homosexual behavior’ is morally wrong”. The report notes that “it is possible opinions could have shifted since this survey was conducted.” (Pew Research Center, 8 November 2017)

In March 2019 the USDOS notes the following regarding the situation of LGBT persons:

“There were reports of violence against LGBTI individuals; however, reporting was limited due to fear of retribution, discrimination, or stigmatization. There are no hate crime laws or other criminal justice mechanisms to aid in the investigation of abuses against LGBTI individuals. Individuals generally did not identify themselves as LGBTI persons due to severe societal stigma and the illegality of consensual same-sex sexual activity. Activists in

the LGBTI community reported surveillance and feared for their safety.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6)

The AIDS Resource Center in Addis Ababa reported the majority of self-identified gay and lesbian callers, most of whom were men, requested assistance in changing their behavior to avoid discrimination. Many gay men reported anxiety, confusion, identity crises, depression, self-ostracism, religious conflict, and suicide attempts.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6)

A March 2019 country profile by ILGA provides a detailed overview on the situation of LGBT people in Ethiopia by citing different sources:

“[...] the difficult legal and social situation of LGBT people in Ethiopia has been described in accounts given by individuals who have fled the country. For instance, a 2013 news report interviewed two individuals who explained that homosexuality is common viewed as a ‘Western disease’. Another news report in 2014 interviewed several gay men who have been harassed and attacked in public. A 2016 research report also featured interviews with LGBT individuals in the closet who dare not reveal their sexual identities due to fears of backlash and social ostracisation. There is no visible LGBT community, though there are some informal groups that have emerged online, particularly on social media. In 2011, Christian, Catholic and Muslim religious leaders demanded the cancellation of the International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa organised by African Men for Sexual Health and Rights (AMSHer) on the basis that it violated the country’s conservative culture. In fact, there is a strong religious counter-movement to SOGI human rights claims, and representatives from different religious groups and political parties gather annually to discuss prevalent issues, including the ‘gay problem’. A researcher also described a ‘crusade against homosexuals’ by various religious institutions in December 2008 that culminated in a resolution that referred to homosexuality as the ‘pinnacle of immorality’ and urged Parliament to ban homosexuality in the Constitution, establish rehabilitation centres to ‘treat’ homosexuals’ and censor the internet to prevent exposure to ‘homosexuality and other unwanted cultures’.” (ILGA, March 2019, pp. 323-324)

In June 2019 the online LGBT publication Pink News reports that Chicago-based tour operator Toto Tours is facing death threats and hate messages from the Ethiopian Orthodox community over plans to visit religious sites in Ethiopia (Pink News, 7 June 2019). The company “was founded in 1990 primarily catering to all-male, gay clientele but has since expanded to include men and women, regardless of sexual orientation” (VOA, 7 June 2019). BBC News also mentions the controversy over the planned visit by Toto Tours and further notes:

“Bahiru Sheway, the co-founder of House of Guramayle, a London-based organisation that advocates for the recognition of LGBT rights in Ethiopia, told the BBC that homophobia had deep roots in the country. Most gay Ethiopians did not reveal their sexuality, he said, for fear of physical harm and ostracism. He added that the row over Toto Tours had triggered a social-media storm, with many Ethiopians expressing outrage at the prospect of gay tourists visiting the country - and even calling for attacks against them and their straight allies.” (BBC News, 4 June 2019)



VOA in a June 2019 article on the Toto Tours visit cites Dereje Negash, the vice chairman of Sileste Mihret United Association, an Orthodox Christian organization, as saying that “we hate homosexuality; they can't come to Ethiopia and visit Lalibela and other historical places. Because homosexuality is a crime - so if they come here, they will be damaged” (VOA, 7 June 2019).

The report by the Setaweet Movement and DAWN of February 2019 mentions that lesbian and bisexual women and women identifying as Intersex - most of whom hide their sexual orientation and identity - “are completely ignored even within the Ethiopian human rights discourse that does not include sexuality, or the rights of sexual minorities, as an issue at all” (Setaweet Movement/DAWN, February 2019, p. 15).

## 6 Rule of law/Administration of justice

### 6.1 General overview of the Ethiopian judicial system

Both at the federal and at the state level there is a “three-tiered court system” (Tefera, November 2018, p. 20). At the federal level the court system comprises the Federal First Instance Courts, the Federal High Courts and the Federal Supreme Court (Proclamation No. 25/1996, 15 February 1996, Article 2; see also World Bank, 1 July 2010, p. 12). Regarding the situation on the state level a report published by the World Bank in 2004 notes the following:

“The Constitution directs the creation of three levels of state courts: the State Supreme Court (which also incorporates a cassation bench to review fundamental errors of state law), High Courts (or the Zonal Courts), and First Instance Courts (or the Woreda Courts). State Supreme Courts sit in the capital cities and have final judicial authority over matters of state law and jurisdiction; they can also exercise the jurisdiction of the Federal High Court if none exists in that state. Similarly, State High Courts sit in the zonal regions and can assert the jurisdiction of Federal First Instance Courts in addition to state jurisdiction.” (The World Bank, 2004, p. 13)

The supreme federal judicial authority is vested in the Federal Supreme Court (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 78). The House of Peoples' Representatives can establish subordinate federal courts nationwide or in some parts of the country. There are Federal High Courts and First Instance Courts in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. (The World Bank, 2004, p. 13) Additionally, Federal High Courts have been established in the regional states of Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Somali, and SNNPR. (The World Bank, 2004, p. 81, endnote 35; see also Proclamation No. 322/2003, 8 April 2003)

The Federal Courts Proclamation 25/1996, along with subsequent amendments sets the “jurisdictional division of labor between the federal and regional judiciaries”. In its 2010 report, the World Bank noted that some cases that would normally be seen by federal courts were delegated to regional courts, as “the federal courts until recently only functioned in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa” (World Bank, 1 July 2010, pp. 12-13). No current information could be found on the functioning of federal courts.

For the Federal Courts Proclamation No. 25/1996 and further relevant amendements and laws please see (Proclamation No. 25/1996, 15 February 1996; Proclamation No. 138/1998, 1 December 1998; Proclamation no. 254/2001, 6 July 2001; Proclamation No. 321/2003, 8 April 2003; Proclamation No. 454/2005, 14 June 2005; Proclamation No. 322/2003, 8 April 2003).

In Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa there are municipal judiciaries structured along two levels, the First Instance and the Appellate Courts (The World Bank, 2004, p. 14, World Bank, 1 July 2010, p. 12, FN 22). The City Charta of Addis Ababa further allows the establishment of Kebele<sup>9</sup> Social

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<sup>9</sup> Kebeles are an administrative unit “with an average population of 5,000, and are the smallest recognized division of local government. Kebeles do not have the same constitutional formality as states and other sub-regions, but have parallel administrative and judicial structures, and in practice serve as the primary level of governmental

Courts, which hear offenses and disputes up to 5,000 birr. The decisions of the Social Courts can be appealed at the First Instance Courts (The World Bank, 2004, pp. 14-15). The states of Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples and Harari have also established Social Courts that “handle small claims and minor disputes” (Globalex, April 2016, section 2.4.4 and endnote 63). These courts are “operating at the kebele level and using a combination of formal and customary law” (The World Bank, 1 July 2010, p. 9).

The USDOS human rights report covering the year 2018 notes that the “constitution recognizes both religious and traditional courts” and further mentions:

“Many citizens residing in rural areas had little access to formal judicial systems and relied on traditional mechanisms for resolving conflict. 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 Somali and Afar Regions, which are predominantly Muslim. Other traditional systems of justice, such as councils of elders, functioned predominantly in rural areas. Some women felt 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.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1e)

More detailed information on the Ethiopian judicial system can also be found in the above-cited documents:

- The World Bank / Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Uses and Users of Justice in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia’s Federal Courts, 1 July 2010  
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/205561468209366086/pdf/579880ESWOP1121010July020101reduced.pdf>
- Globalex: UPDATE: Introduction to the Ethiopian Legal System and Legal Research (By Girmachew Alemu Aneme Update by Hanna A. Zemichael), April 2016  
<https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/Ethiopia1.html>

According to the USDOS “the civil courts operated with a large degree of independence”, however “criminal courts remained weak, overburdened, and subject to political influence” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1e). Freedom House assesses in February 2019 that the judiciary is officially independent, but “in practice it is subject to political interference, and judgments rarely deviate from government policy”. Freedom House further notes:

“The November 2018 appointment of lawyer and civil society leader Meaza Ashenafi as chief justice of the Supreme Court has raised hopes for judicial reform. Ashenafi has promised to build judicial independence and reduce corruption in the courts, and she

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contact for most Ethiopian citizens.” (World Bank, 2004, p. 4). Proclamation 361/2003 Article 2(6), defines Kebele as the third administrative stratum of the city and a unit of a sub-city (Proclamation 361/2003, 24 July 2003).

claims to have the support of Prime Minister Abiy in this endeavor.” (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section F1)

The USDOS provides the following overview on the right to fair trial:

“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-incriminate, the right to present witnesses and evidence in their defense, and cross-examine prosecution witnesses. The law requires translation services provided in a language defendants understand. The federal courts have staff working as interpreters for major local languages and are required to hire interpreters for defendants that speak other languages.

Detainees did not always enjoy all these rights, and as a result defense attorneys were sometimes unprepared to provide adequate defense. 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. There were reports of authorities subjecting detainees to abuse while in detention to obtain information or confessions.

The federal Public Defender’s Office provided legal counsel to indigent defendants, but the scope and quality of service were inadequate due to a shortage of attorneys. A public defender often handles more than 100 cases and may represent multiple defendants in a single case. Numerous free legal aid clinics, primarily based at universities, provided legal services. In certain areas of the country, the law allows volunteers, such as law students and professors, to represent clients in court on a pro bono basis. There was no bar association or other standardized criminal defense representation.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1e)

Further information on the rule of law can also be found on pp. 3-4 of the Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Ethiopia published in March 2019 by the UN Human Rights Council:

- HRC – UN Human Rights Council: Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Ethiopia; Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/WG.6/33/ETH/3], 4 March 2019  
[https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2007145/a\\_hrc\\_wg.6\\_33\\_eth\\_3\\_E.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2007145/a_hrc_wg.6_33_eth_3_E.pdf)

Freedom House notes in February 2019 that “due process rights are generally not respected”, but also mentions that a review of the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, under which people have been arbitrarily arrested, began in 2018 (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section F2).

## 6.2 Detention procedures and conditions

According to the Constitution “no person may be subjected to arbitrary arrest, and no person may be detained without a charge or conviction against him” (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 17). However, the USDOS notes that state of emergency regulations in

2018 “allowed law enforcement officers to arrest and detain individuals without a court warrant and hold detainees for longer than prescribed under normal, non-SOE legal precedents”. The report mentions hundreds of arbitrary arrests and detentions related to the state of emergency (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1d). Freedom House notes “some positive developments in 2018”, however, “arbitrary arrest and detention remains common”. The organisation further reports that the “right to a fair trial is often not respected, particularly for opponents of the government charged under the antiterrorism law” (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section F2).

In September 2018 nearly 3,000 youths were arrested in Addis Ababa. Of these, 1,200 were detained for their alleged participation in protests and sent to Tolay military camp for rehabilitation. On 18 October 2018 they were released (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section F2; The Economist, 3 November 2018; Al, 24 September 2018; BBC News, 25 September 2018).

The USDOS’ human rights report covering the year 2018 gives the following account on detention procedures in Ethiopia:

“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 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (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; however, local militias and other formal and informal law enforcement entities operated an unknown number of unofficial detention centers.

A functioning bail system was in place. Bail was not available for persons charged with terrorism, murder, treason, and corruption. In other cases the courts set bail between 500 and 10,000 birr (\$18 and \$357), which most citizens could not afford. The government provided public defenders for detainees unable to afford private legal counsel, but defendants received these services only when their cases went to court and not during the critical pretrial phases. In some cases a single defense counsel represented multiple defendants in a single case. There were reports that while some detainees were in pretrial detention, authorities allowed them little or no contact with legal counsel, did not provide full information on their health status, and did not allow family visits. There were reports

officials sequestered prisoners for weeks at a time and placed civilians under house arrest for undisclosed periods.

The constitution requires authorities under an SOE to announce the names of detainees within one month of their arrest. Authorities generally published the names of those detained under the SOE but not always within the 30-day period. Civilians were not always able to locate the rosters of names of those imprisoned.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1d)

Regarding arbitrary arrests and pretrial detention the USDOS notes:

“Authorities regularly detained persons arbitrarily, including protesters, journalists, and opposition party members. There were hundreds of reports of arbitrary arrest by security forces. [...]

Some detainees reported indefinite detention for several years without charge or trial. The percentage of the inmate population in pretrial detention and average length of time held was not available. Lengthy legal procedures, large numbers of detainees, judicial inefficiency, and staffing shortages contributed to frequent trial delays, in some cases years. SOE regulations allowed authorities to detain a person without a court order until the end of the SOE. At the conclusion of the SOE, several hundred individuals remained remanded and awaiting trial.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1d)

Regarding the ability of detainees to challenge the lawfulness of detention before a court the report elaborates:

“The law requires officials to inform detainees of the nature of their arrest within a specific period time, which varies based on the severity of the allegation. It also provides persons accused of or charged with a crime the ability to appeal. During the year no cases were brought to the courts by individuals claiming unlawful detention. There were reports of hundreds of arbitrary arrests and detentions related to the SOE. The criminal law does not provide compensation for unlawfully detained persons.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1d)

The USDOS mentions reports of “general mistreatment of detainees at official detention centers, unofficial detention centers, police stations, and in Kilinto federal prison”. Regarding the treatment of detainees, the report further notes:

“Interrogators administered beatings and electric shocks to extract information and confessions from detainees. Police investigators used physical and psychological abuse to extract confessions.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1c)

In January 2018 Ethiopia announced plans to close the Maekelawi detention facility in Addis Ababa (Al Jazeera, 3 January 2018). On April 2018 the government closed the detention center, described as “site of many reports of prisoner abuse in past years” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1c) and “one of the country's most notorious police stations” (Al Jazeera, 3 January 2018). HRW also mentions the closure of the Maekelawi detention center and further notes:

“After media reported significant complaints of abuse from prisoners in other federal detention centers, the federal Attorney General’s Office dismissed administrators of five facilities in July [2018] but they did not face criminal charges. Many detention centers run by regional administrations, some well-known for ill-treatment, rape, torture, and lack of access to medical and legal aid, remain unaffected by the reform efforts. In July, the federal attorney general told media that there would be investigations into torture and mistreatment in detention facilities. In November, a number of high-ranking security officials were arrested due to their alleged involvement in human rights abuses in detention, according to the attorney general. They had not yet been charged at time of writing.” (HRW, 17 January 2019)

In November 2018 “Ethiopia has arrested 63 intelligence officials, military personnel and businesspeople on allegations of rights violations and corruption”, some of the arrested “are suspected of abuses of prisoners” (VOA, 12 November 2018). Addis Standard also mentions the arrests and reports on information on the alleged rights violations given at a press briefing by Attorney General Berhanu Tsegaye:

“Narrowing down the allegations into the practice of torture, the attorney general pointed out that its investigations have uncovered that the practice was not only limited to prison cells, but also seven illegal private detention facilities found in the capital Addis Abeba alone. The AG’s [attorney general’s] allegations are familiar tales for Ethiopians which were out in the open especially following the mass release in February this year of thousands of prisoners of conscience. What came as a chilling experience for many, however, was to hear the AG admit publicly what every Ethiopian knows inside out. He went on describing torture methods, including but not limited to, removing fingernails, inserting pen on suspects’ noses, leaving suspects overnight tied to trees and naked, electric shock, hanging bottles of water on male genitals, gang raping women and sodomizing male suspects, using pliers to pull male genitals, and waterboarding. Main suspects of these chilling allegations are mostly drawn from the country’s top spy agency, the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS – both for federal and regional states), and prison police. [...] The number of suspects in this category as of yet stands at 37. But the AG implied this number could grow once those on the run and those who have fled the country are apprehended.” (Addis Standard, 16 November 2018)

In May 2019 FBC reports that “about 26 former officials and employees of the National Intelligence and Security Services [...] have been charged with gross human rights violations”. The charged “are suspected of gross human rights violations such as torture, forced confessions, sodomy, rape, electrocution, and arbitrary detention of people including in secret facilities”. (FBC, 7 May 2019)

The USDOS’ human rights report covering the year 2018 gives a detailed account on the detention conditions in Ethiopia. Regarding the situation under the state of emergency the report notes the following:

“During the SOE the government operated detention centers in six zones - Addis Ababa, Hawassa, Dire Dawa, Nekemte, Bahir Dar, and Semera. In March the State of Emergency



Inquiry Board announced the SOE Command Post detained 1,107 individuals in the six zones. The main reasons given by the government for these arrests included murder, destruction of public service utilities, road blockade, demolishing of public documents, trafficking illegal firearms, and inciting activities that cause ethnic conflicts. Although conditions varied, problems of gross overcrowding and inadequate food, water, sanitation, and medical care were common at sites holding SOE detainees.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1c)

Regarding physical conditions in detention the report further notes:

“Severe overcrowding was common, especially in prison sleeping quarters. For example, in 2016 the EHRC visited a prison cell in Shoa Robit Federal Prison and found that its two small windows did not allow enough light into the estimated 40-square-meter (430-square-foot) cell, which was extremely small to house 38 inmates. 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.

The government budgeted approximately nine birr (\$0.32) per prisoner per day for food, water, and health care, although this amount varied across the country. According to the World Bank, the country’s per capita GDP was \$1.50 per day. Many prisoners supplemented this support with daily food deliveries from family members or by purchasing food from local vendors. Reports noted officials prevented some prisoners from receiving food from their families, and some families did not know of their relatives’ locations. 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.

Visitors to political prisoners and other sources reported political prisoners often faced significantly different treatment compared with other prisoners. Allegations included lack of access to proper medication or medical treatment, lack of access to books or television, and denial of exercise time.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1c)

Regarding the administration of prisons, the USDOS describes:

“In July [2018] the government fired five federal prison officials following state media reports of allegations of abuse. There were reports that prisoners mistreated by prison guards did not have access to prison administrators or ombudspersons to register their complaints. Legal aid clinics operated in some prisons. At the regional level, these clinics had good working relations with judicial, prison, and other government officials. Prison officials allowed some detainees to submit complaints to judicial authorities without censorship, but courts sometimes declined to hear such complaints.

The law generally provides visitor access for prisoners. Authorities, however, denied some 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 and legal counsel. Prison regulations stipulate that lawyers representing persons charged with terrorism offenses may visit only one client per day, and only on Wednesdays and Fridays. Authorities denied family members' access to persons charged with terrorist activity.

Officials permitted religious observance by prisoners, but this varied by prison and even by section within a prison. There were allegations authorities denied detainees adequate locations in which to pray." (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1c)

In February 2019 charges were filed on eight former prison officials at Qilinto federal maximum security prison located south of Addis Abeba. The prison officials are accused of firing on inmates following the outbreak of a fire in the prison in September 2016. Addis Standard cites a guard on duty, who claims "the victims died as a result of indiscriminate shooting by prison security guards of duty" (Addis Standard, 19 February 2019).

Reports by Human Rights Watch released in July 2018 and October 2013 detail human rights abuses in Jail Ogaden, in Somali regional state, and in Maekelawi Police Station, in Addis Ababa:

- HRW – Human Rights Watch: "We are Like the Dead"; Torture and other Human Rights Abuses in Jail Ogaden, Somali Regional State, Ethiopia, July 2018  
[https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1437376/1476\\_1530828139\\_ethiopia0718-web.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1437376/1476_1530828139_ethiopia0718-web.pdf)
- HRW– Human Rights Watch: "They Want a Confession" Torture and Ill-Treatment in Ethiopia's Maekelawi Police Station, 17 October 2013  
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/10/17/they-want-confession/torture-and-ill-treatment-ethiopias-maekelawi-police-station>

### 6.3 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

According to the Ethiopian Constitution the House of Peoples' Representatives "shall establish a Human Rights Commission and determine by law its powers and functions" (Proclamation No. No. 1/1995, 21 August 1995, Article 55). The Human Rights Commission of Ethiopia was established by law on 4 July 2000 (Proclamation No. 210/2000, 4 July 2000, Article 3). In July 2004 Kasa Gebre Hiwot was appointed as head of the Human Rights Commission, while Abay Tekle Beyene was appointed as ombudsman (TNH, 1 July 2004). As reported by The Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI), a not-for-profit-organization working towards the establishment and strengthening of National Human Rights Institutions in Africa, the EHRC had only one investigation unit until 2011. Since then, however, it launched eight branch offices with separate investigation units in different regional states. As of 2016 it had nine separate investigation units (NANHRI, 2016, p. 22).

For further information, including powers and duties of the Commission please see the full-text of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Establishment Proclamation (Proclamation No. 210/2000, 4 July 2000) and pp. 19 to 22 of the 2016 NANHRI report (NANHRI, 2016, pp. 19-22).

In a June 2019 briefing, Amnesty International (AI) published recommendations for the reform of the EHRC based on an analysis of EHRC's human rights investigation reports, primarily from

2016 and 2017. The AI briefing notes that the EHRC has had limited practice of reporting human rights violations which “limits the mandate of the Commission to the promotion and monitoring of rights” and “effectively restricts the scope of human rights the Commission can monitor and promote” (AI, 17 June 2019, p. 5). AI notes that the ECHR “has often attempted to dismiss allegations of human rights violations by the authorities” and further criticises the performance of the ECHR:

“The ECHR has built an unenviable track record of dismissing credible allegations of human rights violations, producing questionable investigation reports, and many times, failing to act in clear cases of human rights violations. When it has had the occasion to investigate and report allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in its submissions to the UNHRC and Ethiopia’s Federal High Court, it missed the opportunity to alert the Ethiopian public about human rights violations occurring in Ethiopian prisons and to hold the authorities to account.” (AI, 17 June 2019, p. 5)

For further details please see the June 2019 briefing by AI accessible via the following link:

- AI – Amnesty International: Skirting human rights violations; Recommendations for reform of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission [AFR 25/0123/2019], 17 June 2019  
<https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2010504/AFR2501232019ENGLISH.PDF>

The USDOS notes that victims of rights violations by government agencies can file a complaint at the EHRC, however, “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” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1e). The report by the Setaweet Movement and DAWN of February 2019 notes that the EHRC “has been criticized by international watchdogs for its lack of impartiality, and for failing to report on human rights abuses”. The EHRC claims, “its reports of abuses were ignored until the reform process created the space for the reports of extra-judicial abuse to come to the surface” (Setaweet Movement/DAWN, February 2019, p. 3). The EHRC “investigated human rights violations in the Somali and Oromia conflicts, as well as the conflict between west Guji Zone in Oromia and Gedeo Zone in SNNPR”, but did not publish its findings (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 5). In August 2018 the regional offices of the EHRC in Jijiga, in Somali regional state “were burned and vandalized which resulted in the loss of documents and other properties that belonged to the branch office” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 11 August 2018).

In July 2019 Daniel Bekele, “a renowned human rights advocate” became head of the EHRC. Prior to his appointment, he has worked with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (Africanews, 1 July 2019). In November 2019 Reuters interviewed Bekele and reports on challenges he and the EHRC are facing, among others low salaries, the impossibility of attracting and retaining talent, scarce resources, a finance ministry that curbs the commission’s autonomy by having to approve all spending, and bureaucracy which prevents the quick deployment of researchers to investigate ethnic clashes. The commission is described as having been “largely ineffective” in the fifteen years since its establishment, rarely documenting “widespread abuses against civilians” by security forces. According to Bekele, thus only a small percentage of the hundreds of complaints per month ranging from domestic violence to mass killings are being investigated (Reuters, 17 November 2019).

## 7 Situation of ethnic groups

Horn of Africa researcher and analyst Rashid Abdi describes in May 2019 that “aggressive and adversarial strains of ethno-nationalisms, resurgent in recent years, pose grave conflict risks.” He further mentions that “many ethnic conflicts are traditionally driven by contested borders and resource competition” and are aggravated by ethno-regionalism or nationalism. (Addis Standard, 10 May 2019)

A policy paper published by the European Institute of Peace (EIP) and authored by Yonas Adaye Adeto, Assistant Professor of Global Security and Peacebuilding in the Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Addis Ababa University, mentions “a sharp escalation in community tensions and local clashes” between 2017 and 2019 (EIP, July 2019, p. 12). The ICG also notes communal tensions growing acute, as local majority groups targeted minority groups. ICG further reports:

“Clashes broke out again between Oromo and Somali in different areas of the two regional states, displacing many; Tigrayans were forced out of entire areas of Amhara; Amharas were evicted from Oromia; Wolayta, a small ethnic group from the Southern Nations and Nationalities and People’s Region and the tribe of former Prime Minister Hailemariam, were expelled from areas of Oromia. Physical fights also broke out among ethnic administrations over disputed regional boundaries. The total number of new internally displaced persons in 2018 reportedly reached more than 1.4 million.”(ICG, 21 February 2019, pp. 13-14)

Several sources mention conflicts between Guji Oromo tribes and the Gedeo along the border between West Guji in Oromia and Gedeo district in the SNNPR (IOM, 22 October 2019; see also LA Times, 30 May 2019; France 24, 10 June 2019; Ethiopia Insight, 2 January 2019; EIP, July 2019, pp. 12-13).

