

Ethiopia – Tigray Conflict

FEBRUARY 18, 2021

SITUATION AT A GLANCE

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| 6 MILLION | 950,000 | 2.3 MILLION | 4 MILLION | 61,347 |
| Estimated Population of Tigray | Number of People in Tigray Requiring Assistance Prior to the Conflict | Number of People Targeted Through the Northern Ethiopia HRP | Estimated Number of People in Urgent Need of Food Assistance | Number of Ethiopian Refugees Arriving in Eastern Sudan Since November |
| GoE – 2017 | UN – November 2020 | UN – December 2020 | Food Security Cluster – January 2021 | UNHCR – February 2021 |

- The conflict in northern Ethiopia’s Tigray Region continues to generate large-scale humanitarian needs and result in civilian deaths, population displacement, and protection violations. Relief actors remain unable to access areas not controlled by the GoE.
- Food insecurity will likely worsen in conflict-affected areas of central and eastern Tigray in the coming months without sustained humanitarian assistance, according to FEWS NET.
- Through the USAID/BHA-supported CRS-led JEOP, REST had reached more than 373,000 people with emergency food assistance in central and southeastern Tigray as of February 12.



| | | |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| TOTAL U.S. GOVERNMENT HUMANITARIAN FUNDING For Ethiopia, including to Tigray, in FY 2020 | USAID/BHA ^{1,2} | \$522,232,575 |
| | State/PRM ³ | \$129,904,93 ⁴ |
| | Total | \$652,137,509⁵ |

¹ USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA)
² USAID/BHA FY 2020 funding includes emergency food assistance from the former Office of Food for Peace and non-food humanitarian assistance from the former Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance.
³ U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (State/PRM).
⁴ State/PRM funding in Ethiopia includes assistance to Somali and South Sudanese refugees who are sheltering in Ethiopia, which is also included in the regional U.S. Government (USG) response totals for Somalia and South Sudan.
⁵ A breakdown of the total USG contributions to Ethiopia—which includes funding for the Horn of Africa desert locust infestations and coronavirus disease (COVID-19) responses—is reflected on USG Ethiopia Complex Emergency Fact Sheets. For additional information regarding the Ethiopia desert locust response, please refer to the USAID/BHA East Africa Desert Locust Crisis Fact Sheet.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Widespread Humanitarian Needs Persist Due to Tigray Conflict

More than three months after conflict erupted in Tigray, clashes between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), and other armed group elements continue to generate and exacerbate humanitarian needs in the region and neighboring areas, according to the UN. Large portions of the region's population, primarily those in rural areas, remain cut off from assistance due to Government of Ethiopia (GoE)-imposed access restrictions and insecurity.

While access constraints and persistent disruptions in internet connectivity and telecommunications have limited the ability of relief actors to assess and verify the full extent of humanitarian conditions in Tigray, the conflict has resulted in civilian deaths as well as instances of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and other protection violations, according to the UN and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. Relief actors expect that the number of SGBV cases occurring since November is likely much higher than the relatively low figures documented at health facilities due to the limited availability of health and legal services, as well as the stigma surrounding reporting.

Humanitarian Access in Tigray Remains Limited to Major Cities and Towns

Due to restrictions and ongoing insecurity, humanitarian access in Tigray remains limited to major cities and towns located along main roads, primarily those connecting population centers such as Tigray's regional capital of Mekele and Adigrat, Alamata, and Shire cities, according to the UN. Relief actors remain unable to access areas not controlled by the GoE, up to 40 percent of the region. Meanwhile, rural areas in Tigray remain inaccessible due to uncertain security conditions and mountainous terrain, which presents unique logistical challenges for relief agencies. In addition, the continued GoE-imposed suspension of telecommunications services in many areas, as well as protracted bank closures outside of Mekele and Alamata and daily cash withdrawal limits in banks that are operational, are further hampering staff movements by limiting humanitarian coordination and relief actors' ability to pay for critical logistics support and supplies.

The current scale and scope of response activities remains inadequate to meet projected needs, even in partially accessible areas, while access to rural areas and areas outside of GoE control is urgently required to prevent humanitarian conditions from deteriorating further, according to the UN. While the pace of GoE access approval processes has increased in recent weeks, humanitarian actors continue to call for unimpeded access for both humanitarian supplies and personnel to all areas of Tigray.

Refugees Flee Severely Damaged Hitsats and Shimelba Camps

On February 10, the GoE announced the official closure of Tigray's Hitsats and Shimelba refugee camps, according to international media. Recent satellite imagery indicates that the conflict has resulted in widespread destruction at Hitsats and Shimelba, located in the region's North Western Zone, with humanitarian facilities targeted during fighting in and around the camps, according to the UN and international media. Eritrean refugees who had resided in the camps prior to the conflict continue to flee to other locations across Tigray, with an estimated 10,000 refugees arriving in Shire and an estimated 5,500 refugees arriving to the North Western's Adi Harush and Mai Aini refugee camps by early February. However, the whereabouts of approximately 20,000 refugees remain unknown, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Humanitarian actors continue to advocate for the restoration of services to refugees amid reports of protections violations and shortages of food and other supplies.

