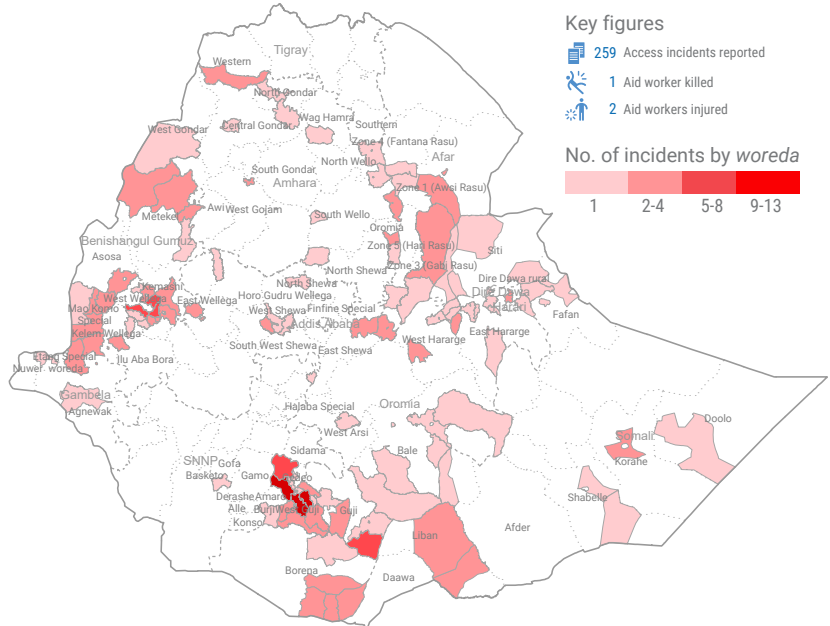


This report is produced by OCHA Ethiopia in collaboration with humanitarian partners. It covers the period October - December 2019. The next report will be issued on March 2020.

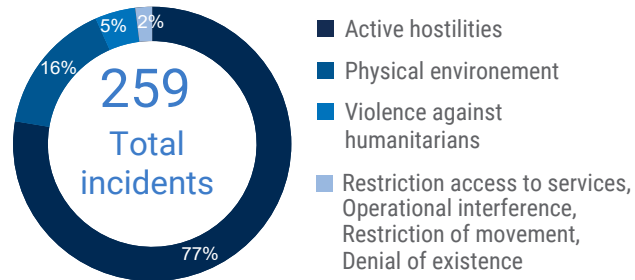
OVERVIEW

- The operational environment to relief operations in Ethiopia remained permissive through the reporting period.
- Localized armed confrontations, ethnic violence, intra-community/ clan tensions, and social unrest continued to challenge operations and the safety of the population and aid workers.
- Most access incidents reported relate to active hostilities with the Unidentified Armed Groups (UAG) as well as between ethnic groups, the bulk of which in West and Southern Oromia.
- Armed clashes and social unrest continue to pose an indirect threat to aid workers. During the reporting period, one aid worker was killed and two injured and six temporarily arrested while carrying relief activities.
- In Gambela, the circumstances behind the killing of two aid workers in September remain unclear, and partners continue to work under very difficult conditions and uncertainty.
- In Amhara, ethnic tensions involving ethnic-Qemant as well as with neighboring communities of Benishangul Gumuz and Tigray, and particularly Amhara- Oromo inter communal conflict (mainly in Dire Dawa and Hararge) escalated during the reporting period.
- In Somali region, the access situation has improved, particularly in the boundary dispute in southern Oromia – Somali, though tensions along boundary areas and resource-based clan conflicts continue.
- In some areas, such as Awi zone (Amhara) or Gedeo zone (SNNPR), authorities continue to deny the presence of IDPs, limiting their fundamental right to access humanitarian assistance. Partners continue to engage to find pragmatic ways to assist the affected population “regardless of status” as per the humanitarian imperative of leaving no one behind and the principles of operational independence, neutrality, and impartiality.

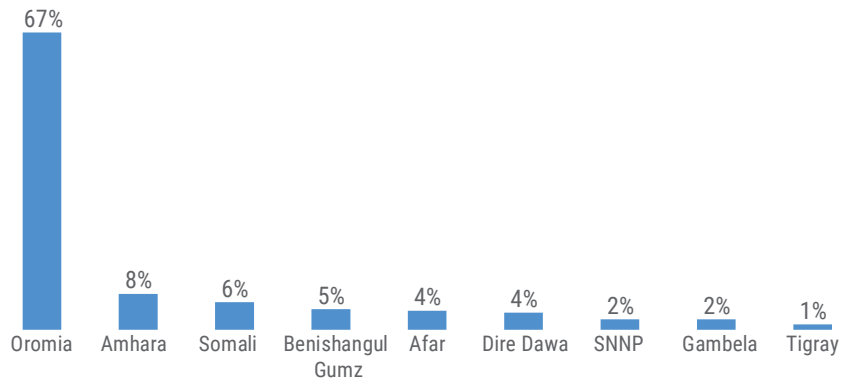


Source: Access Incidents database
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