Al Jazeera mentions “new and old conflicts across the North Gondar zone in Amhara Region”, where Qemant are demanding self-administration (Al Jazeera, 2 April 2019). IOM similarly notes “longstanding tensions and sporadic conflict between the Amhara and Qemant communities” (IOM, 22 October 2019, p. 4). Also, there are tensions between the regions of Amhara and Tigray over border disputes (Al Jazeera, 2 April 2019; also see USIP, 2 April 2019).

In Somali regional state the conflict includes “inter-communal violence in Jijiga” in August 2018 (IOM, 22 October 2019, p. 4) and violence between Somalis and Oromos in the southeast Somali region in 2017 “displacing around one million people and leaving hundreds dead” (France 24, 10 June 2019). Ethiopia Insight mentions conflicts on various parts of the border between Oromia and Somali region since 2016 (Ethiopia Insight, 2 January 2019).

In addition to violence in the Oromia and the Somali regional states EIP also mentions that “Tigrayans were forced out of Amhara and elsewhere in Ethiopia; Amharas were expelled from Oromia and Benishangul” (EIP, July 2019, p. 12).

Since September 2018 “more than 200,000 ethnic Oromos have been evicted from the western Benishangul-Gumuz region” and in 2019 the authorities of Benishangul “accused members of

[...] the Amhara of killing more than 200 people in a territorial dispute” (France 24, 10 June 2019). According to France 24 “dozens of people were killed in clashes between residents of northern Benishangul Gumuz and Amhara states” in May 2019 (France 24, 10 June 2019).

The EIP and the Institute for Peace and Security Studies organised a workshop on ethnic extremism in Addis Abeba in January 2019. Regarding some of the results the EIP report of July 2019 notes the following:

“In fact, when asked, during a workshop on ethnic extremism, a large majority of participants (82%) saw the risk of ethnic extremism as considerable, with 44% rating the risk as ‘high’ and 38% as ‘very high’. This is consistent with media reports, some of which observed: ‘Ethnic tensions are the biggest problem for Ethiopia right now’ or that ‘You’ve got millions of people displaced – it’s a humanitarian crisis, and it could get out of control.’ Reports further stated that even though Dr. Abiy’s aggressive reform agenda has won praise, the impact of inter-communal tensions and ethnic violence presents a serious challenge for the new leadership across the country.” (EIP, July 2019, pp. 12-13)

In September 2019 Africanews cites the Ethiopian attorney general’s office as reporting that “violence has claimed the lives of at least 1,200 people and displaced 1.2 million people from their homes” over the past 12 months (Africanews, 25 September 2019).

Please see the following link for an administrative map of Ethiopia:

- UNOCHA - UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Ethiopia – Administrative Map, 15 August 2017  
<https://reliefweb.int/map/ethiopia/ethiopia-administrative-map-15-aug-2017>

## 7.1 Oromia regional state, Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa

### 7.1.1 *Political discontent in Oromia regional state*

In July 2019 ICG mentions five inter- and intra-ethnic flashpoints, including friction between the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) and the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) “over matters including high-level appointments and disputes over the capital Addis Ababa”. Regarding the capital Addis Ababa, the ICG notes the following:

“In the case of the capital, which is multi-ethnic but surrounded by Oromia regional state, in February Amhara and other groups opposed the Oromia government’s demolition of illegal housing on the capital’s outskirts, while in early March Oromo protested the transfer of new government apartments built in Oromia by the city administration to Addis Ababa residents. Addis Ababa, founded in 1887, is an autonomous city accountable to the federal government, but some Oromo factions say it is a colonial settlement on Oromo land and should be administered by Oromia region, or that the city’s encroachment into Oromia must be reversed.” (ICG, 19 July 2019)

The same report further mentions that the “tensions between the Amhara and Oromo have been aggravated by the 22 June assassinations and events leading to them” (see [section 2.5](#)). Before Asaminew Tsige was killed, he “fuelled Amhara-Oromo friction by using provocative rhetoric about what he portrayed as impending Oromo domination” (ICG, 19 July 2019).

ICG further mentions a “fault line” between the TPLF and the federal government of prime minister Abiy, who is also the head of the ODP. The report notes grievances by the TPLF over the loss of federal power and alleged “selective prosecutions of Tigrayan top officials” as well as “a federal commission that is tasked with assessing interregional boundary disputes” regarding Amhara claims on Wolkait and Raya areas (ICG, 19 July 2019).

Regarding the planned 2020 elections and the return of leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in September 2018 the ICG report mentions the following:

“Three years of anti-government protests since 2015, which largely took place in that state [Oromia], forced the internal shifts that brought Abiy to power. Violence has continued since. The September 2018 return of leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a formerly banned armed group campaigning for Oromo rights and autonomy, sparked ethnic skirmishes, as Oromo youth replaced national flags in the capital and surrounding areas with the OLF banner, provoking the anger of, and clashes with, other groups. If the electoral board registers the OLF, which is seen as the standard bearer of the Oromo liberation struggle, as a political party, it could sap votes in 2020 from Abiy’s Oromo Democratic Party: while leaders like Abiy are popular with youthful protesters, many Oromo regard the ruling Oromo party as ineffective and for years subservient to the TPLF. Moreover, OLF-linked factions are still fighting the military in western Oromia, with each side accusing the other of being the aggressor.” (ICG, 19 July 2019)

A November 2019 article by The Conversation provides an overview regarding Oromo support of Abiy Ahmed:

“Abiy seems to be the prisoner of Ethiopia’s federal government, the very system that propped him up. This federal system draws its legitimacy from citizens maintaining a strong ethnic identity at the regional level. In light of this the new premier has two options. One is to actively pursue the unifying agenda that made him popular, which would alienate his ethnic Oromo constituency. The other is to align with the interests of the Oromo ethno-nationalist movement. This would secure the electoral support of his political base in Oromia. But choosing the latter could deprive him of the non-Oromo support he has been enjoying. Indeed, since Abiy was elected the nation has gone down a renewed path of violence. It is not only the Ethiopian people who are divided, it is also the political elites who had previously shown support for Abiy’s leadership. Ethiopia’s two majority groups – the Amharas and the Oromos - have been particularly critical of the prime minister’s perceived inability to address the country’s political tumult.” (The Conversation, 9 November 2019)

In February 2019 ICG notes that ethnic nationalism is intensifying. Regarding the Oromo the article notes:

“Within the Oromo, forces outside the ruling party, notably the OLF and the Qeerroos, as well as other, less visible, groups seem increasingly emboldened and have begun to question Abiy’s commitment to their objectives – either Oromo dominance in the current dispensation or a forcible takeover of power.” (ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 25)

After protests in front of the residence of media entrepreneur Jawar Mohammed in October 2019, a report by DW describes the relationship between the prime minister and the Oromo:

“While some Ethiopians have criticised [Jawar] Mohammed for inciting ethnic hatred and aiming to destabilize the country, many young Oromo men consider him a hero. ‘The Queerroos [...] are responsible for the prime minister being in office, and today they could make the reform project much more difficult to implement,’ Ludger Schadomsky, head of DW’s Amharic Service said. ‘Some say that one day they [Queerroos] could be the reason for the end of Ahmed’s term.’ [...] Young Oromos are disappointed by how Ahmed has been running the country so far, according to Davison [William Davison, Senior Analyst from the International Crisis Group]. Several Oromia residents reported that non-Oromos had been attacked, their properties looted and burned. ‘This reflects lingering discontent in Oromia among the Oromo,’ Davison said. ‘Some of the demands dating back to 2018 of the protest movements have not been met, like the language demand. The general concern is that the prime minister is not governing in the interest of the Oromo people.’” (DW, 25 October 2019)

The Africa Report writes in October 2019 with regard to demands of the protesters:

“Among the Oromo, long-marginalised although the largest ethnic group, some activists want an independent Oromia to break away from Ethiopia. [...] Youths chanted against Abiy, an Oromo himself, and whose rise to power last April was helped by Mohammed’s campaigning. More than 400 people were arrested, the government said last week.” (The Africa Report, 11 October 2019)

An analysis regarding the October 2019 events published by Foreign Policy (FP) provides details regarding expectations by Oromo:

“Some activists worry that Abiy’s acquiescence toward Jawar presages a future of Oromo dominance. They fear that Abiy and his party have no commitment to genuine democratization but are only interested in replacing the old hegemony of the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front, or TPLF, with a new form of Oromo dominance. Despite being the largest ethnic group with more than a third of the country’s population, the Oromo have historically been marginalized from central roles in national politics and, many say, borne the brunt of historical injustices. Abiy carries the full burden of satisfying the expectations of Oromos who expect national emancipation as a result of his rise while also remaining credible enough among other ethnic groups who fear increasing Oromo dominance. Abiy indeed bends over backward to accede to Jawar’s demands. But this is most likely out of a fear of alienating the passionate Oromo youths who rally behind him than out of the desire to cement Oromo dominance. Having come to the premiership by riding the waves of Oromo protests that were spearheaded by the Qeerroo movement, he needs Jawar’s tacit approval to legitimize the claim that he represents the forces of change that brought him to power. But while Jawar’s only challenge is appealing to the Oromos through radical populist demands, Abiy is torn between two competing challenges: appealing to the Oromos and appealing to the rest of Ethiopia. His current approach is unsustainable, not least because Jawar’s demands are far-reaching. In a media interview,



Jawar had said that there are two governments in Ethiopia, the second being the Qeerroo youth movement that seems to follow his bidding.” (FP, 8 November 2019)

According to a November 2019 article by the New York Times, Jawhar Mohammed announced “he would run for a parliamentary seat in Oromia” and that he aims “to create a political party there with the goal of winning enough seats to name him prime minister” (NYT, 18 November 2019).

### *7.1.2 Central Oromia including Addis Ababa*

Please also see [section 7.2](#) for information on conflict between ethnic Oromo and Amhara.

In September 2018 AI notes that more than 58 people were killed in “a weekend of ethnic clashes” and further notes:

“The ethnic violence followed the return of exiled leaders of the once outlawed Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which had fought for self-determination of the Oromo, Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group. Their return was marked by a mass rally of supporters, some of whom violently attacked non-Oromo groups, in particular the Guraghe and Gamo living in Burayu District, in the special Oromia zone encircling Addis Ababa, resulting in death and forced displacement of non-Oromo communities. Amnesty International observed that social media was awash with hate speech against non-Oromo groups in the three days preceding the rally. However, the security forces did nothing to stop the incitement to violence, or to protect targeted communities despite their repeated pleas for help.” (AI, 17 September 2018)

With regard to the same events in Oromia regional state and Addis Ababa in September 2018, the USDOS reports:

“On September 15 and 16, youth purported to be Oromo attacked citizens in Burayu, Keta, and Ashewa Meda (Oromia towns just west of Addis Ababa), killing 27 residents mostly belonging to the Gamo and related ethnic groups that originated in SNNPR Region. Police detained hundreds of suspects for involvement in the attacks. On September 17, residents of Addis Ababa and Arba Minch, in SNNPR Region, staged large protests condemning the ethnic attacks. The protests in parts of Addis Ababa turned violent and led to loss of lives at the hands of security forces. Security forces killed seven protesters, claiming they attempted to seize firearms. Police arrested 170 individuals in Addis Ababa for suspected involvement in the violence and an additional 1,200 for allegedly attempting to escalate the violence.” (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6)

Further information on the September 2018 events can be found in several sources reporting on the events (Borkena, 7 October 2018; AI, 17 September 2018; The Reporter Ethiopia, 16 September 2018; EIP, July 2019, p. 12).

In October 2019 Oromo activist Jawar Mohammed accused government security forces of plotting an attack against him (VOA, 29 October 2019). Following the accusations, which were denied by the police, hundreds of young men gathered at Jawars residence in Addis Ababa (The

Economist, 2 November 2019). According to residents, the protests “spread to the other parts of the capital and to the cities of Adama, Ambo, Harar and Jimma” (VOA, 23 October 2019). An article by The Economist describes the ensuing events:

“What followed was reminiscent of protests in Oromia that helped to propel Abiy to power. Groups of Qeerroo burned tyres and blocked roads into the capital. They marched, carrying sticks and chanting in support of Jawar. Shops and businesses shut. Copies of Abiy's new book, which preaches national unity, were set alight. It soon took a nastier turn. In Adama, groups of mostly Amhara men (the second largest ethnicity) confronted the Qeerroo. Clashes broke out. Vehicles, shops and businesses were burned. At least 16 people died. Most were stoned to death. Near Addis Ababa non-Oromo were killed in unprovoked attacks. Spreading violence may now have claimed as many as 80 lives, says Ethiopia's human rights commissioner. Some died in attacks on churches and mosques, in a worrying sign that ethnic conflicts risk turning into religious ones, too.” (The Economist, 2 November 2019)

An article by Ezega also details some of the events in October 2019:

“Eyewitnesses told Ezega that gunshots are heard in Debre Zeit and Adama cities where several people died amid clashes between Qeerroo, on the one hand, and residents of the cities and security forces on the other. According to the eyewitnesses, several vehicles were used to transport the attacking youth into Adama, the capital city of Oromia state, through all gates of the city, but mainly from rural parts of neighboring Arsi and other Oromia regions. ‘They selectively attacked members of the Amhara and other ethnic groups as well as Christians by swords, sticks, and stones. They demanded non-ethnic Oromo people to leave the city, the eyewitnesses told Ezega. Ethnic Oromo Christian in Adama city joined the countering forces, which included ethnic Amhara, Silete, Argoba, Oromo and many others to defend from the attacking force, the eyewitnesses said. The Qeerroo burnt a paper factory owned by non-Oromo local investors and 15 vehicles of another factory as confirmed by Assegid Getachew, the Mayor of the Adama city. The Qeerroo had closed roads, broke cars, and glasses of buildings in Adama city before they were countered by the joint forces of the residents. The dead were from both sides, the eyewitnesses confirmed to Ezega. The extended violence also hit the city of Debre Zeit, 45 kilometers east of Addis Ababa. Ezega learned that some Qeerroo members were killed by security forces after the unspecified number of the city’s residents were attacked. As of this writing, the Qeerroo are still blocking roads and denied movement of people. Some members of the Qeerroo were said to have marked those houses which they thought do not belong to ethnic Oromo people for attacks. Residents of Dire Dawa city, about 500km east of Addis Ababa, told Ezega via telephone that the Qeerroo are still creating chaos in the city, even after members of the National Defense Forces were deployed in the city. A heightened security presence, crowded conditions, and significant transportation disruptions have been observed in Addis Ababa too after the Qeerroo blocked roads using stones and woods logs. Residents of Addis Ababa complained over the weakness of the government to address the unfolding security problems posed by the Qeerroo in the city.” (Ezega, 24 October 2019)

As reported by Addis Standard on 28 October 2019, in Adama 16 civilians were killed in three days of violence and in Sebeta ethnic Gamo were targeted. At least six civilians were killed in the violence in the town. In Dodolla at least 14 people were killed. Addis Standard further reports that “Ethiopian defense forces were dispatched to the cities and towns in Oromia which are most affected by the violence, as well as Dire Dawa chartered city, where at least seven people are killed, and in Harar, where a young man was brutally murdered and dumped in a ditch in the first day of the protest” (Addis Standard, 28 October 2019; also see Ethiopia Observer, 25 October 2019). Borkena quotes an interview by DW Amharic service with Daniel Bekele, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commissioner, regarding the recent violence in the Oromo region:

“He confirmed that the number of deaths is between 70 and 80. 10 of them were killed by a bullet during a clash with security forces that were deployed in the region to restore order. The remaining were killed shockingly by a group of mobs either in the streets clubbed to death, or stoned to death. Others were burned alive. They were killed either in the street, in their residence or churches. Worship places (churches and mosques) were deliberately targeted.” (Borkena, 30 October 2019)

According to the spokeswoman for the Prime Minister up to 78 civilians were killed and 409 people were arrested (VOA, 1 November 2019).

On 4 November 2019 state-affiliated FBC released a statement by the Prime Minister regarding violence in Oromia and Harari regional states and Dire Dawa city administration:

“In a statement yesterday, the Prime Minister said a total of 86 people were killed, including 4 women, following the violence in Oromia and Harari regional states as well as Dire Dawa city administration. [...] Of those killed in the violence, 50 were from the Oromo, 20 from Amhara, 8 from Gamo, 2 from Silte, 2 from Hadia, 1 from Gurage, and 1 from Argoba ethnic groups.” (FBC, 4 November 2019)

### *7.1.3 Eastern Oromia and border area of Somali regional state and Dire Dawa*

#### *Northern border areas, Dire Dawa*

According to AI, on 8 June 2018 three people were killed and three others wounded in attacks by Liyu police (see [section 4.1.2](#)) in Chinaksen district, Oromia. In further attacks on the following day seven people were killed and 17 wounded. On 10 June 2018 four people were killed and four others wounded in further attacks in Chinaksen district. The report further mentions attacks of the Liyu Police in May 2018:

“The Liyu Police Unit, on 23 and 24 May 2018, attacked four localities (kebeles) in Chinaksen District of East Oromia Zone, killing five farmers and burning down about 50 homes. These attacks caused residents of these four kebeles and another four neighbouring ones to flee their homes for safety. In 2017, their incursions into Oromia State resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people and the displacement of more than 1 million people, according to a report by Ethiopia’s National Disaster Risk Management

Commission and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.” (AI, 11 June 2018)

US-based Oromo online news OPride also mentions alleged Liyu Police raids into the Eastern Hararghe Zone of Oromia in June 2018:

“The town of Chinaksen alone, has been especially brutalized. In an interview with the Voice of America’s Amharic language program last week, Omar Abdullah from the Chinaksen district administration communication’s office stated that 38 people had been killed over the past month.” (Opride, 31 July 2018)

According to officials 37 people were killed and more than 44 wounded in attacks by the Liyu police in at least three localities in Eastern Hararghe zone of Oromia regional state in August 2018 (Addis Standard, 13 August 2018).

Also in August 2018 at least 13 ethnic Somalis were killed in east Hararghe zone of the Oromia regional state. Addis Standard further notes:

“The killings are blamed on Oromo militias but there is no information as to what triggered the attack. In a statement released on twitter, ONLF ‘strongly condemns the indiscriminate massacre of innocent Somalis,’ and said ‘this occurred as Federal forces were stationed in the very locations where the brutal massacres took place.’ The 13 bodies are now in Jigjiga referral hospital, ONLF said.” (Addis Standard, 28 August 2018)

Somali online news Halbeeg also mentions attacks by suspected Oromo militias in Somali regional state, killing at least 20 ethnic Somali. Dozens of people had been killed along the border between Somali and Oromia regional states since early 2018 (Halbeeg, 28 August 2018). According to Africanews in August 2018 “over a dozen ethnic Somalis were killed after two separate attacks in and around the east Hararghe zone of the Oromia region” (Africanews, 15 November 2018).

In June 2019 UNOCHA provides the following overview on conflicts in the border area between Oromia and Somali regions:

“Historical resource-based conflicts - over water and grazing land - have been prevalent between communities across boundary areas between Oromia and Somali regions. Localized skirmishes in 2015 displaced thousands of agro-pastoralists. This continued in 2017, and in August - September, conflict escalated along the entire regional boundary resulting in massive displacements. Violence was directed at expulsing communities along ethnic lines from contested territories and urban centers. Ethnic Oromos were moved into Oromia from Somali region’s rural and urban areas, while populations from both groups fled boundary areas into their respective regions, most visibly to large towns. In early 2019, new population displacements were reported from Erer district in Siti zone (Somali region) to Goro Gutu and Metta woredas (East Hararge).” (UNOCHA, 14 June 2019)

In May 2019 UNOCHA reports that there are “a number of kebeles in Kumbi and Meyu Muluke woredas occupied by the Somali Liyu Police since 2015” (UNOCHA, 31 May 2019, p. 3). In

September 2019 UNOCHA provides further information on the situation from June to July 2019 in Somali region and East and West Hararge in Eastern Oromia:

“Conflict along the northern boundary areas between Oromia and Somali regions has largely subsided in 2019, with Government investing significant efforts in peace and reconciliation, and EDF deploying to boundary areas. However, pockets of violence along the shared undemarcated border remain.” (UNOCHA, 11 September 2019, p. 3)

UNOCHA mentions “localized violence related to unresolved boundary issues with neighboring Oromo communities as well as between clans over access to resources and land disputes” in Somali region and further notes:

“Partners reported sporadic violence between Chinaksen, Babile and Tuliguled woredas (Fafar zone) and Gursum and Babile woredas (East Hararge, Oromia), and between boundary woredas of Erer zone and Meyu Muleke and Kumbi woredas (East Hararge). Access to these border areas has been restricted to UN Agencies since November 2017, NGOs had intermittent access. Despite EDF deployment, the situation remains tense, including by the presence of demobilized Somali Liyu police and armed youth groups, the ‘Kero’ (Oromo) and ‘Nego’ (Somali). A pull-out of EDF could prompt renewed violence.” (UNOCHA, 11 September 2019, p. 4)

On 8 August 2019 “ten civilians, including women, were killed, and at least five more were injured” in an attack by gunmen in West Haraghe zone of Oromia regional state (Addis Standard, 12 August 2019; see also FBC, 8 August 2019; Borkena, 8 August 2019).

In August 2019 “a clash was reported between Oromo and Issa Somalis, following the detention of Oromo pastoralist and looting of livestock, causing an undetermined number of casualties”. UNOCHA also mentions intercommunal fighting in Doba woreda, Oromia (UNOCHA, 6 November 2019, pp. 3-4) and mentions further clashes in Sitti Zone:

“Early August, at the time when high-level Oromo and Somali officials engaged in peace discussions in Jijiga, fresh clashes were reported in Allale and Madane, Afdem woredas (Sitti zone). Skirmishes erupted again at the end of September, though this time the situation was quickly brought under control by security forces, limiting further humanitarian impact and avoiding the blockage of the Semera - Addis road.” (UNOCHA, 6 November 2019, p. 2)

In April 2019 an article by Ethiopia Observer provides an overview on ethnic conflict in the city of Dire Dawa involving ethnic Oromo and Somali:

“Despite its reputation of being a cosmopolitan and welcoming city, Dire Dawa, located 531km east of Addis Ababa and 55km north-west of Harar, has seen a rise in ethnic conflicts in recent years that have led to multiple fatalities, partly over the long-standing claim by both the Oromia Region, in which it is enclaved, and the Somali region. On November 27, 2018 it was reported that two Oromo ethnic members were killed and four residential houses belonging to Somali ethnic groups torched, after clashes between Oromo and Somali youths. The town was also the scene of violent riots towards the end of January 2019, triggered by a scuffle at the celebration of Timkat, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo

Church's Epiphany. The mayor's supposed inaction in dealing with the agitators added fuel to the flames, it is said. Roads have been blocked in the week-long standoff, during which a person died, several wounded, properties damaged and many young people arrested.

In Melka Jebdu, the northwest part of the town and other areas such as Gende Tesfa, Gende Commission, Gende Gemechu, Magaala, Sabian, there have been a string of episodes of ethnic conflict. Ethnic relations here have deteriorated to a level that many find alarming, clashes in one part of the city could set off a chain of reprisal riots and attacks in other parts of the city. Rock throwing has become a common occurrence, residents said. The conflict was continuously smouldering, spurred by inequalities, a lack of economic development, access to resources, and ineffectual leadership. Many accuse the administration of championing divisive politics and only dealing with the interests of members of their own ethnic group. Dire Dawa has been an important trading centre and a prosperous city, since it is halfway between Djibouti and Addis Ababa and stands at the crossroads of Harar and Assab. However, as the railway has declined and train service has reduced two decades ago, the city has continued to decline, contributing to the dissatisfaction of its residents. The deadly ethnic clashes between ethnic Somalia and Oromo in the border area that broke out in the past three years has also added an atmosphere of distrust and insecurity in the city. Even after the removal and arrest of the Somalia region's president, Abdi Mohamoud Omar, known by his nickname 'Abdi Iley' in August 2018, pockets of his supporters reportedly continued to create havoc in Dire Dawa, according to some version." (Ethiopia Observer, 13 April 2019)

In September 2019, Ezega also provides an overview on security problems in Dire Dawa:

"In a briefing on Monday, Government Communications Affairs Bureau of the city administration said the security problems mainly involved fighting between organized youth groups, accompanied by knives in places called Qefira, Dechatuna and Amistegna. [...] The communication head claimed that the fights had nothing to do with ethnicity or religion, although some people who had political agenda named it ethnic conflict.

Early this year, the federally administered city had witnessed a week of protest and violence. The protest first began on January 21, 2019 during the celebration of the Ethiopian Orthodox Epiphany after minor clashes occurred between youth celebrating Epiphany and others. The protest later took another shape and turned into political demands. Following days of standoff, the military was deployed to the city to calm the situation down. However, the city has not seen complete stability since then. It is to be recalled that, back in August 2018, the city saw a similar violent episode which led to six Djiboutian individuals losing their lives in the conflict and close to 2,000 Djiboutian nationals forced to leave the city. Dire Dawa is a chartered city and its administration is filled based on ethnic quota. Accordingly, 40 percent to the city administration is held by ethnic Somali, another 40 percent is held by ethnic Oromo and the rest 20 percent is left for other ethnic groups." (Ezega, 23 September 2019)

In May 2019 "intercommunal clashes between two youth groups deteriorated into widespread Ethnic Oromo - Amhara violence" in Dire Dawa town (UNOCHA, 31 May 2019, p. 3).

“In Dire Dawa town, according to UNDSS, intercommunal clashes between two youth groups deteriorated into widespread Ethnic Oromo - Amhara violence. The first round of clashes lasted two days, and renewed fighting was reported a week later at the University Campus. Whereas there remain IDPs in town, the impact of these clashes in relief operations was minimal.” (UNOCHA, 31 May 2019, p. 3)

In September 2019 “fighting between armed ethnic Amhara and Oromo youth erupted in Dechatu, Magala, Kafira and the vicinity of Dire Dawa City, quickly spreading to Lagahare and Ashawa areas, causing casualties” (UNOCHA, 6 November 2019, p. 4).

#### *Southern border areas: Borena, Dawa, Bale*

According to a report by the Ethiopian government and UNOCHA, renewed violence in May 2018 “between the Borana (Oromo) and Garre (Somali) communities living in Moyale has led to new internal displacement and protection concerns” (Government of Ethiopia; UNOCHA, 20 June 2018, p. 1). OPride reports that in July 2018 around 50 people were killed in conflict in and around the border town of Moyale. The article provides the following details on the conflict:

“Moyale was once again the epicentre of carnage as a week’s worth of it left around 50 people dead earlier this month. The town and its environs, hotly contested between the Borana Oromo and Garri Somali peoples who inhabit the area, often sees disputes lead to communal clashes. [...]

Adan Kulow, a Moyale born Nairobi based humanitarian law expert and Garri activist says that tension had been brewing for much of the past year. ‘Over the past ten months or so, both sides have been launching tit for tat attacks against each other,’ said Adan, who makes frequent trips to the region. ‘The federal government turned a blind eye to the conflict and with time it worsened.’ On Tuesday July 10th, clashes between pastoralists outside of the town killed some ten people. But it is what followed over the next three days that has shocked the inhabitants of the region. ‘Clashes between the two date back over a hundred years,’ explains Adan. ‘But we saw Oromo militia carry out an unprovoked massacre of around 50 civilians who were completely uninvolved in the violence. This is not just another dispute for land. They brought their weapons into villages that are normally spared from this sort of thing.’ Between the 11th and the 13th, villages in the areas of Chamuq, Malab and Hararsam were completely razed to the ground. The villages targeted were inhabited primarily by the Garri. People were massacred and property set ablaze, sometimes with their doomed owners inside. The perpetrators appear to have been members of an armed Oromo militia.” (OPride, 31 July 2018)

In November 2018 Africanews cites a statement by ONLF on violence in Moyale. According to ONLF 13 people were killed and 20 wounded by suspected Oromo militia (Africanews, 15 November 2018). In Borena Zone “hostilities were reported in Dilo, Yabelo, Moyale, Arero, and Guchi woredas” and in Dilo woreda a conflict between the Oromo clan Borena and Somali clan Garre was reported (UNOCHA, 31 May 2019, p. 3). In June 2019 fighting between Gari (Somali) and Gebra (Oromo) ethnic-groups was reported in Moyale woreda, “causing a number



of casualties” (UNOCHA, 11 September 2019, p. 4). According to the UNOCHA Humanitarian Access Situation Report for August/September 2019, the regional boundary dispute between Oromia and Somali regions “significantly de-escalated”, although “tension remains, including cattle rustling or conflicts related to the use of land by pastoralists from both sides”. The same report notes that “the situation in Moyale town is stable” and most IDPs returned on both sides (UNOCHA, 6 November 2019, pp. 3-4).

UNOCHA further mentions inter-communal conflict in Dawa zone between Degodia and Garre clans in August 2019, which resulted in the displacement of 18,300 people to Filtu woreda (UNOCHA, 6 November 2019, pp. 3-4).

In Bale zone of Oromia, security concerns remained “due to sporadic clashes and tensions with Somali communities” (UNOCHA, 11 September 2019, p. 4).

#### *7.1.4 Guji - Gedeo conflict*

A reference map on Gedeo and West Guji Zones can be found by accessing the following link:

- UNOCHA - UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Ethiopia: Gedeo and West Guji Zones Reference Map (as of April 2019), 12 April 2019  
[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/reference\\_map\\_of\\_gedeo\\_west\\_guji\\_a0\\_kebelledetails\\_grid.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/reference_map_of_gedeo_west_guji_a0_kebelledetails_grid.pdf)

Since April 2018 “communal clashes between locals of Gedeo Zone in SNNPR and West Guji Zone in Oromia [...] led to displacement of 970,000 persons”. The majority of the displacements occurred in June 2018 (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6). According to TNH between April and June 2018 almost one million Ethiopians were uprooted in ethnic violence, “after Gedeos were accused by their Oromo neighbours of trying to annex land and resources” (TNH, 28 February 2019). According to a June 2018 article by Esat “over 200 people were killed in ethnic violence in Guji Zone in Southern Ethiopia over the past ten days while over 300,000 have been displaced”. The violence between Guji and Gedeo started in April 2018 and also led to the destruction of schools, churches and property (Esat, 14 June 2018). According to a report by the Ethiopian Government and UNOCHA, “renewed violence along the border areas of Gedeo and West Guji zones since early June 2018” has led to displacement in Gedeo zone and West Guji zone (Government of Ethiopia; UNOCHA, 22 June 2018).

In August 2018 DW notes that “ethnic violence between the Oromo and Gedeo ethnic groups in Ethiopia shows little sign of ending” and further reports:

“Although the government has not given an official death toll, Gedeos claim dozens have been killed in the clashes, with many forced to flee their homes as tensions between the two ethnic groups intensify.” (DW, 11 August 2018)

In October 2019 African Business notes that “the bulk of last year’s displacements occurred in West Guji in the Oromia region where 800,000 ethnic Gedeos fled following intercommunal clashes with Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group, the Oromo” (African Business, 15 October 2019).

In April 2019 The Globe Post provides the following overview on the conflict in Gedeo and West Guji zones:

“Violence between Ethiopia’s largest minority, the Oromo, and the Gedeo people has plagued the southern Gedeo and West Guji zones since April 2018, shortly after the inauguration of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. The fighting died down by the end of the year and some of the close to one million people displaced by the conflict began returning to their homes in Gedeo and West Guji, key coffee growing areas. But an outbreak of fresh violence in March saw families again on the march, many leaving behind their only source of income as they crowded into fetid displacement camps.” (The Globe Post, 18 April 2019)

In July 2019 an article by DW reports on returns to Gedeo and Guji zones pressured by the government and describes the authorities’ point of view:

“Authorities insist the tension between the Oromos and Gedeos has calmed down. ‘There is not much of a security problem in our zone,’ Abera Buno, the chief of administration in West Guji. ‘When displaced people return to their homes, we bring them together with the Oromos so that they can talk,’ he told DW.” (DW, 2 July 2019)

In November 2019 TNH provides an overview on the current situation in areas at the Gedeo-Guji border:

“In Kercha, the West Guji district where the bulk of the violence occurred, the conflict’s scars are still visible. Makeshift shelters with tarpaulin roofs mark the spots where, according to the government, at least 21,000 houses were burnt or torn down. A heavy presence of local militia and special police patrol the streets, and many locals, as well as returnees, still rely on food handouts as much of last year’s harvest was abandoned or destroyed. [...]

About 130 peace ambassadors are now dotted across 13 districts along the border between Gedeo and Oromia’s West Guji. These young men and women, all volunteers, hold meetings and workshops in their villages, hoping to restore trust between the two communities. [...] Imnet Irba, a 25-year-old recent college graduate, leads monthly meetings in churches and schools, even giving lessons to local elders and officials. ‘Now relations are so good – everyone is regretting what they did,’ she told The New Humanitarian. ‘It’s very peaceful.’ [...]

‘In our zone, there is no peace problem now,’ said Abera Buno, the top official in West Guji. ‘The IDPs have come home, and they are rebuilding their lives.’ [...]

Almost all those interviewed by TNH on both sides of the Gedeo-Guji border, in districts which have long been multiethnic, said children were back to attending the same schools and people were once again socialising with neighbours from the other ethnic group, drinking coffee and eating meals together as they had done in the past. The approach to peace and reconciliation is notable for its emphasis on traditional institutions common to both groups, such as the Abba Gadas, and on forgiveness before accountability. [...]

Publicly, the government says it is holding people to account for the violence. In April, Abiy said 300 people had been arrested for their suspected involvement. Around the same time, the West Guji police chief said 89 people had been given prison sentences for instigating killings and evictions. But, on the ground, the reality seems different. Buno, the top West Guji official, said those arrested had not yet been sentenced. The head of the local militia in Magala village, Ebisa Elema, said nobody in his badly affected district had been arrested for involvement in ethnic violence, and none of the returnees interviewed by TNH said they were aware of any arrests or prosecutions in their neighborhoods, either. [...]

There are other signs that, beneath the surface, the peace here is a fragile one. One is ongoing land disputes, the root cause of the conflict. [...] As violence escalated, many land certificates were either lost or destroyed as houses were burnt. And, for some returnees, proving ownership can be difficult since many lacked documentation in the first place, including personal identification cards. [...] Another concern among aid workers is that in most districts on the West Guji side, Gedeos are no longer represented in local kebele governments or militias.” (TNH, 11 November 2019)

In April 2019 Ethiopia Observer published an interview with Kalkidan Negash Obse, “a former president of Dilla University and Assistant Professor of Law and Human Rights at Addis Ababa University”. Kalkidan himself is an ethnic Gedeo and talks about a “serious and massive ethnic cleansing campaign” regarding the Guji-Gedeo conflict:

- Ethiopia Observer: Interview: The makings of a Gedeo crisis, 4 April 2019  
<https://www.ethiopiaobserver.com/2019/04/04/interview-the-makings-of-a-gedeo-guji-crisis/>

Please also see [section 8.1](#) for information on the situation of people displaced by the violence.

#### *7.1.5 Western Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz*

In June 2018 AI mentions attacks on the homes of ethnic Amharas by ethnically-motivated youth groups in Oromia regional state. The Oromo youth beat residents and looted property in the Siyo District. Since October 2017 at least 20 Amharas have been killed in such attacks (AI, 8 June 2018).

In November 2018 three students were killed at Assosa University in Benishangul-Gumuz in allegedly ethnically motivated clashes between students (Ezega, 23 November 2018). In December 2018 FBC mentions the establishment of a Command Post along the Oromia-Benishangul Gumuz regional states’ border, after “more than 100 people were killed and tens of thousands were displaced due to the conflicts that happened along the two regional states’ border during the past three months” (FBC, 20 December 2018). In December 2018, 15 individuals suspected of assassinations in Oromia regional state were arrested. According to Oromia officials they were members of a group named “Abaa Torbee” (FBC, 24 December 2018). In January 2019 “about 171 people have been arrested on suspicion of having links to the violence in the Oromia-Benishangul Gumuz regional states’ border areas”. According to official reports “the suspects were arrested from both Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia regional states” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 12 January 2019b).

Eleven Oromia police were killed in Limu woreda of East Wollega Zone in Oromia in November 2018. Also in November, insurgents shot at eight Gumuz teachers and agricultural officials and killed two in Yaso woreda, northeast of Kamashi Zone. Gumuz youth killed several Oromo, after following the insurgents, resulting in 38 Oromo deaths. (Ethiopia Insight, 30 November 2018) In May 2019 a report by Action against Hunger provides information on the conflict in border areas of Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia leading to the displacement of more than 150,000 people (see also Ethiopia Insight, 8 March 2019; UNHCR Protection Cluster, 2 August 2019; BBC News, 2 October 2018):

“On September 27, 2018 two vehicles transporting Benishangul-Gumuz Kemash zone officials is ambushed by gunmen in Henna kebele of Nedjo woreda in West Wollega Zone of Oromia. During this incident, Kamashi Woreda chairperson, his deputy, and the Kamashi Zone police commissioner were killed. In the following days, dozens were killed in Kamashi (BGR) zone and Kemashi towns, east/west wollega border kebeles leading to the displacement of more than 150,000 people to neighboring East and West Wollega zones and Kemashi zone. Most of the displaced were Oromo. The security crisis also caused a total blockage of movement to Kamashi for which resulted, inflated market price, and destabilized whole economic, health, social and political life of the people in Kamashi zone.” (Action against Hunger, May 2019, pp. 19-20)

In November 2019 UNOCHA notes that “tensions between Gumuz and Oromo communities persist in Agelometi, Yaso, and Kamashi, including cases of cattle rustling by youth on both sides. Kamashi town has no electricity since 2018, access to health is seriously compromised in Belo Jeganfoy and Agelometi, there is no hospital nor ambulance service” (UNOCHA, 6 November 2019, p. 4).

### *7.1.6 Continued armed activities of Oromo liberation groups*

Please also see [section 3.1](#) for further information regarding the OLF and further armed groups.

In September 2018 more than 60 people were killed within five days in Benishangul region, after “‘unidentified’ gunmen allegedly hoisting Oromo National Liberation Front (OLF)” killed four security authorities from Kamashi zone on their return from a meeting in Wollega in Oromo region (Borkena, 1 October 2018). Ethiopia Insight provides the following view on the September 2018 violence:

“Tens of thousands of people have fled Kamashi Zone in Benishangul-Gumuz state after deadly instability following the killing of four zonal officials in Oromia last week. The unrest is another example of renewed instability around disputed inter-regional border areas that has plagued Ethiopia this year. [...] The Sep. 26 ambush is being pinned on the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) by locals who are demanding justice and for the federal government to restore order, according to Matiyos. Negeri said an armed group acting in the name of OLF was responsible, which is what the federal Attorney General’s Office alleges about a grenade attack at a June 23 rally in Addis Ababa attended by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. [...] OLF is not involved in the conflict and believes it is caused by mercenaries hired by a group trying to weaken the government, according to an Oct. 2 BBC interview with

spokesman Tolera Adeba. [...] The Benishangul People's Liberation Movement alleges that the OLF committed multiple attacks in recent months and says indigenous people in the region are oppressed by Amhara, Oromo and Tigrayans. The Gumuz historically faced oppression and subjugation in Wellega by Oromo and by Amharic-speakers from the east, according to Asnake." (Ethiopia Insight, 4 October 2018)

In Wollega, West Oromo region 17 banks were robbed within two days, allegedly "by groups with political affiliation to the militant OLF faction" (Borkena, 14 January 2019). According to FBC, 18 banks had been robbed in three zones in the western part of Oromia (Africanews, 16 January 2019, Nazret, 15 January 2019). Following the incidents, 835 members of the Oromo Liberation Front, "who are believed to be behind a spike in crime incidents in western Oromia" were arrested. Africanews further notes:

"The recent looting particularly of banks in western Oromia by armed men believed to be from the OLF led to reports last weekend that the army was carrying out airstrikes in the area. The Oromia state government flatly denied the reports widely carried by local media describing them as misleading." (Africanews, 17 January 2019)

A January 2019 article by Associated Press cites the office of the Prime Minister:

"Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's office denied it but said rebel groups were 'not heeding the call for peace.' It accused the OLF of 'egregious violence against community members.' The office said Ethiopian forces have been 'undertaking a stabilising operation over the past two weeks, and the area is now being secured'." (AP, 19 January 2019)

A February 2019 article by Ethiopia Insight cites a farmer from Amaro woreda in Southern Nations region, who alleges that the Oromo Liberation Front is responsible for attacks in the area. According to him "the Guji-based OLF kills and loots us as it wishes." The article further notes:

"The border between West Guji Zone of Oromia and Southern Nations has experienced occasional conflict for decades. Competition for land and water between Guji Oromo and Gedeo, Burji and Amaro communities, who all use the Gelan River, has been at the heart of disputes." (Ethiopia Insight, 28 February 2019)

In August 2019 the UK Home Office cites Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment on North Africa, dated 19 April 2019:

"Several anti-government militant groups pose sporadic, low-capacity small-arms attack risks, particularly armed Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) elements (despite formal reconciliation with the government) in Oromia's Welega, Illubabor, Guji, and Borena zones, and Benishangul-Gumuz militants in areas bordering western Oromia. Their most likely targets are security forces, state-owned assets, local civilians, and (infrequently) road travellers (including vehicles carrying expatriate staff in remote areas). Armed robberies targeting cash-intensive operations (e.g. banks) and road travellers and cargo are also likely. Full integration of the armed OLF wing into the security forces would decrease this risk, and attempts to disarm un-integrated OLF elements would increase it." (UK Home Office, August 2019, pp. 29-30)

In March 2019 at least five people were killed by shootings of unidentified gunmen in the Nejo district, Western Wollega zone, in the southwest of Oromia. The region “has been the center of armed movement until recently when the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a popular party across Oromia, made a deal with the Federal and regional governments to disarm” (AA, 19 March 2019). According to Oromo regional state deputy police commissioner, Retta Belachew, “the gunmen were armed Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) Shane group who refused to disarm”. A militant OLF wing “has been operating in the region for many months now” (Borkena, 19 March 2019). According to a May 2019 article by Addis Standard “several reports indicate that armed groups who are often accused of being members of Oromo Liberation Army, the armed wing of OLF-SG, are still active in parts of Western Oromia and Guji areas in southern Ethiopia” (Addis Standard, 29 May 2019).

Ethiopia Insight provides an overview on incidents involving OLF in May 2019:

“Dambi Dollo Town Communication Office said a grenade killed one and injured four civilians on May 9. ODP and OLA blamed each other for the attack in the western Oromia town. Residents say after the grenade detonated, soldiers killed a civilian and injured two others. A health worker and nurse in Dambi Dollo Hospital said two injured people and a body with bullet wounds arrived on May 9. Thirteen people were killed on May 4 by security forces in Lalo Assabi Woreda of West Wollega Zone after a firefight between soldiers and OLA, an official told Voice of America. Lalo Assabi residents said 10 were killed while loading sand on a truck, and three in a Bajaj taxi in Inango town. On the day of the funeral, a pharmacy owner returning from purchasing supplies was shot dead by soldiers in Kellem Wollega Zone’s Gaawoo Qeebbee Woreda, possibly as he was suspected of supplying medicines to OLA. [...] ‘The security situation throughout Wollega was very tense in April. I heard the Abbaa Torbbee wing of OLF claiming that they had killed a security chief of the Western regiment,’ said Mebratu Kelecha from the University of Westminster in the UK. [...] ‘In Nekemte town, where most partners operating in the region are based, there has been a range of attacks with hand grenade by UAGs (unidentified armed groups) in the last two months. These attacks have created a number of casualties, none among humanitarian personnel. Aid operations in West Wollega are intermittently restricted by ongoing hostilities between the EDF (Ethiopian Defense Forces) and UAG, with clashes taking place in a number of woredas, i.e. Begi, Bogi Dirmegi, Nejo, Leta Sibu, Kiltu Kara, Mana Sibu and Lalo Asabi.’” (Ethiopia Insight, 7 June 2019)

In September 2019 nine people were injured in a grenade attack on a police garrison in Burayu town on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. 22 suspects were arrested and are accused of having connections to OLF. (Borkena, 13 September 2019; Xinhua, 13 September 2019)

As reported by Borkena, at least three people were killed and five others wounded in the town of Ataye in North Shewa zone of Amhara regional state. According to residents and government the armed wing of Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is responsible for the attack (Borkena, 7 October 2019). Ezega also mentions the attacks in Ataye and reports that “at least five people were killed, and four others wounded in the ongoing attacks by undisclosed armed groups”. According to witnesses gunshots are also being heard in Minjar and Shenkora as well as Efrata and Gidim districts. Official of Amhara state “reportedly blamed members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) for the unfolding attacks in Ataye and surrounding towns”. OLF denies

the accusations and claims “it does not even have armed forces in the area”. Already in April 2019 Amhara regional government blamed OLF for attacks in Ataye and surrounding towns (Ezega, 8 October 2019). Ethiopia Observer cites General Berhanu Jula of the Ethiopian Armed Forces in October 2019 as noting that “armed groups in the two areas have been defeated and only their remnants are attacking villages and public transports to show that they are still around”. The article further quotes:

“Today, there is not active insurgency to speak of either in Wollega or Guji”, General Berhanu claimed. ‘Normalisation has returned to those areas. Some of the fighters have surrendered. Some of them have handed themselves in. Some died,’ he added. Berhanu reached out to armed units that are still in the bush and continue to resist, saying the government is willing to go extra lengths to meet their demands.” (Ethiopia Observer, 11 October 2019)

At the end of October 2019 the President of Oromia regional state said that “parts of Oromia have in recent days been facing insecurity by the actions of armed militias claiming allegiance to ex-rebel group Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and that the government would be forced to act to protect the lives and security of its citizens if militias don't cease all armed activities.” (Xinhua, 30 October 2019)

As noted by Borkena in November 2019 “a battle between Ethiopian troops and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) fighters is reportedly going on in Wollega, Western Ethiopia” (Borkena, 4 November 2019).

An November article by Africa Confidential mentions that “the Oromo Liberation Army's Central Command, which has split from OLF leaders in Addis, reported over 10 clashes in western Oromia between 1 and 2 November, claiming to have repulsed ‘several advances’ by the military in Najjo and Dembi Dollo, which signalled a ‘new chapter’ in ‘the armed struggle’.” (Africa Confidential, 7 November 2019)

The following paragraphs provide information on attacks involving unidentified armed groups (UAGs).

As reported by UNOCHA, in May 2019 “clashes between the EDF and an UAG continued unabated” in West Guji and in “Guji zone, clashes between EDF and an UAG intensified” after EDF soldiers were killed in Wadera woreda (UNOCHA, 31 May 2019, p. 3). Between June and July 2019 hostilities between EDF and UAG in West Guji restricted humanitarian operations. UNOCHA also notes a “spike of violence in southern Oromia, mirroring the conflict dynamics of West Guji, with an increase number of UAGs attacks, road blockages, and large scale EDF presence” (UNOCHA, 11 September 2019, p. 3). UNOCHA further reports on the situation in Oromia (East Wellega, West Wellega, Kelem Wellega) and Kamashi (Benishangul-Gumuz) between June and July 2019:

“Partners’ operations in West Wellega and Kamashi [Benishangul-Gumuz] were affected by the conflict between EDF and UAGs. In June, a number of deadly attacks were reported in Gimbi, Leta Sibu, and Kilta Kara woredas, including the use of hand grenades, prompting partners to cancel operations and relocate staff. In Nekemte town (East Wellega), between



March and June, there were a number of explosive attacks, including the 5 June bomb in a hotel that injured some civilians and caused pandemonium in the area. By mid-July, increased Government security presence and the subsequent reduction of security incidents, allowed for the resumption of UN road movements between Nekemte – Assossa. However, in some instances, aid workers were intimidated by military elements while conducting security patrolling, road check-points, and staff searches in their accommodation. Elsewhere, an increment of UAG attacks was reported in Kelem Wellega, while in East Wellega, the security situation remained calm and conducive to aid operations.” (UNOCHA, 11 September 2019, p. 2)

In Guji zone “UAGs have conducted attacks impacting the civilian population, targeting public transport vehicles, government infrastructure, and kidnapping local officials” (UNOCHA, 11 September 2019, pp. 3-4). UNOCHA further mentions clashes with unidentified armed groups (UAGs) in August 2019 hampering humanitarian operations in West Guji (UNOCHA, 6 November 2019, p. 3).

## 7.2 Amhara regional state

### 7.2.1 *Political discontent in Amhara regional state*

Please also see [section 7.3](#) for further information regarding disputed territories between the regional states of Amhara and Tigray.