REPORTED ACCESS INCIDENTS BY TYPE



REPORTED ACCESS INCIDENTS BY REGION



SITUATION OVERVIEW

Afar region (Zone 3 – Gabi Rasu) – Somali region (Sitti zone)



Tensions involving Afar and Issa (Somali) continue along boundary areas between Afar zone 1 and 3 and Sitti zone. Other inter-communal conflicts are concomitant, i.e. Afar and Ittu in Amibara Woreda, Afar and Karayu in Awash Fentale woreda, Afar and Oromo in Oromia special zone and along the boundary areas with Amhara region. Overall, some 55,000 people are displaced in Afar due to conflict, drought and floods. The lack of humanitarian actors and limited attention and resources allocated by regional authorities to IDPs, are aggravating the situation of IDPs and other vulnerable groups.

The conflict between Afar and Issa is historical, and the situation in the three contested kebeles of Gedmayitu, Amibara Woreda, Undofo, Gewane Woreda, and Adeyitu, Mille Woreda, remains very volatile. Under the 2014 agreement of Afar and Somali administrations, these kebeles are administered by Afar region despite being populated by Issa. Partners in Afar do not feel safe to operate beyond the 'Awash highway' that unites Addis Ababa – Djibouti, and have de facto not been able to access the three kebeles for months. The large presence of EDF along the highway, which has become a sort of unofficial border demarcation, prevents any escalation of violence. In a separate incident, in October, gunmen attacked pastoralists in Afambo district, Awsi zone, killing 17 people including women and children, sparking outrage in the region.

In 2019, the seasonal overflow of Awash river and flash floods have displaced thousands and limited partners' access to large areas. Government relocated people to safe areas, some areas adjacent to the Awash dam remain inaccessible since April. A recent mission to Mille woreda, Zone 3, identified 350 households displaced in April by the flooding caused by the release of water from the Awash dam, who were in a dire situation. Lack of road infrastructure throughout the region hinders partners' movements.

In Sitti zone, a recent security assessment in Gablalau district, which shares a long border with Afar and Djibouti, underscored the fragility of the situation. In November, an armed confrontation involving regional police forces from Afar and Somali in a place called Qala'tu, caused a number of casualties. The zone does not have road infrastructure and services such as electricity or water.

Amhara region



In October, violence between Amhara and Qemant spiked in Gondar city and surroundings, causing casualties, and displacing 19,000 persons. Previously, violence had mostly taken place in rural areas in Chilga woreda (Qemant stronghold). The regional government managed to return IDPs from Gonder Zuria rapidly with military escorts, as IDPs were keen to harvest their crops, women and children remained behind due to security concerns. Some 6,000 IDPs resided temporarily in a congested site called 'Arbaba' in the outskirts of Gondar, with limited assistance, before being returned to places of origin. The conflict impacted partners' programmes, forcing those operating in North and Central Gonder zones to relocate staff and halt operations such as emergency education activities. In a separate incident, near Gondar town, unidentified armed men fired at an ambulance injuring two health workers.

Low level inter-communal conflict between Amhara, Oromo and Afar was reported in Oromia special zone North Wollo and North Shewa zones. By the end of October, a command-post was established, while security forces deployed largely in return areas. In November, reportedly reconciliation efforts with Qemant leaders prompted an improvement of the situation. Security-related restrictions for UN Agencies remain in the 'Gondar to Metema' road.

Amhara (Awi zone) – Benishangul Gumuz region (Metekel zone)



In April, violence between Gumuz and Amhara spread through following a private incident, claiming many lives, and displacing thousands within Metekel and to/ from Awi. Hundreds of houses were burned and large farm lands abandoned, leading to concerns over 2019 food production in the region. IDPs on both sides cite safety and security concerns as the main reason for not returning to areas of origin. Partners have flagged the lack of peace and reconciliation engagement by the respective administrations, which are nonetheless collaborating to return IDPs across the regional border.

Meanwhile, sporadic violence and killings along the border continue. In Metekel, nearly 11,000 people remain displaced in public buildings, host communities, and fourteen spontaneous sites with very limited assistance and services. From June to October, physical access to some sites was cut by the rains and the poor state of roads or lack thereof. In October, an

assessment mission identified critical needs in various sites, including one in Guba woreda, bordering Sudan and Amhara, hosting 2,300 IDPs located in a hard-to-reach area, with severe acute malnutrition rates beyond emergency thresholds. At the time of writing, joint efforts by partners and authorities have yield positive results, and quick works have re-opened roads to IDP sites. In Awi, an estimated 17,000 people remain displaced with no access to aid. In September, the regional government dismantled previous IDP sites and stopped assistance to IDPs, including food, in an attempt to trigger their return to Metekel. IDPs dispersed across host communities. At the time of writing, the regional government does not recognize the existence of IDPs in Awi, hampering their access to aid.