In November 2019 Al Jazeera reports that Amhara ethnonationalists claim prime minister Abiy Ahmed “is too soft on the Oromos, while reacting strongly to perceived security threats involving other groups, including the Somali, Amhara and Sidama.” (Al Jazeera, 1 November 2019). African Business Magazine in August 2019 reports that “grassroots support for Amhara nationalism is increasing” and further mentions:

“Amhara, a proud region which constitutes the historic core of the Ethiopian state, was initially supportive of Abiy. However, enthusiasm seems to be on the wane and grassroots support for Amhara nationalism is increasing. While Amhara grievances developed under the leadership of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), previously the dominant force in the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), reforms introduced under Abiy have allowed these grudges to come to the fore.” (African Business Magazine, 19 August 2019)

In February 2019 ICG mentions that in “Amhara region, the National Movement of the Amhara challenge the ruling party and demand the annexation of land from Tigray, Oromia and Benshangul-Gumuz that they believe historically belong to the Amhara” (ICG, 23 February 2019, p. 25). Regarding the protest wave in Amhara regional state, starting in mid-2016, the initial grievances also concerned “the incorporation into Tigray regional state of historically Amhara-populated lands” (ICG, 21 February 2019, p. 4). In July 2019 ICG mentions “intra-ethnic flashpoints”, providing the following overview:

“A handful of inter and intra-ethnic flashpoints are particularly worrying. First is friction between the Tigray and the Amhara. The main source is the Amhara’s longstanding claim to the Wolkait and Raya territories that are currently part of Tigray regional state and

border Amhara. Tigray security forces have repressed protesters in Raya that were seeking to be part of Amhara and, previously, Amhara protesters and militia have killed and evicted Tigrayans from Amhara, particularly the Gondar area in northern Amhara state. The former Amhara regional security chief, Asaminew Tsige, whom the federal and Amhara governments blamed for the 22 June killings of Amhara's regional president and two colleagues, also promoted the return of parts of Tigray's territory to Amhara. Second are rising tensions between the Amhara and Oromo, Ethiopia's two largest groups. The EPRDF parties representing them – the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) and the Oromo Democratic Party – united to propel Abiy to power and reverse the TPLF's longstanding domination of the ruling coalition. But friction between them has mounted since, over matters including high-level appointments and disputes over the capital Addis Ababa. In the case of the capital, which is multi-ethnic but surrounded by Oromia regional state, in February Amhara and other groups opposed the Oromia government's demolition of illegal housing on the capital's outskirts, while in early March Oromo protested the transfer of new government apartments built in Oromia by the city administration to Addis Ababa residents. Addis Ababa, founded in 1887, is an autonomous city accountable to the federal government, but some Oromo factions say it is a colonial settlement on Oromo land and should be administered by Oromia region, or that the city's encroachment into Oromia must be reversed. Tensions between the Amhara and Oromo have been aggravated by the 22 June assassinations and events leading to them. The appointment of Asaminew, an Amhara nationalist who was jailed in 2009 for his part in a coup attempt and released by the federal government in February 2018, as regional security chief by the Amhara government in November 2018 reflected the ADP's growing ethno-nationalism and its desire to outflank the one-year-old National Movement of Amhara, an opposition party espousing Amhara nationalism. Asaminew fuelled Amhara-Oromo friction by using provocative rhetoric about what he portrayed as impending Oromo domination and involving regional security forces in clashes with Oromo militia in an Oromo enclave of Amhara in early April 2019 that left dozens dead. Since the 22 June assassinations, doubts over the federal government's account of the killings and a sweep of arrests of Amhara nationalists and others have hardened regional opposition to the Oromo-led federal government. Large crowds of Amhara gathered for Asaminew's funeral, including uniformed security forces." (ICG, 19 July 2019)

In December 2016 The Guardian provides an overview on the territorial dispute between Amhara region and neighbouring Tigray concerning Wolkait district in Tigray:

"Wolkait is an administrative district in Tigray that borders Amhara. The committee [a committee campaigning over the contested Wolkait territory] says Wolkait and others areas were taken out of [the Amharan city] Gondar's control by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front in 1992, when Ethiopia was divided into a federation along ethno-linguistic lines. Allied rebels led by the TPLF, who unseated a military regime in 1991, introduced the system and still monopolise power. Critics of the committee point out that a 1994 census found more than 96% of the people of Wolkait were Tigrayan, and that the complaints of annexation stem from the town of Gondar, not the district itself. The activists say the TPLF moved Tigrayans into the area during the rebellion." (The Guardian, 22 December 2016)

In July 2019 Foreign Policy provides an overview on Amhara claims on territories outside Amhara regional state:

“As regional nationalism grows, competing irredentist claims are on the rise. One of Amhara state’s borders is with Tigray state. Amhara nationalists want to reclaim the districts of Wolkait and Raya, which they say were annexed to Tigray after the Tigrayan-led EPRDF came to power. Amhara nationalists also want part of Oromia, Al-Fashaga in Sudan, and the federal capital, Addis Ababa—and NAMA [National Movement of Amhara] labels the EPRDF’s Tigray People’s Liberation Front (which governs Tigray) as a ‘terrorist group,’ according to Christian Tadele, a NAMA politburo member—riling neighboring Tigrayan nationalists.” (FP, 4 July 2019)

In October 2019 the a Financial Times article notes that “the Amhara, with around 29m people, are at rhetorical war with the Tigrayans over territory” and “also resent the Oromo narrative that Amaharans are oppressors who, under Emperor Menelik II in the 19th century, brutally conquered Oromo territory” (FT, 30 October 2019).

Please also see the following media articles for background information regarding Amhara nationalism:

- Addis Standard: Commentary: The Birth of Amhara Nationalism: Causes, Aspirations, and Potential Impacts, 4 May 2018  
<http://addisstandard.com/commentarythe-birth-of-amhara-nationalism-causes-aspirations-and-potential-impacts/>
- Al Jazeera: Ethiopia: Ethnic nationalism and the Gondar protests, 11 January 2017  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/01/ethiopia-ethnic-nationalism-gondar-protests-170102081805528.html>

### *Qemant self-rule*

In December 2018 Ethiopia Insight notes that “the Amhara government granted self-rule to the Qemant in 69 districts last year, but withheld it in three others, saying they were not suitable for Qemant administration as they were not contiguous with the other territories” (Ethiopia Insight, 16 December 2018). Addis Standard in February 2019 notes that “a referendum to determine the administrative jurisdiction of the Kimant people was held in eight Kebeles in September 2017”, and further reports:

“Seven of the eight Kebeles have voted to remain in the administrative jurisdiction of the Amhara Regional State, whereas Quaber Lomye Kebele voted to join the Kemant self-administrative zone, which was established two year prior to the referendum. The result of the September referendum was approved by the House of Federation in October 2017. Since then however, clashes have frequently visited the two communities. Activists blame ‘Kimant identity group’, which refused to accept the results of the referendum, for the clashes.” (Addis Standard, 7 February 2019)

In October 2019 mentions “a quest for self-administration by the Qimant community under Amhara Regional State”. According to the Amhara regional state’s Security Council “the Qimant

administrative area will be established as soon as possible” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 19 October 2019 a).

### *7.2.2 Ethnic conflict in Amhara regional state*

Please also see [section 7.1](#) for information on conflict between ethnic Oromo and Amhara. For information on arrests after the alleged coup attempt in June 2019, including members of the National Movement of Amhara (NAMA) please see [section 2.5](#).

Regarding violence after the demonstration at Jawhar Mohammeds House in Addis Ababa in October and November 2019 (see [section 7.1.2](#), fighting between Oromo mobs and rival Amhara groups erupted “in urban centres such as Adama” (Africa Confidential, 7 November 2019).

As reported by AfricaNews in November 2019, two students at Woldia University in Amhara regional state and one student at Dembi Dollo University in Oromia “died in days of unrest largely along ethnic lines”, according to authorities (Africanews, 14 November 2019).

As reported by Ezega “two ethnic Oromo students were killed and many others wounded” in inter-ethnic clashes at Woldia University, Amhara regional state. At Dembi Dolo university, in Oromia regional state “at least one ethnic Amhara student was killed and a dozen others wounded” in an alleged revenge attack. (Ezega, 12 November 2019)

### *7.2.3 Clashes between ethnic Qemant (Kemant, Kimant, Qimant) and Amhara*

As reported by the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) in February 2019, tensions between ethnic Qemant and Amhara in North Gondar zone have been growing “since mid-2018 related to claims for self-administration by ethnic Kemants”. Violence and displacement occurred particularly since November 2018 (ERCC, 25 February 2019). Between 5th and 8th December 2018 there were clashes between ethnic Amhara and ethnic Qemant communities in Central Gonder zone of Amhara regional state. The clashes “resulted in the burning of 480 houses and displacement of scores of people”. Deadly clashes between Amhara ethnic group and Qemant activists occurred in recent months in different parts of Amhara regional state, where several people were killed (Xinhua, 20 December 2018). As noted by Ethiopia Insight in December 2018, houses of ethnic Qemant were reportedly torched in Chilga woreda, Genda Wuha, and Shinfa. According to Yirga Teshager, a member of a committee campaigning for self-determination for the Qemant people, “Regional security forces and mobs killed at least 42 Qemant in a week in Metema and Chilga woredas of West Gondar Zone before the military controlled the situation”. According to Asaminew Tsige, the security head of Amhara region, “the Qemant were the aggressors in fighting that’s killed at least 69 people in two recent flare-ups”. He further stated that “almost nine grain mills were burned, 67 houses were burned, and some people were massacred” (Ethiopia Insight, 16 December 2018). The same article further cites Qemant victims who were contacted via a political activist:

“One of the recent victims, Beletu, who was contacted via a political activist, described a campaign that sounded like ethnic cleansing, saying Qemant were beaten, killed, evicted, fired from government jobs, and told they can’t live in Metemma. ‘In the last two weeks the regional security armed mobs and the mob started hunting. Every Qemant is taken

away from their farm, their property robbed and put in warehouses, and their houses are set on fire.” (Ethiopia Insight, 16 December 2018)

In February 2019 “clashes between groups from the Amhara and the Kimant people in Chilga Wereda in central Gonder have led to a closure of the road connecting Gonder to Metema”. According to Enyew Zewdie, police chief of the central Gonder zone, “lives were lost and properties were damaged in the clashes” (Addis Standard, 7 February 2019).

At the end of September 2019 “dozens of people including policemen have been killed and several others wounded in an attack in Chilga town, North Gonder of Ethiopia”, according to an Amhara region official (Ezega, 30 September 2019). A 30 September 2019 article by Borkena also mentions “renewed violence [...] in central Gondar region of Ethiopia which affected ethnic Amhara and ethnic Kemant communities” (Borkena, 30 September 2019). Amhara authorities blame the “Qimant Identity Regaining Committee” for the attack (Ezega, 30 September 2019). As reported by UNOCHA, “at the end of September, the old political standoff of ethnic Qemant in Amhara escalated into new armed confrontations in Chilga (North Gonder zone) causing casualties and displacing some 15,000 people, with road blockages reported between Gonder town and Metema” (UNOCHA, 6 November 2019, p. 2).

According to Desalegn Chane, the president of the National Movement of Amhara (NAMA) party, “armed men killed 10 people when they ambushed a minibus travelling to the city of Gondar” on 30 September 2019. Two convoys transporting Amhara special forces were attacked the next day and 12 soldiers killed. Desalegn Chane blamed “the Kimant Committee, a group of locally elected leaders campaigning for self-determination for the Kimant people, an ethnic sub-group in Amhara region” for the violence. The chairman of the Kimant Committee, Fekadu Mamo, denied the accusations and said “individual members of the community were fighting back in self-defence after being targeted by the militias”. According to a Gondar resident “he had seen the bodies of 17 militia members” (Reuters, 4 October 2019). In October 2019 Addis Standard reports on fighting in Central Gonder zone since mid-September 2019:

“The areas at the center of this latest round of unrest are Chilga woreda in Central Gonder zone where questions of identity by the Qimant people led by the Qimant Identity Committees have been at the center of its relationship with the regional government and starting from just a few days ago the city of Gondar and its environs. Reports of fighting between the Amhara region’s special police force and armed farmers in Central Gonder zone started surfacing in mid-September with news of heavy gun fights that, reportedly, claimed the lives of several people, mostly farmers. In addition, an Associated Press reporter quoted a member of the Qimant community who said that there were youth wearing a uniform bearing the title ‘Fanno’ and insisting they should be able to arrest members of the Qimant Identity Committee. This development has been described as the immediate factor in starting the deadly bouts of violence in the last few weeks.” (Addis Standard, 3 October 2019)

According to an October 2019 Borkena article “there has been a sporadic violence in central Gonder for nearly a year now”. The TPLF is blamed to pursue “a strategy of making the region a war zone” and to be “behind those who are claiming to be Kemant Identity Committee”

(Borkena, 17 October 2019). Also, on 17 October 2019 the Addis Standard reports on the situation “following the violence that reignited in Central and Western Gonder, the city of Gonder as well as the Qimant administration zone in recent weeks”:

“Bouts of unrest cloaked in identity questions have resulted in the loss of life and damage to property over the last five years, says a statement released by the Amhara Regional State Security Council on the 16th of October, 2019. [...] Although the situation has subsided last week, this week saw yet another unrest in the area in what the regional state said on Monday October 14 was not related to previous unrest but related to private scuffles, But this claim is contested by a group calling itself ‘Qimant Central Committee’, which accused the regional government security forces of ‘large scale’ and ‘indiscriminate’ attacks, including killings and displacements of the minority Qimant community in the region.” (Addis Standard, 17 October 2019)

An October 2019 article by The Reporter Ethiopia also mentions “weeks of violence, and loss of life of dozens of civilians and regional security officers” in Central Gondar and in Gondar city. Amhara regional state has requested the intervention of federal security forces, including the army (The Reporter Ethiopia, 19 October 2019).

#### *7.2.4 Conflict in Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara regional states*

In April 2019 clashes erupted in “various localities of Metekel zone in Benishangul Gumuz regional state”, killing about 18 people within three days. Addis Standard provides an overview regarding the violence:

“The clashes erupted over the Ethiopian Easter weekend following private altercations between a truck driver and a customer over prices of services the former provided the later. The truck driver then called in a federal police officer who then physically assaulted the customer, who is from the Sinasha community. The beating of the man by the security officer has set off revenge attacks against members of Amhara community by members of Sinasha and Gumuz communities, according to Colonel Alebel. Some 20 houses were also burned. There are 30 kebeles in Metekel zone and the clashes, which started in Dangur wereda, were quickly spreading through all the Kebeles, but due to efforts by the Amhara and Benishangul Gumuz regional states and the involvement of additional federal security forces, the clashes were contained before further damage. A joint command post between the two regional states and federal security forces was formed and is currently stationed in Pawe special wereda to monitor the security. Colonel Alebel further said that the clashes were under control and talks were held between the presidents of the two regional state on mapping out further actions to maintain the peace and security. According to Asemahegn Asres, communication bureau head of Amhara regional state, eleven of the victims were from Amhara community in the area while six were from the Gumuz community. According to him, the number of casualties were 17 while 25 houses were burned.” (Addis Standard, 19 April 2019)

In May 2019 The Reporter Ethiopia also mentions the “minor clash between an unnamed driver and a user of public transport in Metekel Zone”, and notes the following regarding violence spreading to further regions:

“In an emergency meeting held last week, Benishangul Gumz regional party condemned the recent killings of hundreds of civilians in neighboring towns of Jawi Woreda of the Amhara Regional State, The Reporter has learnt. In the statements issued by the party, it was indicated that civilians who are ethnically Gumuz and Sinasha who lives in the two Kebeles of Jawi Woreda were brutally killed by an armed group including kids, elders and mothers. [...]

The party didn't indicate how many were killed during the incident; however, vice president of the region, Adego Amesya told The Reporter that no less than 200 civilians might have lost their lives in Jawi Woreda incident. The body of those who were killed was found in mass graves, Adego told The Reporter. The incident in Beinshangul begun a week ago, following a minor clash between an unnamed driver and a user of public transport in Metekel Zone, Beinshangul region, at a place called Dangur Woreda. Later, the disagreement between the two changed into a more serious fight leading to Federal Police being deployed to the area. [...] The minor clash then spread into more areas in the region and resulting in the loss of life of more than of dozen civilians in the region. Later on, the conflict also spread into the neighboring Amhara regional state, Awi Zone, Jawi Woreda.” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 11 May 2019b)

As reported by UNOCHA by early May 2019, “large scale violence related to communal conflict between Ethnic Amharas and Gumuz/ Shinashas in Metekel zone (BGR) had diminished following EDF deployment”. However, in Dangura and Mandura woredas a number of attacks and killings continued (UNOCHA, 31 May 2019, p. 2). As reported by UNOCHA, in June and July 2019, the “security situation in Metekel zone remains concerning, with a number of ethnic-related attacks reported, as the killing of dozens of people in one single attack perpetrated by unknown armed men in Dilbanj Village, Dangur woreda, on 24 June” (UNOCHA, 11 September 2019, p. 2).

The Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE) reports the following on displacement of Amhara people from their home in Kamashi Zone, Benishangul Gumuz region, and on violence regarding ethnic Amhara between October 2017 and April 2018:

“AHRE strongly condemns the continued displacement of Amhara people from their home in Kemashe Zone, Benishangul Gumuz region. According to our local sources, more than 530 ethnic Amhara households (each household has from 2-8 members) have been forcefully displaced from their land and forced to leave their home. We have received credible reports that local authorities ordered armed militias and other residents to attack Amhara people who settled in the area for many decades. The recent attack started in October 2017 and continued till end of April 2018. During the attack 13 ethnic Amhara people were killed and at least 50 others were injured. Thousands have fled to the neighboring Oromia region and to the capital of Amhara Region, Bahir Dar for shelter. AHRE has the names of the victims and official documents which show their legal status as residents in the region.” (AHRE, 5 May 2018)

In September 2018 ten people were killed in allegedly ethnically motivated attacks in Beldig District in Delati town, in Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. Already earlier “ethnic Amharas



and Oromos have been repeatedly attacked in the region” and sought “refuge in churches in Bahir Dar, capital of Amhara Regional state” (Borkena, 3 September 2018).

In October 2018 Ezega also provides an overview on violence in Kamashi zone of Benishangul Gumuz state:

“Last month, more than 100,000 ethnic Oromos and Amharas, mainly from Kamashi zone of Benishangul Gumuz state, fled planned attacks from their neighborhoods and sheltered in bordering east and west Welega zones of Oromia regional state. The well-armed perpetrators are accused of torching over 2000 homes in an attempt to permanently displace members of these two nationalities, Oromo and Ahmara. These two ethnic groups make about 60 percent of the over 100 million horn of African nation.” (Ezega, 27 October 2018)

In November 2018 ethnic Oromos and Amharas living in a cluster of villages in Yaso, on the border with Haro Limu district in Oromia “were targeted by mobs of Gumuz people”, as reported by witnesses and survivors. Reportedly 37 people were killed, although the number was not officially confirmed (Ethiopia Observer, 24 November 2018).

In December 2018 IDPs from Kamashi zone in Benishangul-Gumuz region arrived in Amhara’s capital Bahir Dar. The ethnic Amhara IDPs “reported instances of GBV [gender-based violence] and human rights violations, suffered in Kamashi and en route to Bahir Dar” (Protection Cluster, 19 December 2018). In December 2018 Ezega provides an overview on the situation at the border between Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia:

“The boundary between the Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia states is one front where numerous conflicts arose as recently as this month and still active. Hundreds of citizens have died and hundreds of thousands displaced. The issue is, in part, between the Kamashi people living across the border from Oromia and ethnic Oromos and Amharas living in the state. But the bigger issue is that regional leaders are also part of the fray, as demonstrated by the recent, strongly-worded warnings coming out from the leading parties in Oromia, the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and the recent arrest of some Benishangul-Gumuz leaders.” (Ezega, 20 December 2018)

UNOCHA mentions the displacement of “an estimated 21,000 IDPs from Kamashi and Metekel zones [...] to Awi zone following clashes between ethnic Amhara and Gumuz” since June 2019. Although the security situation reportedly improved following the establishment of a command post, “tension and polarization between both groups in Metekel” remains and government and business are dysfunctional. (UNOCHA, 6 November 2019, p. 2)

In September 2019 Ezega reports that police is searching for “another 1,462 suspects who are accused of instigating violence in Jawi district, Metekel zone of Gondar and surrounding areas”, and in North Shewa zone of Amhara regional state. Also included are individuals suspected to be involved in the killings in Kamashi zone of the Benishangul Gumuz state and the neighboring Oromia regional state. So far, 185 suspects had been arrested (Ezega, 25 September 2019).

In October 2019 Ezega reports on violence in Ataye town in North Shewa:

“At least one person was killed and two others wounded in exchange of fire that occurred in Ataye town of Eferata Gidem district of North Shoa, in Amhara regional state of Ethiopia. Eyewitnesses told Ezega that residents of the Ataye town have been told to stay at home as gun shots were going on in the area, including from heavy arms. [...]

The individual was said to have been armed with three bombs, one Kalashnikov and walking around in places which are under the control of the command post which was deployed after armed groups claimed lives of several people in April this year. The eyewitness said the security problem is expanding in the neighboring localities as members of the Ethiopian defense forces and the state’s Liyu force launched a counter attack against the attacking force.”(Ezega, 6 October 2019)

Please also see [section 7.1.5](#) for further information on violence in Benishangul-Gumuz.

## 7.3 Tigray regional state

### 7.3.1 *Political discontent in Tigray regional state*

According to an article in The New Humanitarian (TNH), Tigrayans, although only comprising six percent of Ethiopia’s population, are seen as a powerful minority because of their affinity with the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which “wielded almost unlimited power for more than two decades” before the EPRDF reforms in 2018 (see [sections 1.2.2](#) and [2.3](#)). Tigrayans fear that the power shift in the federal government makes them vulnerable. The article by TNH further notes the following regarding anti-Tigrayan sentiments:

“Already simmering anti-Tigrayan sentiments have led to violence, people told IRIN, from barricading roads and forcibly stopping traffic to looting and attacks on Tigrayan homes and businesses in the Amhara and Oromia regions.” (TNH, 14 February 2019)

“In the Tigray region’s capital of Mekelle, more than 750 kilometers north of the political changes taking place in Addis Ababa, many Tigrayans feel increasingly isolated from fellow Ethiopians. ‘The rest of the country hates us,’ Weyanay Gebremedhn, 25, told IRIN. Despite the reforms, Tigrayans say what hasn’t changed is the narrative that they are responsible by association for the ills of the TPLF. Although he now struggles to find work, 35-year-old Huey Berhe, who does mostly odd jobs to pay the bills, said he felt safer living among his own community in Mekelle. Huey said he had been a student at Jimma University in western Ethiopia, until growing ethnic tensions sparked fights on campus and led to Tigrayans being targeted. ‘I left my studies at Jimma after the trouble there,’ he said. ‘It was bad – it’s not something I like to discuss.’” (TNH, 14 February 2019)

As reported by Ethiopia Observer in January 2019, the founder of the opposition party Arena Tigray for Democracy and Sovereignty, and former president of Tigray regional state, Gebru Asrat, “said that officials of the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front were holding Tigray people ‘hostage’ while employing ‘extreme rhetoric’ against the federal government.” (Ethiopia Observer, 16 January 2019)

In September 2019 Ethiopia Insight provides a detailed overview on Tigrayan secessionists and anti-secessionists as well as the position of the TPLF regarding the issue. For further details please access the full-text version of the article (Ethiopia Insight, 28 September 2019):

“While the Tigrayan independence movement has been dormant under ethnic federalism and with the outsized role of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), that changed amid last year’s downgrading of the TPLF, and the accompanying political bitterness. With the infamous Article 39 secession clause and an antagonistic mood towards the federal government growing in Tigray, the specter of secession looms once more. Although peripheral for now, it may soon prove to be a central challenge for Addis Ababa—unless the TPLF and its opponents strike accommodating stances, and Tigrayan nationalists come to their senses. [...] In Tigray, his [Abiy Ahmed] leadership was disputed. No party and people have opposed Abiy’s administration as vehemently as the TPLF and Tigrayans. They accuse the federal government of failing to deliver justice regarding crimes committed by previous administrations and criticize allegedly selective arrests of Tigrayans; a concern shared by Human Rights Watch. To many Tigrayans, Abiy is a demagogue, whipping up ethnic-based resentment and tying them to TPLF abuses to shore up his base. [...]

The campaigners [for independence] use various political vehicles to advance their cause. In fact, most regional parties, excluding Arena Tigray and Tigray Democratic Movement, are pro-independence. TPLF kept the option of Tigrayan independence as a last resort, but ultimately settled for an equal share of decision-making in EPRDF and inserting the infamous Article 39 secession clause into the constitution. [...] The anti-secession forces in Tigray are scattered and mostly led by voices from opposition groups like Arena Tigray and TPLF dissidents like Aregawi Berhe, one of the liberation front’s founders, who returned from exile in 2018 to re-enter Ethiopian politics. [...] The TPLF is generally trying not to get dragged into the independence discussions. Doing so could worsen its already strained relations with federal government. Instead, the party utilizes the independence issue to demonstrate to Addis Ababa that it is still the best available ‘federalist’ party among contenders in the region. This seemed to be the messages that Debretsion Gebremichael, TPLF chairman and acting president of Tigray, tried to convey in a June interview with The Reporter. Yet, Getachew Reda, TPLF politburo member and advisor to Debretsion, downplayed the comments, claiming they were taken out of context. Getachew emphasizes that most Tigrayans still believe in Ethiopia and that there is little appetite for secession.” (Ethiopia Insight, 28 September 2019)

In July 2019 the Central Committee of the TPLF the “declared the current central government in Ethiopia unfit to lead the country and is responsible for all the grave situation the country finds itself currently” (Ezega, 11 July 2019). In particular the TPLF statement accused the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) of being “instrumental in creating a fertile ground for extremist forces” (Ethiopia Insight, 18 August 2019) and called on the ADP to “apologize to the Ethiopian people and correct its way” (Ezega, 11 July 2019). As reported by Ethiopia Insight the ADP in return called TPLF an anti-democratic party and blamed it “for the overall crisis, a viewpoint that has plenty of nationwide support” (Ethiopia Insight, 18 August 2019).

In July 2019 ICG mentions a “fault line” between the TPLF and the federal government led by Abiy, and provides the following overview:

“The TPLF’s main sources of grievance are its loss of federal power; what it argues are selective prosecutions of Tigrayan top officials – notably of TPLF Executive Committee member and former national intelligence chief Getachew Assefa – for human-rights abuses and corruption; and opposition to a federal commission that is tasked with assessing interregional boundary disputes, such as the Amhara claims on Wolkait and Raya. The TPLF sees the commission as likely to rule against it and rejects it as unconstitutional because its mandate allegedly clashes with that of the upper house of parliament. The TPLF-run regional authorities apparently refuse to detain Getachew, whose whereabouts are unknown but suspected to be in Tigray, despite the federal authorities issuing his arrest warrant.” (ICG, 19 July 2019)

In October 2019 the TPLF released another statement after a central committee meeting in Mekelle (see also Borkena, 20 October 2019):

“[TPLF] condemned the plan to transform the coalition to a unity party as a move to pose threat in the Federal system and also warned that it could lead to the disintegration of Ethiopia. The statement went further in advising ‘sister organizations’ (they are referred to as agar parties in Amharic) that the move is against their interest. Some ethnic Tigray opposition party leaders tend to think that it is likely TPLF could start a war while claiming that the repression in the region has become worse so much so that they are unable to carry out their functions as an opposition party leaders.” (Borkena, 22 October 2019)

Please also see the following document for further information on the relationship between the Tigray administration and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s administration:

- Ethiopia Insight: Is Tigray really a drop in the bucket for Abiy’s administration?, 17 January 2019  
<https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2019/01/17/is-tigray-really-a-drop-in-the-bucket-for-abiy-administration/>

### *7.3.2 Raya and Wolkait dispute*

The “Wolkait and Raya territories that are currently part of Tigray regional state and border Amhara” are disputed between Tigray and the Amhara (ICG, 19 July 2019). In July 2016 a rally was held in Gondar, Amhara region, “over the alleged annexation of the Wolkait area by Tigray state”. Since then unrest has continued (EIP, July 2019, p. 22). A December 2018 article by Ezega notes:

“In the north, the Wolkite and Raya enclaves, currently in the Tigray regional state, are contested by some activists from the Amhara region, perhaps with some backing from the Amhara regional government behind the scenes. There have been armed clashes in the Wolkite area a few years ago, and clashes in some parts of Amhara, especially in Gondar, related to this issue. There were protests in the Raya area in Tigray in late October this year, where three people were killed.” (Ezega, 20 December 2018)

According to an Ethiopia Insight article, “the Raya and Wolkait disputes appear problematic as they are not readily solved through constitutional means such as referendums”. It is not disputed that the areas are majority Tigrinya-speaking. However, activists allege the resettlement of Tigrayans in the area since the 1980s (Ethiopia Insight, 16 December 2018).

A January 2019 article by Ethiopia Insight also mentions the claim to the Wolkait and Raya territories and reports the following regarding TPLF rule in Tigray:

“For the TPLF, the issue of Wolqait-Tsegede and Raya is a nightmare. As if that is not enough, its officials’ crimes are haunting the party. In addition, an ailing leadership is struggling to keep-up with political developments. Most of the TPLF top guns prospered in the past two decades and they will lose a lot if the situation in the country gets out of control. The location of Tigray, far from the political and geographic center, and the much smaller size of TPLF’s constituency compared with ADP and ODP, puts TPLF at a disadvantage. After it lost federal power, TPLF is no more punching above its weight. But, taking into account the financial, intelligence and military resources it amassed in the last 27 years, it won’t go down without a fight.” (Ethiopia Insight, 9 January 2019)

For further information regarding the Wolkait area, please see the article in the Addis Standard:

- Addis Standard: Commentary: What is the price of identity in today’s Ethiopia? The suffering of Yonas Gashaw as an illustration, 30 May 2018  
<http://addisstandard.com/commentary-what-is-the-price-of-identity-in-todays-ethiopia-the-suffering-of-yonas-gashaw-as-an-illustration/>

A detailed overview on the “Raya issue” can be found in an article by Ethiopia Insight:

- Ethiopia Insight: After Eritrea thaw, Tigray’s southern border with Amhara heats up, 28 October 2018  
<https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2018/10/28/after-eritrea-thaw-tigrays-southern-border-with-amhara-heats-up/>

For further information on the Raya please also note the following documents:

- Ethiopia Insight: Raya: a category error, and a catalog of errors, 24 March 2019  
<https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2019/03/24/raya-a-category-error-and-a-catalog-of-errors/>
- Alemu Asfaw Nigusie; Sisay Megersa Dirirsa: The Politics of Self-Representation in Ethiopia: A Case of the Raya People since the 1930s, 2017  
<https://aaref.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/44-1.-Alemu-READY-Issue-44.pdf>

### *7.3.3 Treatment of persons of Tigray ethnicity*

Please also see [section 7.2](#) for information on conflict in the border areas between Amhara and Tigray regional states.

In Amhara regional state “ethnic Tigray business communities in Bati town were attacked” in June 2018, according to a jewelry store owner. According to the chairman of the political party Arena, one ethnic Tigrayan was reportedly killed, however, this was not confirmed (Borkena, 27 June 2018). The Tigray administration sent an inquiry team to Kemisse and Bati in Amhara

regional state “where reports and allegations of attacks against residents from Tigray ethnic group are coming out” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 30 June 2018).

As reported by Reuters in December 2018 many Tigrayans “were worried about a surge in ethnic violence elsewhere in the country”, and further notes:

“Although Tigray has been largely unaffected – unlike other regions, it is not home to significant numbers of people from other ethnic groups – residents told Reuters that Abiy was not doing enough to stop the bloodshed elsewhere. Several said they had family members who abandoned jobs and businesses to return to Tigray for fear of reprisals, though there have been no reports of major attacks against the community.” (Reuters, 16 December 2018)

In October 2018 Ethiopia Insight notes that “Tigray state had been relatively peaceful over the last few years”, however mentions that regional police killed at least three people on 21 October 2018 “in response to protests opposing Tigrayan rule in Alamata town near the border of Amhara region”. The article further notes:

“In scenes familiar from Oromia, and to a lesser extent parts of Amhara and Southern Nations regions, youths frustrated with local Tigrayan administrators in Alamata blocked roads with burning tires, said a teacher, requesting anonymity. Regional police killed five, and then two more, with 20 seriously wounded, he said.” (Ethiopia Insight, 28 October 2018)

A February 2019 article by TNH cites Gebre Weleslase, a Tigrayan law professor at Mekelle University, who “criticised Abiy for not condemning ethnic attacks, which he said had contributed to tens of thousands of Tigrayans leaving Amhara for Tigray in recent years”. The article also cites the chair of the Amhara Association of America, Tewodrose Tirfe, who states the following regarding attitudes of other Ethiopians on Tigrayans:

“[...] the feeling of ‘hate’ that Ethiopians have toward the TPLF ‘doesn’t extend to Tigrayans’. ‘There is resentment toward them when other Ethiopians hear of rallies in Tigray supporting the TPLF, because that seems like they aren’t supporting reform efforts,’ he said. ‘But that doesn’t lead to them being targeted, otherwise there would have been more displacements.’” (TNH, 14 February 2019)

In January 2019 Ethiopia Insight notes that there is a “tendency, particularly strong among those Amhara elites, but pervasive nationwide, to equate the TPLF and the Tigrayan people” (Ethiopia Insight, 17 January 2019). Another article by Ethiopia Insight, published September 2019 further describes the attitudes regarding Tigrayans:

“Indeed, some recent discourse has implicitly taken aim at Tigrayans. Expressions such as ‘day-time hyenas’ (ye qen jiboch) - alluding to ethnic conflict entrepreneurs trying to sabotage reforms, or corrupt officials in the state apparatus—was initially voiced by the Prime Minister and has become a common euphemism used to defame ordinary Tigrayans. This, in turn, sharpened their bitterness towards him.” (Ethiopia Insight, 28 September 2019)

Freedom House in February 2019 notes with regard to arrests of military and government officials in November and December 2018:

“In November and December 2018, a number of high-profile military and government officials were arrested and charged with corruption. Notably, 26 high-level employees of the military-run Metals and Engineering Corporation (MeTEC), including its chief executive, were arrested on corruption charges, and were awaiting trial at the end of the year. Some critics have accused the government of selectively prosecuting officials from the Tigray ethnic group, which has dominated the military for decades. However, a number of non-Tigray officials were also arrested in the sweep.” (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section C2)

In December 2018 residents in Mekelle city protested against “what they called ethnic profiling that targets mainly Tigrayans in the ongoing crackdown on corruption and abuse of power”. The chairman of TPLF and president of the regional state held a speech in front of the demonstrators in Mekelle Stadium. Already in November 2018 “rallies were held in various towns in Tigray, including in Adwa, Axum, Korem, Abiy Adi, Setit Humera, Alamata, Addisu and Moheni”. (Ezega, 9 December 2018)

## 7.4 Somali

### 7.4.1 *Political enfranchisement*

In August 2018 VOA mentions friction between the federal government and the Somali regional government that started in April 2018. Prime Ministers Abiys reforms “put him at odds with Somali Regional President Abdi Illey, who is known for ruling his territory with an iron fist” (VOA, 10 August 2018).

Early August, after violence left at least 30 people dead, “armed members of the federal defense forces began entering Jigjiga city, placing key regional installations, including main roads, regional Parliament and television buildings under the federal security”, after violence left at least 30 people dead (Addis Standard, 6 August 2018). Residents perceived this as “an apparent attempt by central authorities to arrest regional officials” (Reuters, 4 August 2018). Somali Regional President Abdi Illey resigned and handed over the responsibilities to Ahmed Abdi Mohamed, the former regional finance minister (VOA, 6 August 2018). Although the Somali regional president was unpopular across the region, “Somalis in the region reacted negatively to the federal takeover of Jijiga” (VOA, 10 August 2018). Regarding the relationship between Somalis and other Ethiopians, VOA cites Safia Aidid, a researcher and expert on the region:

“‘Marginalized groups like Somalis, whose relationship to Ethiopia, historically, has been one of exclusion,’ must be considered, Aidid said, and there are questions about whether this group is really part of the new Ethiopia. Rebuilding trust and addressing issues affecting Somalis will be a critical task for the prime minister, Aidid added, particularly since he has not yet resolved the displacement happening in the region.” (VOA, 10 August 2018)

Later in August 2018 Mustafa Muhumed Omer was nominated as acting president of the Somali regional state, and also elected as deputy chairman of the Ethiopian-Somali People’s



Democratic Party (ESPDP) (Ethiopia Observer, 22 August 2018; see also VOA, 25 August 2018). In January 2019 federal prosecutors “charged 47 individuals, including ex-Somali regional state president Abdi Muhamud Omer, a.k.a, Abdi Illey”, following investigations into the violence in Somali regional state during early August 2018 (Addis Standard, 30 January 2019). In February 2019 the Council of Somali regional state lifted the immunity of twelve members, “due to their alleged involvement in manufactured security crisis in the region some time in July 2018 which resulted in the deaths of dozens of civilians”. They were also blamed to be implicated in corruption (Borkena, 7 February 2019). In October 2019 Ezega reports on the court hearing of Abdi Muhamud Omar, accused “of inciting inter-communal violence which left more than 58 people dead in the city of Jigjiga, the capital of Somali state”. The article quotes the former Somali region president and provides further details on court proceedings:

“‘I administered the state in a proper way, and I did not commit any crime. I am not guilty,’ he said. He made the plea in a court hearing on Wednesday, October 30, 2019 at Lideta Criminal Court. The court also ordered the police to publish names and photos of seven other suspects who are still at large. All are accused of killing and wounding people as well as causing the displacement thousands in the capital city, Jigjiga, and other towns. About 50 individuals were charged along with Abdi Illey in August 2019. Those suspects who were arrested and charged under the same alleged crimes complained that justice has not yet been served and that they continue to be mistreated. [...] Abdi Illey was detained on August 27 from a house in Addis Abeba. He remained in jail facing serious criminal charges after his August 30/2018 request for bail was denied by the federal high court. The August violence had eventually led to the intervention of federal forces and subsequent ousting from the presidency of Abdi Illey.” (Ezega, 30 October 2019)

In April 2019 the Ethiopian Somali People’s Democratic Party (ESPDP) changed its name to Somali Democracy Party (Borkena, 2 April 2019). The party further changed its emblem and now allows all Ethiopian citizens to join the party. Ahmed Shide was elected chairperson and Mustefa Omer became his deputy (The Reporter Ethiopia, 6 April 2019b). Although the Somali Democracy Party administers the Somali regional state, it is not part of the EPRDF, however it has the status of a “sister organization”. Borkena notes that the EPRDF “has recently made decision to make ‘sister organizations’ running regional administrations in Afar, Benishangul, Gambella and Somali regions of Ethiopia to be part to the ruling coalition and to form a single party” (Borkena, 3 April 2019). An article by The Economist published in October 2019 notes the following regarding the situation in Somali regional state and in Jigjiga after the replacement of the Somali regional president:

“Dissidents and rebels returned in droves. Mohammed [Gurey] became the region's deputy security chief. The infamous central prison in Jigjiga, the state capital, was closed. Thousands of prisoners were freed. Since then Mustafa [Omer] has overseen the most dramatic turnaround in the region's recent history. ‘It is the safest place in Ethiopia right now,’ says Kamal Hassan, another recent returnee. When your correspondent visited Jigjiga in the final months of Abdi's rule, former detainees refused to meet in public for fear of reprisals. Today many of them are in government. The old prison is to reopen as a museum, and Bashir takes visiting journalists and human-rights workers on tours - revealing, for example, the toilet cubicles where political prisoners huddled in solitary

confinement and the underground pit where human waste was dumped on them as punishment. Meanwhile separatist leaders of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) have ditched their weapons and plan to contest elections next year. [...]

But even in the Somali region, the process is imperfect and fragile. Some critics allege that Mustafa is keener to take revenge on the old guard than to strengthen state institutions. 'He treats everyone who worked for Abdi like they are Hitlers,' complains an associate of the former regime. Locals bristle at a government dominated by well-heeled diaspora types. Others resent a lack of consultation. 'Transparency is not very strong,' sniffs Abdirahman Mahdi, the ONLF's secretary-general. Some worry about a return to strong-arm tactics: in recent days nearly 600 youngsters were indiscriminately rounded up in Jijiga on vague allegations of criminality and taken out of the city for 'rehabilitation'. About a tenth have since been released." (The Economist, 5 October 2019)

For Information on the former rebel group Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) please see [section 3.3](#).

#### *7.4.2 Conflict in Somali regional state*

In August 2018 the Heego youth group – loyal to former Somali regional state president Abdi Illey - and paramilitary Liyu police carried out attacks that left many people dead. According to the Ethiopian Orthodox church 15 people were killed and eight churches burned. After the destroying of homes hundreds of people fled to a church compound (HRW, 9 April 2019). Also in August 2018 "police opened fire on a group of demonstrators protesting the looting of property owned by ethnic minorities in the Somali Region, killing four people" (Freedom House, 4 February 2019, section E1). The Turkish Anadolu Agency (AA) provides the following overview on events in Jijiga in early August 2018:

"Hundreds of Ethiopians demonstrated against violence that occurred last Saturday in which ethnic Somalis reportedly burned, looted and vandalized property belonging to ethnic Oromo and Amhara residents of the eastern town of Jijiga, capital of the Ethiopian Somali regional state. The demonstration took place in front of the Ministry of Defense and the Prime Minister's office in Addis Ababa. The demonstrators carried banners that read 'Stop the killing in Jijiga'. In a statement issued on Monday, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church condemned the burning of churches and the killing of people in the city. According to local sources from Jijiga, scores of people have been killed in violence that brought the federal army and the regional 'Liyu/special' police force at loggerheads. The Liyu unit was established to serve as a counterterrorism force but has been mired in controversy for its alleged involvement in the ethnic conflict between Oromos and Somalis, according to local media." (AA, 6 August 2018)

A Reuters article provides the following insights on violence in Somali regional state in August 2018:

"At least 40 people were killed by paramilitary forces in eastern Ethiopia over the weekend, a senior regional official said on Monday, in the latest spate of violence driven by ethnic divisions. [...] 'We still do not know why Liyu forces raided the areas on Saturday and Sunday,' he said, referring to the paramilitary soldiers. 'But we know that all the victims

were ethnic Oromos. At least 40 were killed in the attacks.’ A week earlier, mobs looted properties owned by ethnic minorities in the Somali region’s capital Jijiga. The central government said the unrest had been stoked by regional officials who had fallen out with central authorities trying to address rights abuses in the region.” (Reuters, 13 August 2018)

Regarding violence in Jijiga city in August 2018 the Federal Attorney General’s office disclosed in January 2019 that a mass grave with the remains of 42 people was discovered and a further eight bodies were found inside St. Michael Church in Jijiga city. Addis Standard gives the following overview on the results of the investigations by the Attorney General:

“The AG’s office blamed an organized youth movement called ‘Heego’ and members of the Somali Liyu Police for instigating inter-communal violence between Somalis and residents of other ethnic groups in the region. Zinabu said arrest warrants were issued against 46 suspects including, including the infamous Abdirahman Labagole, head of the Liyu Police who is believed to be on the run, and Abdi Iley, who is standing trial. Of the 46, however, only six are under police custody. The remaining are either on the run or are hiding in the country, Zinabu said. A task force was formed to pursue after those hiding in the country while negotiations with third countries where some of the runaways are believed to be in hiding were underway to extradite the suspects.” (Addis Standard, 25 January 2019)

As reported by UNOCHA “five Somalis were killed and several other injured in Lagahida woreda” in fighting with ethnic Oromo over land, in April 2019 (UNOCHA, 30 April 2019, p. 3). In June and July 2019 there were reports of inter-clan conflict in the zones of Doolo and Shabelle. UNOCHA mentions the following regarding the incidents:

“In early July, one person was killed and two injured following the clash between Somali region police forces and Bantu local communities, after the latter set up a new settlement in Dhoomaale village, an area claimed by both Cabudwaq and Bantu clans. Another land-ownership related clash took place between Cabudwaq and Bah-Geri clans in Kalafo and Shilabo woredas (Shabelle zone) with four people killed, impacting critical nutrition activities in southern parts of Kalafo woreda. The situation in the southern boundary areas of Liban and Dawa zones remained unpredictable, with a reported spill-over of violence by UAGs [unidentified armed groups] from neighboring Borena and Guji zones (Oromia).” (UNOCHA, 11 September 2019, p. 4)

UNOCHA notes the following regarding inter-clan clashes in Doolo zone in August and September 2019:

“In Doolo zone, a number of inter-clan clashes over land and power-sharing were reported involving the Bi-idyahan and Marehan sub-clans. Further, clashes were reported between Lelkase and Majerten clans in Galadi woreda, and between Gacanweyne (Makahil clan) and Bahamagan (Abdile clan) in Lehel-yucub woreda.” (UNOCHA, 6 November 2019, p. 4)

Please see also [section 7.1.3](#) for further information on the Oromo-Somali ethnic conflict and [section 5.3](#) for further information on events in Jijiga and Somali region. [Section 7.6.3](#) provides further information on ethnic conflicts involving ethnic Somali people.

## 7.5 Sidama

### 7.5.1 Political enfranchisement

Please see also [section 2.4](#) for further information regarding the Sidama referendum.

As reported by The Conversation “ethnic Sidamas have been granted self administrative rights by controlling political powers in the Sidama Zone administration”, however, “those pushing for statehood contend that the size of the Sidama population, which is about 4% of Ethiopia’s total population, should empower it to have its own regional state” (The Conversation, 12 August 2019). The Sidama Zone is part of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Region (SNNPR) and has roughly 4 million inhabitants (TNH, 7 November 2019).

After weeks of unrest in July 2018, “federal security forces assumed control of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region” (Mail and Guardian, 17 October 2019; also see Addis Standard, 23 July 2019).

The Africa Report mentions the following regarding the situation in the region in October 2019:

“By the end of 2019, barring an upset, Sidama will be Ethiopia’s tenth semi-autonomous state. A referendum on statehood, which should have taken place in July, is now scheduled for November. Leaders of the country’s fifth-largest ethnic group are energetically preparing for the enhanced autonomy statehood will bring. Work has begun on a constitution. Billboards have been erected, welcoming visitors to the would-be state as they enter Hawassa, its putative capital.” (The Africa Report, 11 October 2019)

Regarding the situation in Hawassa, the capital of Sidama zone, TNH notes in November 2019:

“Cosmopolitan Hawassa currently serves as both the capital of the Sidama zone and the SNNPR. If Sidama wins statehood, its future will be unclear - it could either become the new Sidama region capital or it might exist as a federal city state like the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, which sits in the Oromia region of the Oromo. Non-Sidama residents fear that should Hawassa become the new regional capital they will be marginalised and discrimination will force them to leave - especially if the Sidamic language, which many inhabitants cannot speak, becomes the city’s official language.[...]

A constant refrain among Hawassa residents, and among Ethiopians elsewhere, is that political agitators – both homegrown and in the Ethiopian diaspora – are taking advantage of the current instability for their own ends. ‘Around the city the agitation has been spurred by the intellectual elites,’ said a Hawassa University lecturer, who asked not to be named. ‘Their main motivation is to get political power so they can get economic power. It’s happening across the whole country now.’” (TNH, 7 November 2019)

In November 2019 an article by The Reporter Ethiopia cites a statement by the Wolayta Committee for Human Rights (WCHR), claiming that “illegal registration of ineligible Sidama voters living inside the Wolayta zone borders, illegal identification authorization of new Hawassa residents; the xenophobic activities of top Sidama officials directly involved in the referendum, are a threat to the process” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 9 November 2019).

### 7.5.2 *Ethnic conflict involving Sidama*

Please see also [section 2.4](#) for further information regarding violence in connection with the Sidama referendum.