Amhara – Tigray regions (boundary areas)



A territorial dispute over Wolkait and Raya districts in the border between the two regions has simmered for long-time, particularly along the Wolkait - Tsegede corridor and in the border to Tselemeti. Over the last months, a number of security incidents were reported, including a clash between Tigray Special Forces and an UAG that caused casualties. The situation has prompted an increased militarization on both sides, and new check points have been set up in the Mekelle - Humera road. The situation has not impacted relief operations given the limited number of IDPs, however, it has the potential to affect the refugee response in 'Mai-Aini' and 'Adi-Harush' camps in Tselemti woreda. Further, instability has impacted significantly the movement of goods and provision of services. On the other hand, seasonal rains have hampered physical access to some areas in eastern and central zones of Tigray region.

Gambela region



On 5 September, unidentified gunmen attacked a clearly marked NGO vehicle on its way from Gambela town to refugee camps, killing two aid workers. Humanitarian partners suspended all movements and operations. Circumstances behind the attack remain unclear. The operation resumed with the protection of armed (police) escorts as an exceptional measure. Some security measures have been put in place such as area patrolling or one static security post in the main road to the camps, however, many partners remain worried about the security situation and the possibility of another attack. Overall, the number of security incidents in Gambela town - and throughout the region - has reduced in the reporting period. However, the need to address historical grievances perceived by ethnic Agnuak in regards to the seamless influx of ethnic-Nuer refugees from South Sudan, and the amount of aid and resources allocated to host communities' vis-à-vis refugees remains pending.

Central & Eastern Oromia (Hararges) - Dire Dawa



At the end of October, generalized protests by Oromo youth groups followed the alleged attempt to remove the security escort to a well-known Oromo activist, caused considerable disruption across the region, including in Addis Ababa. In some areas, the protest acquired ethnic and religious dimensions, with the ensuing violence leaving dozens killed. In November, some students were killed in ethnic-motivated violence in Universities in Amhara, Dire Dawa and Oromia, triggering large-scale demonstrations and road blocks. Properties were damaged and religious institutions set on fire. In the Hararges and Bale zones, the conflict spilled into confrontations between Oromo and Amhara groups. Security forces deployed to bring the situation under control. The situation had a direct impact on operations, impending access to IDP sites, stopping operations, and forcing eight partners with stranded staff on the ground to hibernate for few days. The movement of aid supplies was affected by road blockages, particularly in the 'Awash – Harar' highway and roads leading to Woreda centers.

The multi-cultural town of Dire Dawa was particularly affected by the violence. In one incident, a humanitarian vehicle was attacked by a mob causing injuries to aid workers. By early December, clashes resumed again in several parts of the city, leaving again a number of casualties. Meanwhile, the situation of IDPs in the 'Millennium park' site remains critical. Federal authorities set deadlines to close the site and regular food distributions were discontinued in May. These measures have compromised IDP rights - as per internal displacement principles - and their access to assistance, and triggered desperate departures. At the time of writing, an estimated 2983 IDPs remain at the site at risk of forced eviction.

Southern Oromia (West Guji) – SNNPR (Gedeo)



In Gedeo, an estimated 40,000 IDPs remain cut off from assistance and 'invisible' to partners, as authorities refuse to acknowledge the existence of IDPs in the zone following the massive IDP return operation of June. In October, 4,000 IDPs were identified in one collective site 'Kalehiwot church' in Chiriku Kebele, the majority displaced from areas bordering West Guji. Reportedly, authorities dismantled the site in order to trigger their return, however, by mid-November, an agreement

was reached allowing those holding land certificates as well as from insecure areas to remain.

In West Guji, in November, authorities announced end of the emergency response, and requested partners to support recovery needs. Some 575,000 IDP returnees, IDPs and flood-affected communities have been identified in the latest needs-based joint targeting exercise. While the exact number of IDPs who chose not to return to Gedeo remains unknown, the fact that these have been considered within the joint targeting exercise is a positive step. Tensions between communities have noticeably scaled-down, thanks to government reconciliation efforts. In November, authorities lifted the restriction on the use of motorbikes. Armed confrontations with UAGs continue, impacting operations, and blocking access intermittently to few kebeles in Abaya, Bule Hora, Gelana, and Kercha woredas. In October, 145 households were displaced by clashes in Ledo Kebele, Abaya Woreda. A protection monitoring report underscored that many houses of IDP returnees destroyed in 2018's violence have not yet been reconstructed and many returnees remain in substandard temporary shelters, or with relatives. Lastly, partners reported difficulties in accessing areas as a result of rains and poor state of roads.