In June 2018, “several men from the Wolayta ethnic group were burned alive by members of the rival Sidama ethnic group” in Hawassa (Reuters, 24 August 2018). According to officials, 15 people were killed in several days of violence in Hawassa and Wolayta in SNNPR in June 2018 (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 6). According to the ICG dozens of people died in June 2018 in Hawassa during a cultural festival and campaigning for the Sidama regional state. Leaders of the Sidama and Wolayta, “who have long competed for regional leadership, blamed each other for the violence” (ICG, 4 July 2019, p. 6). Regarding protests against the Hawassa violence in June 2018, African Arguments reports:

“On 15 June, violence then erupted in Sodo. Wolaita activists wished to demonstrate against the violence in Hawassa and what they saw as the authorities’ inadequate response. When they were denied official permission, they attacked local administrators’ vehicles and set fire to Oromia Bank, private business, and the local Justice Office building. Some youth reportedly attempted to raid the central prison to free detainees. Diaspora media reported five deaths. On that same day, activists in Arba Minch also requested permission for a demonstration, which was delayed to 23 June. The demonstrators additionally demanded the resignation of Zonal officials, the release of political prisoners, and an end to alleged land appropriation by state officials.” (African Arguments, 19 June 2018)

In October 2019 The Africa Report cites an ethnic Wolayta and resident of Hawassa regarding events in June 2018:

“Our country is sliding down, says Admasu, a resident of Hawassa and ethnic Wolayta, whose home was destroyed by a Sidama gang when violence broke out in June 2018. He plans to leave the city after the referendum: ‘There is no rule of law, no peace and security. Everything is stuck.’” (The Africa Report, 11 October 2019)

The Reporter Ethiopia mentions in September 2018 that the recent conflict in the town of Hawassa and its surroundings “had resulted in the death of ten people and the injury of more than 80, while close to 3,500 people have been reported to be displaced from their homes” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 1 September 2018). Ethiopia Observer describes the June 2018 events in Hawassa:

“There have been three days of unrest in Hawassa in southern Ethiopia with at least one fatality and many injured after Sidama protesters’ demand for their own regional state was accompanied by violence. Police and soldiers are trying to control the situation after hotels and businesses were attacked, a resident said. ‘We have been hearing gun shots the entire afternoon,’ they said in the evening of June 14. At least one person died in unknown circumstances on June 13. Adare Hospital is ‘crowded’ and there are more than 50 seriously injured people at Hawassa Referral Hospital, the witness, who did not want to be named, said. ‘Those who are orchestrating the chaos are from the native people of Sidama and they are claiming the land belongs to them only and any other clan should be kicked

out. Houses are raided since yesterday. They are breaking into homes and stealing property and beating people,' they said. Hawassa is the capital city of the multiethnic Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State (SNNPRS) as well as the administrative centre of Sidama Zone. The Sidama people have a longstanding claim to have their own state in Ethiopia's federation. Around 100 people may have been killed by security forces in 2002 when similar demands were made. 10 people died in the violence, 89 were injured and 2,500 displaced, including many Wolayta, Fana Broadcasting Corporation said on June 16. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed plans to visit Hawassa next week. Recent violence occurred in the aftermath of the cultural Chamabalala festival and has included attacks on Wolayta people, who are from the same region, the witness said. Large hotels were invaded in the popular resort town and are now controlled by security forces. Another account said security forces shot people at a teacher training college today and six have died overall." (Ethiopia Observer, last update 17 June 2018)

In July 2019 UNOCHA reports on violence in Sidama zone:

"Initially characterized by clashes between Sidama youths and security forces in protest of the announcement by the National Electoral Board of a delayed timeframe for holding a referendum on the issue of Sidama Statehood; the violence gradually took on an intercommunal character when non-Sidama owned properties were reportedly targeted for attack. Since 21 July, the region was put under a federal security forces-led command to restore law and order." (UNOCHA, 28 July 2019)

In September 2019 UNOCHA further reports on violence in Hawassa in July 2019:

"On 19 July, violence between EDF and 'Ejjetto' (Sidama youth) followed the region's earlier-made announcements to unilaterally declare a regional state (in the absence of a federally organized referendum). Government buildings and Ethiopian Orthodox churches were set on fire, non-Sidama people were attacked, thousands were displaced to Oromia region (mostly ethnic Amharas, Gurages and Siltes), properties were looted, and roads blocks erected in the main roads." (UNOCHA, 11 September 2019, p. 4)

Addis Standard in July 2019 also provides an overview on the events:

"Sidama activists on their part accuse security forces in various places in Sidama zone and Hawassa city of arresting dozens of activists, including several leaders of Ejjeetto, a Sidama youth group spreading the campaign for Sidama statehood, such as Belay Belguda, Fasika Legesse and Getahun Deguye. Addis Standard has confirmed the arrest of these activists late yesterday. Twedros did not mention the number of casualties whereas activists say as many as eleven were killed so far. Citing Hawassa hospital, DW Amharic reported at least one person was killed yesterday and three others were injured. According to two eye witnesses who spoke to Addis Standard by phone from Hawassa, although the city is calm today compared to yesterday, there are reports of ongoing 'clashes, killings, property damages, and arrests' coming from several areas of Sidama zone such as Aleta Wendo, Hagere Selam, Yirgalem and Malga. Addis Standard's attempts to confirm the reports from the Sidama zone administration were to no avail." (Addis Standard, 19 July 2019)

Another article by Addis Standard published three days later provides further details on incidents in Sidama zone:

“The number of civilians killed in Sidama zone in southern Ethiopia since July 18 has risen to ‘more than 35’, according to Yigezuh Adamu, a resident of Yirgalem who is currently in Hawassa city. ‘Hundreds of people are also displaced after their properties were vandalized,’ Yegezu said. ‘We are trying to coordinate a report on the amount of casualties and property damages so as to provide it to the regional state,’ Yigezuh said, referring to himself and his friends. Hagere Selam is one of the most affected towns. Another eye witness who is also currently in Hawassa city told Addis Standard. ‘On Friday and Saturday at least three churches were burned to the ground in Hagere Selam by angry mobs who went out to the streets to protest the killings by security forces.’ [...]

The other towns severely affected are Melga and Yirgalem. In Melga, eleven people were killed on Thursday and Friday by security forces. In Yirgalem, some reports say that Aregash Lodge, a popular Eco-lodge known for its tranquil, was burned. However Addis Standard couldn’t verify that information; neither the city’s police, nor the lodge’s telephone lines are reachable.” (Addis Standard, 22 July 2019)

In August 2019 Reuters reports that “at least 17 people were killed in clashes between security forces and pro-autonomy activists” in July 2019 (Reuters, 29 August 2019), and in November 2019 TNH mentions that “at least 60 people died in clashes with security forces” to push the statehood demand until a referendum date was agreed. The TNH article further cites a non-Sidama resident regarding the situation in Hawassa:

“‘We feel like we are hostages in our own city,’ Elias, a non-Sidama Hawassa resident, told TNH. ‘We’re surrounded by Sidama.’ He said non-Sidama are wary of going to parts of the city with a majority Sidama population, explaining that some non-Sidama were burned and stoned to death by mobs when violence broke out in July and spread to other towns in the Sidama zone. ‘The killing style was beyond imagining,’ said Elias – a reference to its brutality.” (TNH, 7 November 2019)

In October 2019 Borkena publishes a statement by the Wolayta Committee for Human Rights (WCHR), also containing information on the situation in Hawassa:

“On October 10, 2019, WCHR expressed deep concern on the random re-imprisonment of Wolayta residents and anti-secession Sidama activists in Hawassa wereda. We also condemned nativism harassment of residents labeled as ‘foreign businessmen’ by youth in the name of ‘Ejeto’ which were financed and organized by the same Sidama zone officials who are supposed to be trusted to independently run this referendum. [...] On October 19, 2019, WCHR published a statement titled ‘Leave Hawassa, go back home!’ to re-express our concern with the growing xenophobia and targeted harassment of so-called ‘outsiders’ and ‘Neftegnas’ which has become synonymous with virtually all Ethiopians opposing nativism and xenophobia in the zone. In that statement, we also asked that “Sidama officials stop organizing a referendum inside the Wolayta zone wereda of ABELA” as soon as possible; which otherwise would lead to a deadly conflict between nativist Wolayta elites and Sidama nationalists. Lastly, we reminded the NEBE to guarantee that displaced



residents (who became refugees out of Sidama zone due to various ethnic violence incidents in recent years, particularly after the June-August 2018 Wolayta Massacre) be given an opportunity to either return home first OR at least be allowed to vote (wherever they are, as long as they display credible identification /proof of prior residence) in the upcoming referendum, according to the Ethiopian Constitution and according to the NEBE's own recent declaration that 'all legal residents' can participate in the referendum." (Borkena, 6 November 2019)

## 7.6 Other ethnicities

### 7.6.1 *Demands for statehood in the SNNPR*

Please also see [section 2.4](#) and [7.5](#) for further information on the Sidama statehood referendum.

As reported by HRW in April 2019 there are "provisions in federal and regional constitutions that allow for the creation of new regions and zones", however, "there is a lack of clarity around how those provisions might be implemented" (HRW, 9 April 2019). After the request for a referendum on Sidama statehood in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) at least ten groups have petitioned the regional council to form their own regional states (HRW, 9 April 2019; The Africa Report, 11 October 2019). According to Ethiopia Insight, Wolayta Zone voted for statehood on 12 November 2018, followed by Kaffa Zone on 15 November, Gurage Zone on 26 November and Gamo on 12 December. Hadiya Zone also voted for statehood, while other demands are on the way, including in South Omo Zone (Ethiopia Insight, 30 December 2018).

In August 2019 USIP notes that the "SNNPR is among Ethiopia's most diverse regions. Some worry that if Sidama becomes a state, it would presage the disintegration of the SNNPR, and the possible displacement of thousands of people along ethnic lines" (USIP, 6 August 2019). According to the ICG, the formation of a Sidama state "would intensify other statehood demands, particularly those of the Wolayta, the second largest ethnic group in the south. It could catalyse a violent unravelling of the Southern Nations" (ICG, 4 July 2019, p. 2). The Africa Report notes that in May 2019 "Welayta people held a demonstration demanding statehood after the Welayta Zone affirmed a statehood request in November last year" (The Africa Report, 2 August 2019). As reported by Ethiopia Insight in November 2018, there is danger "that the moves increase identity-, border- and resource-related conflicts that have plagued the 21-million strong Southern Nations, which has around 50 recognized indigenous groups". The article further notes:

"There has historically been plenty of jostling for more administrative autonomy in SNNP as that generally gives local elites greater control over spending and appointments. While the statehood ambitions are legitimate 'the South is a fragile region of interwoven ethnic groups with unclear territorial borders which have been the prime cause of inter-ethnic conflicts,' said Gemechu Geligeleo, a lawyer originally from Konso." (Ethiopia Insight, 28 November 2018)

In December 2018 an article by 7D News provides an overview on demands for regional status in the SNNPR:

“The Southern Ethiopian Peoples’ Democratic Movement (SEPDM), a member of Ethiopia’s ruling coalition, recently warned that requests for regional autonomy now flaring up in various parts of the state and under consideration by zonal councils need to be seriously considered. The warning came following an extraordinary meeting by the SEPDM on November 25th and 26th, 2018. Ethiopia’s Southern Regional State, the third most populous in the Federal Republic, is being rocked by rising demands from zones for a regional status. [...]

As feared by many, requests have multiplied, with the Wolayta already demanding statehood, as are the Kaffa, Gurage, Hadiya and Kembata Zones. Secretary of the SEPDM, Moges Balcha, disclosed that a detailed study to map out new administrative divisions is underway. ‘Thus, all those quests for autonomy will be entertained in a coordinated and legal manner,’ he said. Moges said that a committee of experts has been formed to examine the issue of when and how quests for regional autonomy should be entertained. [...]

Girum Alemayehu, a political commentator in Addis Ababa, says the decision by the Council of the Southern Region is very surprising. ‘The Wolayta are already demanding statehood. This will create more disputes about borders and budgets in the future,’ he said. ‘Unless this is meant to show the absurdity of the federative arrangements by a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* and to slowly, but surely, dissolve the federation into the smallest possible ethnic-based political units, I am not sure what the purpose is.’

The Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNP) Council restructured the region of around 20 million people and more than 80 groups, adding three zones and 44 woredas (third-level administrative divisions of Ethiopia). Konso was made a zone in a split from Segen Zone, which was itself a 2011 amalgamation of three woredas.” (7D News, 2 December 2018)

Please also see the following article by Ethiopia Insight for further information on demands for statehood and developments in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples regional state (SNNP):

- Ethiopia Insight: Southern comfort on the rocks, 20 November 2019  
<https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2019/11/20/southern-comfort-on-the-rocks/>

### *7.6.2 Conflict in Gambella regional state*

In May 2019 the international news agency IPS News provides the following overview on Gambella region:

“When war broke out in 2013 in South Sudan, refugees poured into neighbouring Gambella. Today, 485,000 South Sudanese refugees lived in the Gambella region, according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN refugee organisation. Some displaced Nuer brought arms across the border, destabilising an already tense region. ‘The fact that the Nuer and Anuwak exist on both sides of the border

makes it easy for people of both communities to pass backwards and forwards, taking with them their conflicts both between the two tribes but also at the national level,’ says John Ashworth, who has been working in South Sudan and the surrounding region for the last 30 years.

[...] It is hard to visit Gambella and not be struck by the height of many locals, some with horizontal scarification lines across their foreheads. The Nuer are one of five ethnic groups populating the region. Close ties and tensions between the Nuer and Anuwak, the two largest ethnic groups, representing about 45 percent and 26 percent of the population, respectively, date back centuries. The modern border between the two nations does not delineate where either group lives nor is movement across the South Sudan-Ethiopia border a new phenomenon.

[...] Back in 1962, the first of several civil wars broke out next door in Sudan at the start of a 50-year quest for South Sudanese independence, and from which Gambella could not remain immune. The stigma attached to the region hasn’t been helped by the Ethiopian government’s tendency to take a dismissive view of the region, underscored by a prejudice—one that extends throughout Ethiopian society—that the blacker one is the less Ethiopia you are, says Dereje Feyissa, a senior advisor at the Addis Ababa-based International Law and Policy Institute. ‘The Ethiopian centre has always related to its periphery in a predatory way,’ Dereje says. ‘This is not only because of the geographic distance but also the historical, social and cultural differences which the discourse on skin colour signifies.’” (IPS News, 6 May 2019)

In December 2003 “a brutal ambush allegedly committed by armed Anuak sparked a bloody three-day rampage in the regional capital in which ENDF soldiers joined ‘highlander’ mobs in the destruction of the town’s Anuak neighborhoods”. Houses were burnt and “as many as 424 people were killed, almost all of them Anuak” (HRW, 23 March 2005). According to an article published by Ethiopia Insight “the Anuak’s largely untold story is still fresh a decade and a half later. The state has neither apprehended suspects for atrocities nor served apologies or compensated victims’ families and survivors for heinous state-sponsored crimes”. The article further notes:

“Of course, the troubled border region of Gambella has a long record of violence. Indeed, insecurity and poverty are its historical landmarks. In the past few decades, however, this has increased, with conflicts between the two major ethnic groups, the large South Sudanese refugee population, and other Ethiopians. Frequent violence has a far-reaching impact on livelihoods and community relationships. [...]

In September [2018], Dhaldim youths [a pressure group that took to Gambella’s streets to bring about political change; also see [section 3.5](#)] protested for the first time complaining of endemic corruption, nepotism, youth unemployment, abuse and unfair treatment. The protest turned bloody when suspected followers of Gatluak Tut [Gambella region’s President, who resigned in October 2018] killed Okello Ojwato, an Anuak. The next morning, angry youths staged peaceful protests that turned out bloody. The army shot dead nine and wounded 22. Anarchy best described the grim reality in Gambella town for

the following two months. The Anuak and Nuer relationship became toxic and polarized along ethnic lines in support or against the incompetent and corrupt Gatluak Tut and Senay Akwor leadership. Gambella town divided; streets were deserted and undeclared stay-home protest tactics enforced. This paid off: it paralyzed the local economy and forced Gatluak Tut and his Deputy Senay to unexpectedly resign at a political evaluation that took place in Addis Ababa. Possibly federal officials put them under considerable pressure to do so.” (Ethiopia Insight, 13 December 2018)

The situation in Gambella has been described as “very tense over the past year” in September 2019, and clashes between the mostly indigenous Anuak population and the Nuer population “have occurred on a regular basis” (ECHO, 12 September 2019). As reported by UNOCHA, in April 2019, “the overall security situation in Gambella region has worsened and remains unstable”. The report describes the situation as follows:

“Several incidents have been reported between Nuer and Agnuak ethnic groups that contributed to a high level of anxiety and suspicion between communities. Security forces continue attempting to contain the escalation, mainly associated with revenge killings. In April, three refugees lost their lives allegedly linked to tribal/clan conflict, and one aid worker was killed in his private residence in Gambella town. The motives behind the killing remain unknown.” (UNOCHA, 30 April 2019, p. 2)

Also in April 2019, a report by Borkena mentions violence in a Gambella prison. Two individuals got into a fight that “took a form of ethnic conflict between Nuér and Agnuak” resulting in prison-wide violence. 92 inmates escaped following the violence. (Borkena, 16 April 2019)

In May 2019 UNOCHA notes a significant decrease of “the number of security-related incidents in Gambella”. The incidents “were reported in Gambella city, Akobo Gambella, and Itang districts, most of them relating to longstanding Nuer and Anyuak tensions”, however, 13 of the reported 15 incidents were crime related (UNOCHA, 31 May 2019, p. 2). Regarding the “highly volatile” security situation in June and July 2019, UNOCHA notes the following:

“Tit-fortat attacks between ethnic Agnuak and Nuer continued through June and July. Ordinary civilians were stabbed, beaten or shot - based on their presumed ethnicity – and while conducting day-to-day activities, in a spiral of violence that seems to never end. This violence has impacted the nature and quality of humanitarian activities as well as road movements along the axis Itang – Gambela. Thirty-four security incidents (18 in June, 16 in July) were reported by partners, over fifty per cent of which in Gambela town. In addition, there were reports of Nuer intra-clan fighting in Itang Special Woreda, impacting partners’ movements to the refugee camps.” (UNOCHA, 11 September 2019, p. 3)

In July 2019 Borkena mentions that four senior government officials were removed in Gambella regional state, “in what seems to be an effort to resolve the security issue in the region”. The head of the region’s peace and security office, the region’s Police Commission Commissioner as well as Gambella City’s Mayor were removed from their roles. (Borkena, 15 July 2019)

In September 2019 two aid workers were killed in Itang area (also see [section 8.3](#)). According to UNOCHA host communities and refugees bear “the brunt of protracted violence between Anuak and Nuer” (UNOCHA, 6 November 2019, p. 2).

Please also see [section 8.3](#) for information on the situation of refugees in Gambella.

An article published by Ethiopia Observer in its opinion section describes the situation in Gambella after Prime Minister Abiy took office. The article was written by Obang Metho, the executive director of the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE):

- Ethiopia Observer: Political reform in Ethiopia eludes people of Gambella, 13 October 2018 <https://www.ethiopiaobserver.com/2018/10/13/political-reform-in-ethiopia-eludes-people-of-gambella/>

Further detailed information on the Gambella conflict can also be found in the following paper published in 2012:

- Lie, Jon Harald Sande; Borchgrevink, Axel: Layer upon Layer: Understanding the Gambella Conflict Formation; in: International Journal of Ethiopian Studies Vol. 6, No. 1/2, 2012 (login required) [www.jstor.org/stable/41756938](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41756938)

### *7.6.3 Conflict in Afar regional state*

In January 2019 Ezega reports on a blockade by protesters in Afar region which lasted for several days, after “a spate of deadly clashes between Issa Somalis and ethnic Afars, who are the minority groups in the area” which broke out in 2018. The protesters demonstrated “against the violence and government directive ordering local militias to leave the disputed areas and be replaced by the federal troops”. (Ezega, 18 January 2019)

In May 2019 Ezega mentions an attack on a soccer team from Tigray in Gewane area of Afar region. One player was killed and four others injured. The area of the attack is “predominately inhabited by Issa Somalis who are now demanding that they be included in Somali region”. After the attack the Somali regional state cabinet nullified a 2014 agreement “which transferred Endefo, Adayetu and Gedamaytu areas to Afar Region”. (Ezega, 5 May 2019)

UNOCHA also mentions renewed fighting between Afari Special Forces and Issa Somali communities in May 2019, regarding disputed territories in the woredas Gewane, Mille, and Amibara (UNOCHA, 31 May 2019, p. 1).

In June 2019, “the conflict between Afar Special Forces and Issa Somali communities that escalated in May largely abated”. Last clashes occurred on 9 June 2019 in Mille woreda, however in July 2019 “there was inter-communal conflict in areas between Gila Tomoga woreda (Oromia) and Dewe woredas (Afar’s zone 5 - Hari Rasu), causing a number of casualties”. (UNOCHA, 11 September 2019, p. 2)

Unknown armed men killed 16 persons in Afar Regional State at the border to Djibouti in October 2019 (The Reporter Ethiopia, 19 October 2019b; also see Reuters, 14 October 2019, Xinhua, 14 October 2019). Kontie Moussa, Afar People’s Party Chairman, blamed “Somali Region State’s Special Force as well as plain clothes armed men from Djibouti”, while Colonel Tesfaye Ayalew, the Head of the Office of Deputy Chief of Staff at the Ministry of Defence, “denied reports of armed men who crossed from Djibouti” (Addis Standard, 14 October 2019) The Reporter Ethiopia provides the following details:

“It can be recalled that just last week, 16 civilians, who live along the Ethiopian and Djibouti border were massacred by unknown armed men. The civilians were killed in a small village of Obno, Afambo woreda of the Afar Regional State. According to local sources, the killings were committed on Saturday, October 12 around 1 am. The armed men who have committed the crime came via Djibouti and attacked the village. The attackers used small and heavy weapons, including RPG launchers, snipers as well as explosives. Besides the killings, the armed men also took hundreds of cattle’s from the villagers. Moreover, in addition to the deceased which included a four month child, 28 of the villagers have suffered from gun-shot injuries, and explosives. They were taken to Dubti General Hospital and a few were referred to hospitals in Mekele and Addis Ababa. Following the killings, different towns in Afar saw public protests, expressing their anger on the government’s failure to stop the attack before it happened. It can be recalled that there have been similar conflicts in the past few months. In this regard, there was a bloody clash along the border areas of the Somali and Afar regions, claiming the lives of civilians from both sides. The conflicts mainly took place within a disputed small kebeles, namely: Endefo, Adayetu, and Gedamaytu - currently belonging to the Afar Regional State. In addition to other ethnic groups; it is also inhabited by Issa Somalis. Those disputed kebeles were the center of conflicts. Angered by similar killings of civilians in Somali, protests were also held in different towns of the Somali region.” (The Reporter Ethiopia, 19 October 2019b)

#### *7.6.4 Conflict in the city of Harar*

In July 2018 anthropologist Lindsay Bucklin notes on her Instagram profile that groups of Qeerroo are yelling “ciao ciao Adare”, meaning goodbye Harari, in the city of Harar. The Qeerroo are also knocking “on the doors of Harari compounds at night while yelling ‘kinyyaa’ (this is ours) and ‘pack your bags’” (Instagram, 31 July 2018; see also Ethiopia Insight, 2 January 2019).

In January 2019 Ethiopia provides the following overview on political power in Harari region:

“Political power is shared between ODP and the Harari National League (HNL), which has been aligned with Ethiopia’s four-party ruling front. However, the balance in the state is tilted toward ethnic Hararis on the 36-member Harari National Regional State Council, which is formed by two other bodies. The 14-member Harari National Congress in the walled city was given a ‘final say’ on Harari affairs to protect the group’s self-rule rights, says a 2015 history published by the regional culture and tourism bureau. The Assembly is elected by and composed of Hararis only—including, uniquely, voting rights for Harari elsewhere in Ethiopia—selects the regional president, and decides on identity issues such as language, according to *Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia* by academic Sarah Vaughan.” (Ethiopia Insight, 2 January 2019)

The January 2019 article further mentions that “an HNL woreda official corroborated the report that the party had been pushed out from rural areas around six months ago during protests and a chaotic national political transition, but he was also too afraid to provide his name, or that of his district”. The article goes on to elaborate:

“He said initially it appeared OLF was involved as ODP officials were also targeted, but subsequently all positions were filled by ODP. Activists sent video testimonies from Harari

who've suffered violent evictions. 'A group of Qeerroos invaded my house every night between 2am and 5am. They entered my home compound wielding all sorts of weapons like machetes. At the end, they escalated their threats by throwing stones on to our house and we had to leave the house in fear of our lives,' said Alfuleila Abubakri in one clip, alleging that 30 families endured a similar experience.

[...] there is also clear evidence of Oromo political aggression in Harari. For example, a Dec. 5 video shows an Oromo crowd marching through the city. The Harari official said at regional government offices they demanded the removal of officials and replaced the state flag with Oromia's. Photos show Harari region police accompanying the protests with Oromia and OLF flags draped on vehicles. [...]

In another example of the intimidation in the city, an anonymous investor said armed Oromo invaded his shopping and hotel complex on Dec. 19, saying they were taking from the rich. What was his grandfather's former property just outside the city walls was occupied during socialist land reforms in the mid-70s and bought back from the government in 2010, he said. Harari Diaspora organizations have written letters to Abiy's government about the intimidation, but say they have received no meaningful response." (Ethiopia Insight, 2 January 2019)

In an article covering developments in the first year of Abiy's tenure, HRW notes that "in Harar there have been reports of some Oromo youth clearing Hararis from their homes" (HRW, 9 April 2019).