Southern Oromia (Guji, Borena zones)



The operation by security forces against UAGs increased geographically and in intensity. In Guji, fighting expanded beyond Gumi Eldelo and Liben to Aga wayu, Goro Dola, Seba Boru and Wadera woredas. There are increasing reports of damage to productive and private assets, civilian casualties (including deaths) and subsequent loss of livelihoods. In Guji, 55,000 persons were displaced since October bringing the total number of IDPs displaced since June 2019 to 88,000 and 120,000 since 2017. IDPs reside in collective sites (schools, health posts or churches) and with host communities. Since the beginning of 2019, partners have struggled to assist IDPs in rural areas of Goro Dola, Gumi Eldelo and Liben. Further, access by the affected population to assistance is hampered by limited government and humanitarian capacity with only four international NGOs present.

In Borena, since 2018, territorial claims by Ethnic-Borena and Garri (Somali) plus the long-standing unaddressed border demarcation conflict, and clashes with UAGs continue to impede operations in Guchi and Wachile woredas, outside urban areas of Arero and Dhas, and boundary areas with Guji zone. In Moyale, the situation is reportedly calm, and most of the 200,000 displaced one year ago have now returned, though very limited assistance has been provided. Both Guji and Borena zones remain under EDF command-post, while Guchi and Wachile remain off-limits for UN Agencies due to security concerns.

Western Oromia (Wellega) – BGR (Kamashi zone)



The situation in West Wellega remains highly volatile, limiting relief operations to a large degree. Since November, partners reported 51 access incidents, 38 of which in West Wellega, the majority related to active hostilities. From mid-October to late December, fighting impeded partners' access and operations, including into Kamashi. In one incident, in October, unidentified armed men shot at humanitarian vehicle (lacked proper visibility), staff were temporarily detained but no casualties were reported. In December, an aid worker was killed by UAG in Nedjo woreda, while in another incident some aid workers were temporarily detained by an UAG. Meanwhile, authorities continue to deny the existence of IDPs, including those secondarily displaced from Kamashi, estimated at 14,000 in West and 6,000 in East Wellega, limiting their access to aid. At the time of writing, partners and authorities are working to assess the situation of the most vulnerable. Lastly, as part of the general unrest in Oromia, a number of demonstrations and road blockages affected the Addis – Ambo – Nekemte road, generally for short periods of time.

In Kamashi, in October, violence broke out following the killing by unidentified armed elements of a senior Gumuz police officer in Boji Birmaji woreda West Wellega. Violence targeting returnees' properties were reported in Diza (Koncha) town of Sedal Woreda, forcing partners to suspend operations and teams on the ground to hibernate. Protection monitoring reports indicate cases of discrimination in access to assistance by returnees as well as gaps in the provision of basic services such as Health and WASH.

Sidama (SNNPR)



In November, a peaceful referendum was organized by the Federal Government for Sidama regional statehood. The referendum went on without security incidents, amidst heavy security presence (zone is under command post since July). A draft contingency plan was prepared by partners to mitigate potential violence and forced displacement, not least to avoid any disruption of operations in Geddo – West Guji. On 4 December, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) announced the official results, with an overwhelming majority in favor of statehood. The immediate outcome of this process has been the spread of similar political demands, including 10 other zones within SNNPR. In Wolayta zone, December marked the one-year period since its Council unanimously voted for regional statehood and requested a referendum (as stipulated by the Constitution). Security forces deployed to avoid any disruption to law and order, and did not allow a planned grand rally.

Somali region



The Somali region remained relatively calm with few reports of inter-communal violence. In one incident, the Reer Abdille and Makahil clans clashed in the vicinity of Smody village, 30km along with main road connecting Kabridahar and Kudunbor in Korahe zone, reportedly over disagreements to access water and grazing, causing a number of casualties. In another incident in the end of November, fighting erupted over disputed ownership of a village between Jirael and Fray clans in Dhibay Village, 60 km from Boklomayo, Liben zone. Low level inter/ intra-clan conflicts were also reported from Korahe, Doolo, Liben and Fafan zones mainly related to territorial disputes, without impacting partners' access to the affected population.

During the reporting period, vast areas in Afder, Shebelle and Liben zones were flooded causing damage to road networks and bridges. As a result, delivery of essential humanitarian supplies to IDPs and refugees stalled for a few weeks. In Southern Somali region, in December, partners reported a number of cases of arrests, threats and intimidation of their 'non ethnic-Somali' staff. The humanitarian community is following up with regional authorities to ensure the safety of aid workers as well as to ensure partners' operational independence in the region is respected.