As already mentioned in [section 7.1.2](#) the October 2019 protests in Addis Ababa also spread to the city of Harar. According to VOA "several people were reported to have been killed in Addis Ababa and Harar" (VOA, 23 October 2019). As reported by Addis Standard on 28 October 2019, "a young man was brutally murdered and dumped in a ditch in the first day of the protest" in Harar (Addis Standard, 28 October 2019). According to a November 2019 statement by the Prime Minister, 86 people were killed following violence in Oromia and Harari regional states as well as Dire Dawa city. The victims include 50 Oromo, 20 Amhara, 8 Gamo, 2 Silte, 2 Hadia, 1 Gurage, and 1 Argoba. (FBC, 4 November 2019)

#### *7.6.5 Further ethnic conflicts*

In June 2018 Esat mentions "clashes between the Qebena and Gurage groups" in Wolkite town in Gurage Zone. Three people were killed and more than 100 people injured, while 30 homes and four vehicles were set on fire. (Esat, 14 June 2018)

A February 2019 article by Ethiopia Insight mentions attacks allegedly carried out by the Oromo Liberation Front against Amaro communities. The article further notes:

"'We are like sheep without shepherds.' That is the view of a farmer from Amaro Woreda in Southern Nations region about the lack of government protection from attacks he pins on the Oromo Liberation Front. This is 'why the Guji-based OLF kills and loots us as it wishes,' he adds. The border between West Guji Zone of Oromia and Southern Nations has experienced occasional conflict for decades. Competition for land and water between Guji Oromo and Gedeo, Burji and Amaro communities, who all use the Gelan River, has been at the heart of disputes." (Ethiopia Insight, 28 February 2019)



In May 2019 UNOCHA mentions that “conflict-affected people in Amaro district, Segen Hizboch zone, remain highly vulnerable.” (UNOCHA, 31 May 2019, p. 4).

A memo from Concerned Scholars for Ethiopia (CSE), a group of international and Ethiopian scholars and researchers on Ethiopia, details violence and killings of ethnic Bodi in September 2019 in Hana and Chirim, South Omo Zone. The memo further describes abuse against ethnic Mursi in October 2019. According to the authors of the memo the abuses against the Mursi “apparently take place under the auspices of the Selamago-Hanna district (woreda) administrator, the Jinka Zone administrator, and SNNPR Hawassa commanders. In how far Federal forces are involved is not clear.” (CSE, 2 November 2019)

An October 2019 article by Mail & Guardian also reports on the situation of ethnic Bodi and Mursi in Lower Omo valley:

“For decades, herders in Ethiopia’s Lower Omo Valley have relied on guns to fend off rivals as well as hyenas and lions roaming the forests and plains. But over the past month, security forces have embarked on a campaign of forced disarmament that pastoralist leaders say has been accompanied by shooting of civilians, mass detentions and beatings. [...] The violence is unfolding ahead of elections next year in one of the country’s most volatile and ethnically diverse areas: the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region. Elders from the Bodi community, the main group earmarked for disarmament in the Lower Omo Valley, told AFP nearly 40 people had been killed as of mid-October but the toll could be far higher. Officials deny this account and defend the disarmament campaign as crucial for peace in this sensitive region. [...]

A senior police official in Jinka, who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to discuss disarmament, disputed claims that Bodi people had been killed. ‘The allegations that dozens of Bodi have been killed is false,’ he said. [...]

As of early October, the disarmament of the Bodi was ‘90% finished’, Lore said. He added that the operation could be expanded to include the Mursi, another agro-pastoralist community based in the area. A Mursi leader, who spoke on condition of anonymity for safety reasons, said he was concerned that tactics used against the Bodi would be repeated against his people.”(Mail & Guardian, 17 October 2019)

As mentioned above (see [section 7.1.2](#)), some “Guraghe and Gamo living in Burayu District” were attacked following the return of exiled leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in September 2018 (AI, 17 September 2018). According to a September 2018 Borkena article between 60 and 65 people were killed and more than 100 injured. “Ethnic Gamo who are victims from the massacre from Burayu say that Qeerroo” are responsible. (Borkena, 26 September 2018)

#### *7.6.6 Treatment of Ethiopian nationals of real or perceived Eritrean heritage*

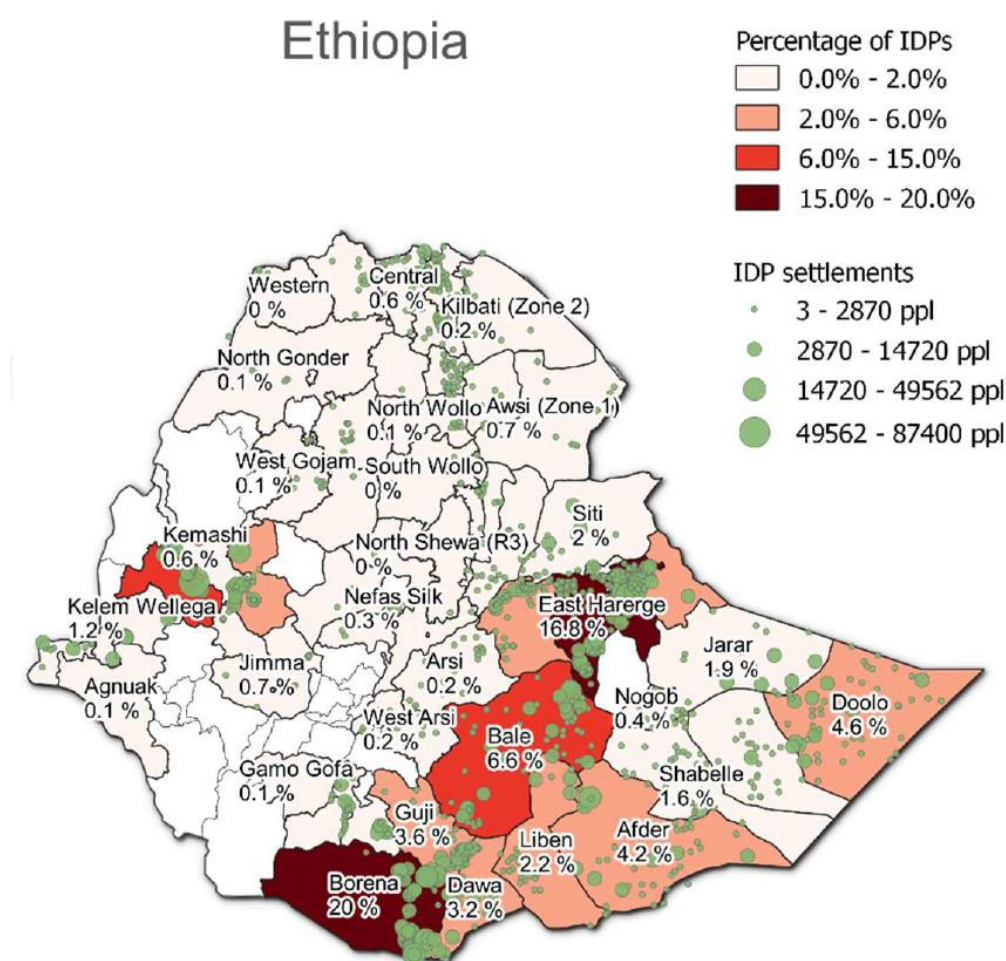
No current information concerning the treatment of Ethiopian nationals of real or perceived Eritrean heritage could be found.

## 8 Internal displacement and refugees

### 8.1 Situation of internally displaced people in Ethiopia

According to IOM's National Displacement Report, a total of 1,642,458 Ethiopians were internally displaced in July 2019 (IOM, 22 October 2019, p. 4; figure includes climate-induced, conflict-induced and other displacement). Numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) have decreased significantly since they had reached a peak in the period from January to April 2019 with more than 3 million Ethiopians internally displaced (IOM, 22 October 2019, p. 5). Already in 2018, numbers of IDPs had increased significantly. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), in 2018 Ethiopia was the country with "the highest number of new displacements related to conflict and violence in the world". In comparison to 2017, the number of displaced people had increased fourfold, as "violence in the country significantly increased and spread to new areas" (IDMC, May 2019, p. 1).

The largest number of IDPs are hosted in the southeastern part of the country by the federal states of Oromia and Somali, with over 828,000 living in Somali state and more than 555,000 in Oromia (IOM, 22 October 2019, pp. 9-10). The IDP caseload in other states is far smaller with approximately 106,000 IDPs in Tigray, around 63,000 in Amhara and approximately 53,000 displaced people in Afar (IOM, 22 October 2019, pp. 6-11).



Source: IOM, May 2019, p. 13

The highest share of displaced persons in Ethiopia are conflict affected IDPs, accounting for approximately 66% of all cases of displacement (IOM, 22 October 2019, p. 2).

The gravest tensions and conflicts in 2018 occurred

- in the Gedeo/West Guji communal conflict in the border region of Oromia and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's (SNNP) state - having caused an estimated 748,000 IDPs by August 2018 (IOM, 22 October 2019)-,
- in the border region of Benishangul-Gumuz state and Oromias East- and West-Wollega zones,
- along the border between Somali state and Oromia (UNOCHA, 13 June 2019; IOM, May 2019, p. 4; IDMC, May 2019, p. 1),
- within Benishangul-Gumuz region violence broke out between Oromos, Amharas and Gumuz (IDMC, May 2019, p. 1)

IDMC briefly summarises the major internal conflicts:

“Inter-communal violence, which broke out in the West Guji zone of Oromia and Gedeo zone in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's region (SNNP) in April [2018] and again in June [2018] triggered the highest levels of displacement. The precise causes for the clashes are still relatively unclear, given the magnitude of the violence, but underlying drivers include ethnic tensions and competition over scarce resources. This conflict left more than one million people displaced in dire conditions, struggling to find space in overcrowded collective centres (e.g. schools, churches, etc.). The latest outbreak of violence and displacement along the border between the Somali and Oromia regions, which began in December 2016, continued and led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in 2018. The Somali regional capital, Jijiga, a previously calm and vibrant city, came under attack in August. The fighting that ensued led to the displacement of 140,000 people in only a few days. Ethnic violence broke out between Oromos, Amharas and Gumuz in the Benishangul-Gumuz region in October 2018, following the killing of three zonal police officers. At least 250,000 new displacements were recorded in only eight weeks.” (IDMC, May 2019, p. 1)

The remaining IDPs, who are not victims of conflict but of natural disasters, have fled, above all, from droughts, but also from floods. Droughts and seasonal floods are responsible for approximately 500,000 IDPs in Ethiopia (IOM, 22 October 2019, p. 2) of which 350,000 reside in Somali state (RI, 12 September 2019, p. 4).

Based on different sources Refugees International and UNOCHA describe Ethiopia's climatic vulnerabilities as follows:

“Eighty percent of the population relies on rain-fed agriculture for its livelihood, and a third of the population is food insecure. [...] The country experiences frequent, sometimes severe droughts, as well as seasonal flooding, which disrupt food production, worsen food insecurity, and lead to displacement. This highly variable climate system and the underlying vulnerability of Ethiopia's population make them vulnerable to natural hazards and the effects of climate change. In 2015–2016, Ethiopia suffered one of its worst droughts in 50 years, caused in part by El Niño climatic changes. The impacts were compounded by below-

average rainfall in 2016 and 2017, which primarily affected the south and southeastern parts of the country. The protracted nature of the droughts, followed by severe flooding in parts of the country in 2018, left many households unable to recover. Millions of people continue to require humanitarian support in the face of high levels of food insecurity, and approximately 508,000 people remain displaced by climate-related causes such as droughts.” (RI, 12 September 2019, p. 6)

“Regions continue to report incidences of flooding which is affecting the lives and livelihood of communities and causing displacement in several woredas. Official request from Afar, Amhara, Oromia and SNNP regions indicate that flood has affected and displaced nearly 30,000 people.” (UNOCHA, 15 September 2019, p. 5)

Concerning climate, 2018 was a year with overall good seasonal rains, and humanitarian needs from direct drought impact decreased. The big increase in numbers of IDPs in 2018 was due to inter-communal violence (UNOCHA, 15 March 2019, p. 1).

For 2019, the East Africa Monitor in a September 2019 article states that “Ethiopia’s attorney general’s office says ethnic violence over the past 12 months has killed at least 1,200 people and displaced a further 1.2 million from their homes” (East Africa Monitor, 29 September 2019).

According to IOM almost 90 percent of IDPs in Ethiopia live in rural areas, of which 76 percent live in camps and 24 percent with host communities. This ratio is different in the urban context, where 46 percent live in camps and 54 percent in host communities. (IOM, May 2019, p. 16)

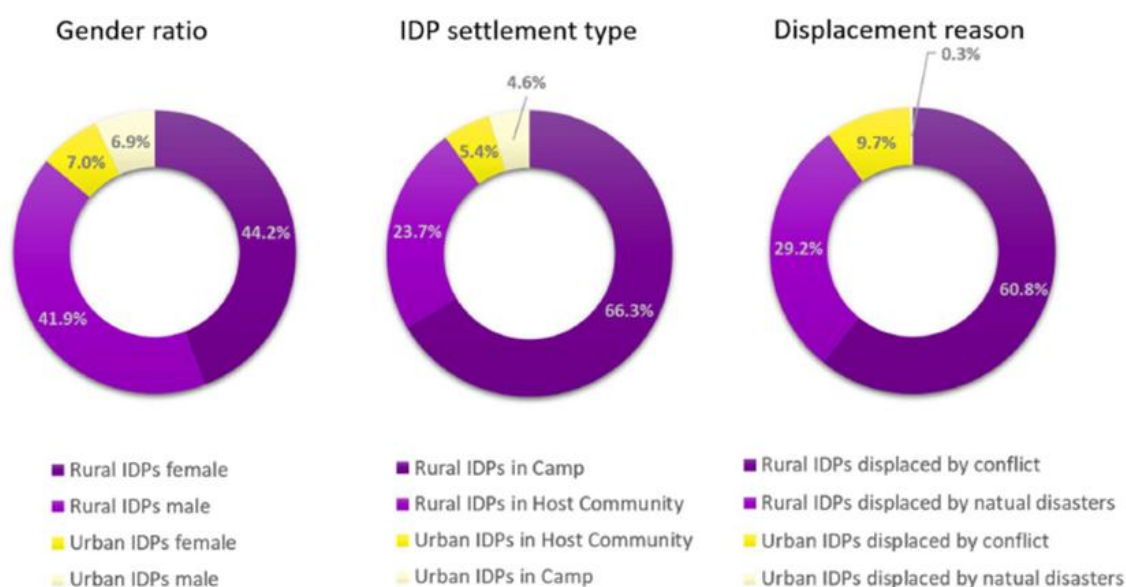


Figure 9. Gender ratio, IDP settlement type and displacement reason in Ethiopia's IDP settlements.

Source: IOM, May 2019, p. 17

In its October 2019 report, IOM describes the situation of accessibility of water and food for 1,163 covered sites across Ethiopia as follows:

“The main water distribution point for most sites (403 sites) was on-site and within a 20-minute walk for a one-way journey. In 338 sites, the main water distribution point was on-site but required more than a 20-minute walk to reach. Significantly, there are 294 sites where IDPs have to walk off-site for more than 20 minutes to reach the main water distribution points. Once at the water distribution point, IDPs queue for an average of 16-30 minutes in 436 sites — this is the most common waiting time. In 234 sites, IDPs have to queue for over an hour and in 192 sites, IDPs queue for 31-60 minutes for water.” (IOM, 22 October 2019, pp. 15-16)

“Out of the 1,163 sites covered, a total of 532 sites (45.7%) have access to food on-site and 488 sites (41.9%) have access to food off-site. However, 143 sites (12.3%) reported having no access to food. As visible through the map, the region in which this is most prominent is Somali with 95 sites having no access to food. [...] The main source for obtaining food is through food assistance, as reported in 694 sites (59.7%). The second main source for obtaining food is via other means in 271 sites (23.3%), while 96 sites (8.3%) resorted to host community donations.” (IOM, 22 October 2019, pp. 16-17)

Concerning access to health care, IOM found that in more than 13 percent of all sites IDPs report to have no access to health facilities, mainly in Somali state, but as well in the state of Oromia. Primary education for displaced children is reported to be available in 83 percent of the 1,163 sites covered by the IOM assessment. The situation of pre-primary and secondary education is much worse with only approximately 20 percent of the sites offering pre-primary education and 25% making secondary education available (IOM, 22 October 2019, p. 19). In view of security, the most commonly reported incidents were gender-based violence against women in 112 sites and frictions between the IDP and the host communities in 82 of 1,163 sites (IOM, 22 October 2019, p. 21).

#### *Situation of IDPs in Somali state*

In November and December 2018, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) visited six IDP sites in Somali states’ Fafan Zone, where 37 IDP sites are located (DRC, 15 August 2019, p. 4). The findings provide an insight to the protection environment and the basic needs of IDPs living in those sites:

“[...] in terms of basic needs and access to services all the sites reported issues in accessing food, with food not being provided on a consistent basis or not delivered at all. When food is distributed, the amount is not sufficient to cover the needs of the entire household. IDPs in the majority of the sites are dependent on the host community for food and shelter or they are highly dependent on humanitarian assistance in the case of Qoloji. Even though the 2 communities share resources, the relationship among them has been reported as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ in the majority of the sites.

[...] Shelters have been prioritized as a need since IDPs either have temporary shelters that don’t protect them from the weather conditions or share shelters among them or with the host community. Some sites reported women being without a shelter that in turn could pose significant protection concerns. With the exception of Qoloji where water has been

provided on site in a safe and accessible area for all, the rest of the sites don't have access to sufficient and clean water. IDPs have to travel a minimum of 3km to access the closest water source [...] and the situation in terms of sanitation, with total lack of sanitation facilities, imposes serious health concerns.

Access to health services is challenging in all sites, except Qoloji [...]. With the exception of Masle IDP site, the local authorities registered the IDPs upon arrival but without providing any documentation.

Across all sites, IDPs have been reporting the almost complete absence of any civil documentation without though to be very clear if they obtained any documents before displacement. The lack of civil documentation though doesn't appear to have implications in regards to freedom of movement or safety with all IDP participants reporting that they can move freely inside or outside the sites. Even though initially IDPs reported feeling safe in site, it appears that lack of light at night as well as the vicinity to the regional borders are affecting the feeling of safety with limited movements during the night.

In regards to GBV, existence of domestic violence and early marriage has been reported in all sites. Even though early marriage is a cultural practice in Somali region, it was further aggravated by displacement and it was reported additionally as a coping mechanism adapted by the communities. Child labor has been reported as a concern in some of the IDP sites while in regards to separated children, traditional practices and more specifically unofficial caring arrangements have been reported as the main protective mechanism for those children. Additionally, there seems to be a reduction in school attendance for children following the displacement. More specifically, for girls, early marriage and household responsibilities seem to be the main reason for not attending school but lack of female teachers as well as the cultural perceptions around access to education for girls present also obstacles in their enrolment and attendance. Lastly, in all sites, women, elderly and single-headed households have been identified as the most vulnerable and in need of assistance." (DRC, 15 August 2019, pp. 22-23)

IOM states that "51-75% of IDP households in 168 sites in Somali are living in shelters that are below standard" (IOM, 11 October 2019, p. 14).

#### *Situation of IDPs of Gedeo/West Guji conflict (SNNPR state and Oromia)*

Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) in an April 2019 press release expresses its concern about the situation of IDPs in southern Ethiopia, especially on "alarming findings about their nutritional status, poor living conditions and limited availability of safe drinking water" (MSF, 17 April 2019).

The New Humanitarian (TNH) writes in a February 2019 article about IDPs in the village of Gotiti, in the Gedeo district of the SNNP region bordering Oromia, where an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 IDPs took refuge. Their shelters are without roofs and sanitations and the Ethiopian government has not formally acknowledged Gotiti's inhabitants as IDPs eligible for humanitarian aid (TNH, 28 February 2019).



UNOCHA describes the situation of those IDPs as follows:

“At least 690,364 people were displaced by the Gedeo/West Guji communal conflict since April 2018, including 374,872 in Gedeo and 315,492 in West Guji. While the large majority of the IDPs have been living with host communities, only 21 per cent have been living in 94 collective centers/camps (92,939 IDPs in Gedeo and 54,078 in West Guji). The living condition of the already vulnerable host communities has deteriorated having shared their limited resources with the IDPs for over a year.” (UNOCHA, 13 June 2019, p. 2)

“As of 22 May, Gedeo zonal government reports indicate that some 320,000 IDPs have returned from Gedeo to West Guji zone, the majority from Gedeb worda, while nearly 20,000 IDPs have returned from West Guji to Gedeo zone.” (UNOCHA, 13 June 2019, p. 2)

About the overall IDP housing situation in Oromia, IOM states that “51-75% of IDP households in 41 sites in Oromia are living in below standard shelters, while IDP households in 185 sites in Oromia live in shelters that meet standards” (IOM, 22 October 2019, p. 14).

#### *Situation of IDPs in Amhara region*

UNOCHA describes the situation of IDPs in Amhara region as follows:

“The majority of the IDPs (70 per cent) are living with host communities, and the rest are living in temporary, sub-standard settlement sites and require shelter and non-food item support. Some wordas are providing medical services to IDPs and there are facilities close to the IDP sites that provide nutrition services, but their capacity is highly limited. The risk of outbreak of communicable diseases is very high given the shortage of safe drinking water reported in most collective sites, the poor personal hygiene and latrine management and open defecation, coupled with poor nutritional status of the population and the sub-standard shelter condition. The overcrowded and poor living conditions also present protection risks, especially for women and girls. IDP children also don’t have access to education in most collective settlement sites. The most pressing needs articulated by IDPs is security and protection, followed by life-saving and livelihood support in the areas of shelter and household items.” (UNOCHA, 13 June 2019, p. 6)

#### *Situation of IDPs in Tigray region*

As in Amhara, UNOCHA found the majority of IDPs in Tigray state living with the host community:

“Although this living arrangement is better than living in camp settings, without adequate and inclusive rehabilitation assistance, it puts a strain on the livelihood of vulnerable community members. At least 27 per cent of the population in the region fall under the poor and very poor category. Overall, the IDPs in Tigray region have not received due attention for assistance. Food assistance to the IDPs has been irregular and only 13 per cent of the IDPs have received essential non-food items support since 2016.” (UNOCHA, 13 June 2019, p. 6)



## 8.2 Government response to IDPs in Ethiopia

Although Ethiopia is a signatory to the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention) since 2009, it has not yet ratified it (African Union, 29 October 2019; Habte/Kweon, October 2018, p. 40). In the national report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in February 2019, the government of Ethiopia stated that “the process for the ratification of the Convention is undergoing currently” (Government of Ethiopia, 25 February 2019, p. 15).

In October 2018, prime minister Abiy Ahmed created a new Ministry of Peace, which among other responsibilities oversees the National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC) and the response to internal displacement (EIP, July 2019, pp. 20-21; Africanews, 17 October 2018). The government of Ethiopia states in its national report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in February 2019:

“To prevent and resolve internal conflicts, a National Reconciliation Commission has been established in December 2018. Ethiopia adopted Disaster Risk Management Policy to reduce risks associated with disasters and to protect those at risk in such circumstances. The Government also works closely with national and international counter parts to prevent internal displacement through early warning mechanisms and to provide care and resettlement for IDPs.

Ethiopia has introduced institutional mechanisms to help meet IDPs’ immediate and longer-term needs for both humanitarian and development assistance. Among these initiatives are an IDP Advisory Group (comprising the UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator, the UN Office for the Coordination of the Humanitarian Affairs, IOM, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Danish Refugee Council), and a national steering committee (under the leadership of the Deputy Prime Minister) to support close to a million individuals displaced following the border conflict in the adjacent areas of the Somali and Oromia Regional States.” (Government of Ethiopia, 25 February 2019, p. 15)

According to a 23 September 2019 analysis of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the National Reconciliation Commission has two principal pillars in its mandate. While the first pillar comprises reconciliation, peace and national cohesion, the second pillar’s objective is the identification of the nature and cause of repeated gross violations of human rights (USIP, 23 September 2019). The Ethiopian House of Peoples Representatives appointed 41 persons as members to the commission on 5 February 2019. They are from different faith groups, intellectuals, former politicians and artists (Borkena, 5 February 2019b).

Concerning the above-mentioned Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Policy of the Ethiopian government, the Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights states that it “did not cover the needs of internally displaced persons. Responses to displacement were ad hoc and insufficient” (HRC, 1 March 2019, p. 9). In their paper published in the Forced Migration Review in October 2018, Behigu Habte and Yun Jin Kweon note that the “DRM objectives are to reduce risks associated with disasters and to protect those at risk

in such circumstances but they do not specifically address either the emergency or the development assistance needs of IDPs” (Habte/Kweon, October 2018).

The members of the national steering committee mentioned by the Ethiopian government in the national report to the UN Human Rights Council (see above) are representatives of seven ministries, namely Education, Agriculture, Finance, Water and Energy, Health, Peace and Defense ministries. Additionally members of the Federal Police and Office of the Attorney General are part of the committee. The committee was established to rehabilitate returnees adequately and fully. (ENA, 29 March 2019)

### *Government’s Strategic Plan to Address Internal Displacement*

According to UNOCHA, the Ministry of Peace introduced a Strategic Plan concerning internal displacement in Ethiopia in early April 2019:

“The Government of Ethiopia, through the Ministry of Peace (MoP) and the National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC) presented a draft Strategic Plan to Address Internal Displacement in Ethiopia and a costed Recovery/Rehabilitation Plan to donors and international agencies on 8 April. The overall objective of the IDP Strategic Plan is to ensure the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return/relocation of conflict-displaced population in seven regions and one administrative city [footnote: Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, SNNP, Benishangul Gumuz, Harari regions and Dire Dawa city administration].

The Plan lays out activities to achieve four broad results including, Result 1 - Restoring law and order and restoration of justice to address crimes committed; Result 2 - Ensuring peace and reconciliation and enable systems to allow for IDPs’ informed decision to pave the way for voluntary and informed return or relocation; Result 3 - Rehabilitation and livelihood support in areas of return or relocation; and Result 4 - Interim multi-sector assistance of affected people in areas of displacement, return or relocation.” (UNOCHA, 16 April, p. 3)

According to UNOCHA, the introduction of the plan was followed by an official announcement of the government on 25 April 2019 to “immediately return over 550,000 IDPs in Gedeo and West Guji zones to their respective areas of origin”. The source notes that according to reports Disaster Risk Management Office (DRMO) in Gedeo, “the return started on 03 May with the deployment of 40 trucks/buses” (UNOCHA, 12 May 2019, p. 1). In other areas of the country, including the states of Oromia, Amhara and Somali, similar measures were taken up by the government (UNOCHA, 12 May 2019, p. 2). In its Humanitarian Response Plan Mid-Year Review from October 2019, UNOCHA states that according to the Ethiopian government, 2.1 million IDPs have so far returned (UNOCHA, October 2019, p. 3). A decrease in numbers of IDPs is also reported by IOM in its Ethiopia National Displacement Report of October 2019:

“According to the data collected in July 2019, 1,642,458 individuals (321,537 households), are internally displaced across 1,163 sites in Ethiopia. This reflects a 26.5% decrease since the May 2019 data collection. This decrease is largely attributed to the government-led return initiative that has been ongoing since April 2019. Amhara region experienced the

most significant decrease in internal displacement with a reduction of 39.2% [...], closely followed by Oromia region, with a decrease of 36.7%. Conversely, Tigray region saw an increase in internal displacement of 10.1% due to conflict.” (IOM, 22 October 2019, p. 4)

## National Displacement Timeline

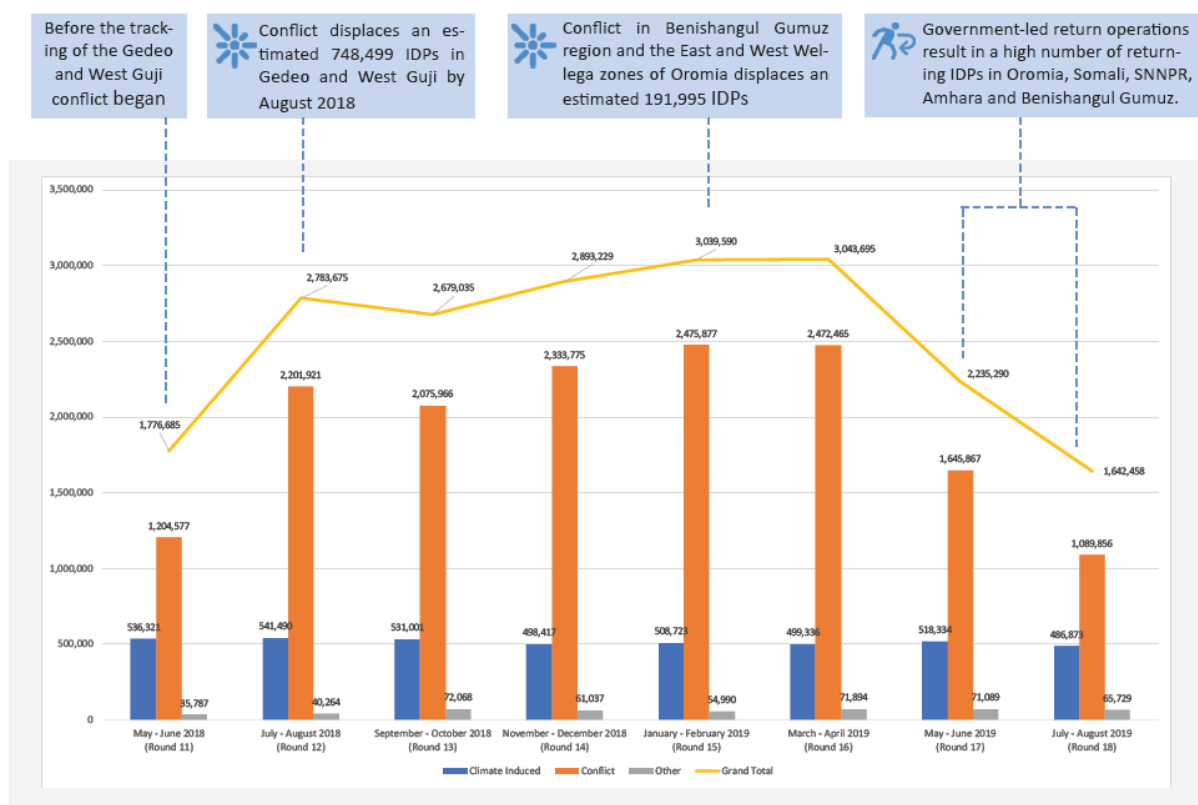


Figure 4: Number of IDPs tracked nationwide by the Displacement Tracking Matrix since May-June 2018 (round 11). Round totals include displacement data captured through previously conducted Rapid Response Assessments (RRA).

Source: IOM, 22 October 2019, p. 5

Several sources report deficits on implementing or applying the Strategic Plan’s objectives of voluntary, safe and sustainable return or relocation (TNH, 28 February 2019; UNOCHA, October 2019; MSF, 15 July 2019; HRW, 9 April 2019). UNOCHA observes in October 2019:

“Overall, humanitarian needs remain high in both areas of displacement and of return. Most assistance in displacement areas is disrupted following the mass Government return operation and the dismantling of sites, while assistance in areas of return remain scant to non-existent, affecting the sustainability of the returns. [...] Secondary displacements of returnees have been reported in most areas of East and West Wollega zones due to lack of assistance and insecurity in areas of return. In other areas of the country where returns have taken place, most IDPs have returned to their damaged homes or to areas nearby. [...] Returns continue amidst reports of minimal to no assistance in areas of return. While the vast majority of the returnees have reportedly gone back to their respective houses or lands and living in makeshift shelters, few IDPs are temporarily sheltered in collective sites in return areas. The Government has been providing limited food and non-food supplies in return areas. [...]

Similar to the Gedeo/West Guji situation, the returnees [to Benishangul Gumuz and to border areas of Oromia's West Wollega zone] are mostly sheltered in sub-standard collective sites in areas of return or integrated with already poor host communities, pending rehabilitation support. Significant multi-sector needs were identified in assessed return areas. [...]

An inter-agency 'go and see' mission in return areas in Dawa zone (Somali region) witnessed the dire situation of some 22,708 displaced households that have returned closer to their areas of origin. Shortage of food has already led to high rates of severe and moderate malnutrition, especially amongst children. The returnees are living in makeshift and overcrowded shelter site and lack basic non-food items." (UNOCHA, 13 June 2019, pp. 1-3)

"Government IDP return operations have been implemented suddenly and massively since early May 2019. By end of May, most IDP sites were dismantled, particularly in East and West Wellega, East and West Hararge, and Gedeo/West Guji zones. Reports indicate that assistance in areas of return remains limited or non-existent, which alongside limited community peacebuilding is affecting the sustainability of the returns.

[...] if the current situation in terms of access and security remains the same, these IDPs are at risk of further displacement due to depletion of resources and the exhaustion of host-family capacities." (UNOCHA, October 2019, p. 22)

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) quote a young woman from Oromia's Guji zone in an article from July 2019 in which she describes her return from Gedeo in SNNP state back to Oromia state as follows:

"This last time, when the government announced the return plan [in May 2019], we decided to join others and go back too,' says Simein. 'The authorities in Guji gave us blankets and plastic sheeting, and we started building a temporary shelter on our land. They promised they would provide more assistance—some essential items and food. We built the shelter and waited for further assistance, but it never arrived.'" (MSF, 15 July 2019)

The article continues telling that the woman and her family were threatened, their shelter destroyed and they eventually had to flee from Oromia again (MSF, 15 July 2019).

With regard to the Strategic Plan's objectives of voluntariness and advance information, UNOCHA reports in October 2019:

"In late April 2019, the Government of Ethiopia, announced that it would start with the returns immediately, even in areas where security conditions were not optimal. During the return plan, protection actors conducted return monitoring in selected locations to assess the extent that humanitarian principles of voluntariness, safety and security were being upheld. Results of the return monitoring indicated that involuntary returns did occur and that IDPs were not fully informed of the return process." (UNOCHA, October 2019, p. 34)

In an April 2019 article, Human Rights Watch (HRW) states that it had been told by Gedeo IDPs and humanitarian actors that IDPs have been pressured to return to unsafe areas, while at the same time humanitarian assistance was shifted from IDP areas to return areas (HRW, 9 April 2019). In a February 2019 article, TNH reports on similar accusations against the government by aid workers, who say “food assistance [in several areas near the border of Oromia and SNNP] has been blocked in order to encourage inhabitants to return to Oromia” (TNH, 28 February 2019).

### 8.3 Situation of refugees in Ethiopia

On 17 January 2019 Ethiopia’s parliament adopted revisions in its existing refugee law. The amendments in the new Refugee Proclamation No. 1110/2019, gazetted on 27 February 2019, aim at improving refugees’ rights in view of, among others, freedom of movement, access to work, education and healthcare. The drafting process was led by ARRA, Ethiopia’s Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs, and included UNHCR (UNHCR, 18 January 2019; see also Proclamation No. 1110/2019).

UNHCR in February 2019 summarizes the new additional provisions as follows:

“Subject to laws applicable to foreign nationals, every recognized refugee or asylum-seeker now has the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose their residence, as well as the freedom to leave the country at any time they wish. [...] UNHCR praises the decision to allow refugees and asylum seekers to engage in wage earning employment although the particular provision refrains from affording the same working rights as Ethiopian nationals. Instead, it defines that refugees will have the right to engage in wage earning employment; and acquire and transfer property and assets, under the same circumstance as the most favourable treatment accorded to foreign nationals. [...]

UNHCR lauds Ethiopia’s bold decision to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are provided with access to national health and education services on the same basis as Ethiopian nationals. [...] The new law also ensures access to telecommunication, banking, financial and judicial services, in addition to identity and travel documentation and driver’s license certification. [...] UNHCR welcomes the move to grant long-staying refugees the right to locally integrate into Ethiopian society, should they choose to do so. [...] The new law did not define any new right applicable to refugees with regard to naturalization.” (UNHCR, February 2019)

According to UNHCR, Ethiopia hosts more than 700,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers as of 30 September 2019 (UNHCR, 30 September 2019). Ethiopia maintains an open door policy towards arriving refugees (UNHCR, February 2019) and recognizes individuals originating from Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Yemen, South and Central Somalia as *prima facie* refugees (UNHCR, 1 February 2019). People of other nationalities undergo individual refugee status determination (UNHCR, 1 February 2019, p. 5; ISS, October 2018, p. 3).

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) notes that “drivers of forced displacement range from conflict in South Sudan to economic deprivation and open-ended military service in Eritrea, in addition to conflict and conflict-induced food insecurity in Somalia” (ISS, October 2018, p. 3).

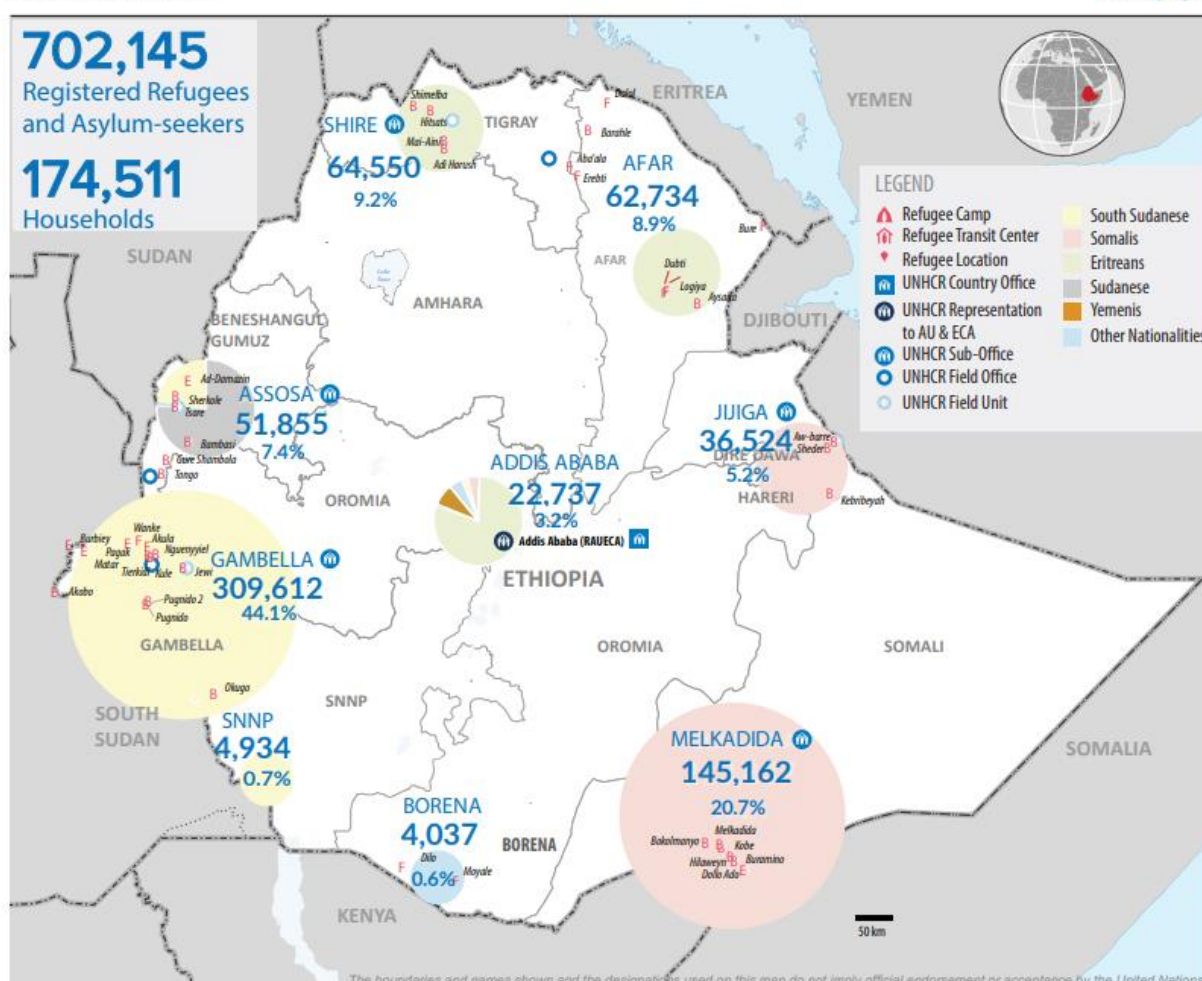
Almost half of all refugees in Ethiopia originate from South Sudan (45%), followed by Somali (26%), Eritreans (21%) and people from Sudan (7%) (UNHCR, 30 September 2019). Refugees in Ethiopia are for the greater part located in the border regions to their countries of origin, living close to or in one of 26 camps (The World Bank, 22 June 2019, p. 8). UNHCR details:

“The majority of refugees in Ethiopia are located in Tigray Regional State and the four Emerging Regions of Ethiopia: Afar Regional State; Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State; Gambella Regional State; and the Somali Regional State. The Emerging Regions are the least developed regions in the country, characterized by harsh weather conditions, poor infrastructure, low administrative capacity, a high level of poverty and poor development indicators.” (UNHCR, 1 February 2019, p. 6)

## ETHIOPIA

### Refugees and Asylum-seekers

As of 30 September 2019



Source: [UNHCR, 30 September 2019](#)

#### Refugees from South Sudan

The largest group of refugees in Ethiopia originates from South Sudan. Those refugees mainly live in West Ethiopia in seven camps in the state of Gambella (UNOCHA, 20 February 2019).



According to UNHCR, “the natural environment in the area is fragile and access to alternative energy for cooking and light is minimal, necessitating refugees to collect firewood” (UNHCR, 1 February 2019, p. 10).

21 percent of new arrivals in the Gambella region are unaccompanied minors or children separated from their parents. Many of them were traumatised by the events leading to their displacement or during their flight (UNHCR, 1 February 2019). About 5,000 refugees are reported to have returned from Gambella to South Sudan, due to violent incidents in the refugee camps:

“Reasons for return included fear of retaliatory action following the recent sub-clan conflicts that started in Kule camp and spread to Tierkidi and Nguenyiel camps in January 2019 and family reunification in South Sudan, with plans to return to the camps in Ethiopia expected. This return comes against a backdrop of 2,015 new arrivals from South Sudan between 1 and 25 January. UNICEF and partners continue to support lifesaving interventions for new arrivals in Gambella.” (UNICEF, 11 March 2019, p. 2)

Based on several sources, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) reports in an October 2018 policy brief that the presence of large numbers of refugees of ethnic Nuer background poses a great challenge to regional inter-ethnic relations:

“[...] the presence of refugees in this region is sensitive, due to multiple layers of tension involving Anuak and Nuer ethnic groups, highlanders and lowlanders, and refugees and host communities. Access to land, environmental degradation, including deforestation and destruction of wildlife, demographic pressure and historical tensions between the ethnic groups, particularly the Anuak and the Nuer, are some of the challenges. Among the Anuak population, there is a ‘siege mentality’, a feeling of being undermined as a minority ethnic group in relation to the Nuer, due to the numerical imbalance between both groups, which many attribute to the inflow of ethnic-Nuer refugees. The refugee population by 2017 had become larger than the local population of Gambella. Acknowledging this challenge, the government and UNHCR in May 2017 began to relocate newly arrived South Sudanese refugees to the neighbouring Benishangul-Gumuz region.” (ISS, October 2018, p. 6)

The Australian media organisation SBS in an April 2019 article reports on insufficient conditions of medical care in the Jewi refugee camp in Gambella:

“The children at the [nutrition] centre [in the Jewi refugee camp] are severely malnourished and if their conditions don’t improve soon, they could die. [...] The UNHCR’s nutrition program has helped bring the rate of malnutrition at the camps down from 33 per cent in 2014, to roughly 13 per cent today. But despite this success, Millicent Lusigi Kavsá - a nutrition officer with UNHCR - says qualified medical staff remain in short supply. [...] At the intensive care centre next door in Jewi, the situation is even more dire. Cramped rooms and limited staff mean the International Medical Corps can only accommodate half a dozen children in intensive care at a time.” (SBS, 7 April 2019)

The article continues citing the medical director of Gambella’s only hospital, who says that due to the influx of South Sudanese refugees to the region, the hospital is not sufficiently equipped



with beds and the demand for doctors is overwhelming. The above mentioned UNHCR nutrition officer Ms Kavsa in the article reports that refugees in camps suffer from a lack of water and don't have access to adequate latrines (SBS, 7 April 2019). In a 5 September 2019 press release, the aid organisation Action Against Hunger announced that two of its employees had been killed in an ambush. The organisation subsequently restricted its full operations in Gambella, maintaining only provision of lifesaving assistance (Action Against Hunger, 5 September 2019).

### *Refugees from Somalia*

Refugees of Somali origin are mainly hosted by Ethiopian Somali state:

“The Somali refugee population is currently supported in two locations in the Somali Region Jijiga (three camps) and Melkadida (five camps). Some of those residing in Jijiga have been based in Ethiopia for over twenty years, while the majority of individuals in Melkadida have been in the Region for eight years. [...] In Melkadida, new arrivals over the previous year showed serious malnutrition rates with the prevalence of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) at 25 percent and 37 percent among newly arrived children and pregnant and lactating women, respectively. However, reduced general food ration below the minimum standard of 2,100 kcal per day provided in the receiving camps threatens to worsen this situation further.” (UNHCR, 1 February 2019, p. 11)

UNHCR states that providing services in the Somali region is more challenging due to the arid environment, poor or no roads and the small and scattered nomadic populations (UNHCR, 1 February 2019, p. 6).

### *Refugees from Eritrea*

In an October 2019 article, TNH reports that many Eritrean refugees live in one of four camps situated at the Eritrean border in Tigray state, but the majority continues from there to cities, some of them hoping for a chance to go to Europe (TNH, 16 October 2019). Until the adoption of provisions in its refugee law in January 2019 (UNHCR, 18 January 2019), Eritreans were the only nationality eligible for Out of Camp scheme and therefore the only nationality allowed to live outside camps (The World Bank, 22 June 2019, p. 8). Therefore, urban refugee population used to be predominantly Eritrean (TNH, 15 November 2018).

With regard to the high number of unaccompanied children, UNHCR states:

“Of particular concern is the high number of unaccompanied and separated children arriving in Ethiopia fleeing impending military conscription, with a disproportionate impact on teenage boys. Children accounted for 44 percent of the total refugee population residing in the Tigray camps, of whom 27 percent arrive unaccompanied or separated from their families. A key challenge in providing protection, assistance and solutions to Eritrean refugees concerns the high number of individuals leaving the camps to pursue onward movements.” (UNHCR, 1 February 2019, p. 8)

## *Refugees from Sudan*

Refugees of Sudanese nationality are for the largest part supported in four refugee camps in Benishangul-Gumuz (UNHCR, 1 February 2019, p. 9). UNHCR further states:

“Upon reception and relocation, as with all population groups, Sudanese refugees are individually registered and provided with core relief items; including sleeping mats, blankets, jerry canes, water buckets and kitchen sets, together with the regular distribution of hygiene and sanitary items. Feedback received from a return intention survey highlighted that a large majority of the Sudanese refugee population expressed a desire to return home in the near future, while citing risks related to the lack of access to food, employment and education opportunity; particularly for girls.” (UNHCR, 1 February 2019, p. 9)

## *Situation of refugee children*

According to the UNHCR Ethiopia Country Refugee Response Plan, at the beginning of 2019 more than half (57 %) of all refugees in Ethiopia were children,

“[...] while 54,715 refugee children were unaccompanied or separated (UASC). In northern Ethiopia close to 27 percent of all children are separated from their primary caregivers. The onward movement of UASCs originating from Eritrea to urban centres and third countries is substantial with up to 60 percent estimated to leave camps within a given year, exposing children to risks of smuggling, trafficking and SGBV [sexual and gender-based violence].” (UNHCR, 1 February 2019, p. 20)

In the Human Rights Council’s March 2019 Compilation on Ethiopia, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its concern about “the lack of security and protection of refugee, asylum-seeking and internally displaced children from violence, exploitation and abuse within and outside refugee camps”. The committee was also “seriously concerned about reports of disappearances of refugee and asylum-seeking children from refugee camps, and about the living conditions in those camps” and raised concerns that “children of refugees were not registered at birth” (HRC, 1 March 2019, p. 9).

In an April 2019 article SBS reports on the risks the great numbers of unaccompanied children face in Ethiopia’s refugee camps. When going to the forest to collect fire wood, necessary to keep warm and cook food, girls are in constant fear of being raped:

“‘Going to the forest poses a lot of problems,’ she [a 16 year old unaccompanied refugee girl from South Sudan] tells SBS News in her native Nuer language. ‘You may find strangers in the forest, or wild animals, who run up to you. Some of us will come home wounded. Yes, some of us are raped.’” (SBS, 2 April 2019)

In June 2019 The World Bank published a study on the education of refugee children in Ethiopia, which was conducted in three areas, namely Gambella region, Somali region and Addis Ababa. Based on data from the Ministry of Education the report states that “refugee children are less than half as likely to complete primary school than their Ethiopian peers” (The World Bank,

22 June 2019, p. 14). The study investigated the causes why refugee students were missing school, with the most common reasons being undertaking chores or helping parents around the home, families struggling to afford school supplies and children's wage earning activities (The World Bank, 22 June 2019, p. 54-55). Asked about reasons for children failing to enrol in school or their dropping out, the most common answers were that the family could not afford it, children were earning wages and children were unaccompanied (The World Bank, 22 June 2019, p. 56).

#### **8.4 Treatment of failed asylum seekers upon return**

No current information concerning treatment of failed asylum seekers upon return could be found.

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