Food Insecurity to Worsen in Conflict-Affected Areas in the Coming Months

The conflict in Tigray is likely to continue restricting populations' access to agricultural fields and markets, as well as other economic and income-generating activities, through at least May, according to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). Satellite imagery indicates that at least 7 percent of cropland was burned throughout the region, with violence further disrupting the October-to-January *meher* harvests. As such, many households in the region have already depleted food stocks, or are expected to exhaust them within the next two months. Household food access is further restricted by conflict-related distribution delays of the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), a GoE social protection program targeting food-insecure households. FEWS NET expects Emergency—IPC 4—levels of acute food insecurity marked by high rates of acute malnutrition and mortality from food consumption gaps to emerge across extensive areas of central and eastern Tigray in the coming months as a result of constraints on humanitarian access and income-generating activities, as well as limited household food access and depleted food stocks, demonstrating the need for increased and sustained humanitarian assistance.⁶

In some parts of central, eastern, and northwestern Tigray where conflict has subsided, populations will continue to face Crisis—IPC 3—levels of acute food insecurity in the coming months. Although FEWS NET expects populations to begin engaging in income-generating activities as security conditions improve, overall economic activity in these areas will likely remain low. In southern Tigray, *meher* harvests were more robust compared to other parts of the region, resulting in more stable food security conditions and enabling households to maintain food stocks through May. In addition, as some trade is ongoing with neighboring areas, populations can access food in local markets.

More Than 61,000 People Flee Into Sudan as Al Fashaga Dispute Escalates

The conflict in Tigray had prompted more than 61,000 people to seek shelter in eastern Sudan's Blue Nile, Gedaref, and Kassala states as of February 10, according to UNHCR. Humanitarian actors and the Government of Sudan (GoS) continue to respond to the needs of newly-arrived refugees. However, recent escalations in a dispute between the GoE and GoS over the al Fashaga territory—located near Tigray and Amhara regions—have resulted in increased militarization along the Ethiopia–Sudan border, the UN reports; the dispute has not impacted humanitarian operations in Ethiopia to date, though it could potentially impact the movement of people seeking refuge in Sudan.

High-Level UN Leaders Visit Ethiopia, Advocating Increased Access

In recent weeks, visits by UN leaders to Ethiopia have highlighted the need to restore humanitarian access to Tigray and increase efforts to ensure the protection of vulnerable populations such as refugees. During a January 28 to February 1 trip to Ethiopia, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi met with GoE officials, including Prime Minister of Ethiopia Abiy Ahmed, and visited Mai Aini refugee camp. High Commissioner Grandi called for commitments for the protection of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, as well as the restoration of basic services in Tigray and increased humanitarian access to ensure the delivery of life-saving assistance. In addition, UN World Food Program (WFP) Executive Director David Beasley traveled to Ethiopia from February 4 to 6 to meet with GoE officials, including Prime Minister Abiy, to advocate that the GoE provide unhindered humanitarian access to all areas of Tigray and ease other bureaucratic impediments hindering relief operations, such as visa limitations and restrictions on importing emergency communications equipment. Executive Director Beasley also participated in a mission to Mekele with UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Catherine Sozi and the GoE Minister of Peace.

⁶ The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a multi-partner initiative that developed a standardized scale to classify the severity and magnitude of food insecurity. The IPC scale, which is comparable across countries and time, ranges from Minimal—IPC 1—to Famine—IPC 5—for acute food insecurity.

KEY FIGURES



2.5 Million

People in Tigray targeted to receive USG emergency food assistance via the JEOP



373,000

People in Tigray reached with USG emergency food assistance via the JEOP to date

U.S. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

FOOD SECURITY

In response to acute food needs across Tigray, USAID/BHA is supporting the Catholic Relief Services (CRS)-led Joint Emergency Operations Program (JEOP), as well as WFP and other non-governmental organizations, to provide emergency food assistance—including commodities such as U.S.-sourced cereals, pulses, and vegetable oil—to vulnerable people in the region. Through JEOP, the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) had reached more than 373,000 people with emergency two-month food rations in Mekele and Adigrat, Shire, and Wukro towns, as well as other *woredas*—or districts—in central and southeastern Tigray, as of February 12. CRS has also dispatched emergency food commodities sufficient to support approximately 607,000 people for two months to distribution sites in 10 *woredas* across the region. The total JEOP caseload for Tigray includes 2.5 million people, including 1 million PSNP recipients, and CRS and REST continue to dispatch and distribute assistance as security conditions allow.

HEALTH

USAID/BHA and State/PRM partners are conducting humanitarian health programs in Tigray as access and security conditions allow. State/PRM partner the International Committee of the Red Cross has distributed essential medicines and other medical supplies to conflict-affected individuals in Mekele, as well as to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and health facilities elsewhere in Tigray and in neighboring areas of Amhara. State/PRM also supports UNHCR to provide health assistance to refugees in Tigray.

NUTRITION

In response to nutrition needs in Tigray, USAID/BHA partner the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is distributing nutrition commodities—including high energy biscuits and ready-to-use therapeutic foods—to conflict-affected populations.

PROTECTION

In response to protection needs resulting from the conflict in Tigray, USAID/BHA supports the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and UNICEF, which conduct programs as humanitarian access restrictions and security conditions permit. For example, IRC is working to reunite children separated from their families in the wake of the conflict, as well as providing SGBV case management services in Shire, where legal structures to address cases are nonfunctional. In addition, State/PRM supports UNHCR to provide protection and other multi-sector assistance to refugees.

SHELTER AND SETTLEMENTS

USAID/BHA supports the provision of shelter and settlements assistance to conflict-affected populations in Tigray—as well as Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz regions—through the International Organization for Migration Rapid

Response Fund (RRF), as well as the Ethiopian Red Cross Society. In western Tigray's Humera town, CRS is distributing relief commodity kits to IDPs sheltering in host community through the RRF. State/PRM supports UNHCR to provide shelter assistance to refugees in Tigray.



140,000

People in Tigray reached with water trucking services by CRS through the UNICEF RRM

WASH

USAID/BHA and State/PRM fund the provision of critical water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) assistance throughout Tigray. USG humanitarian partners are distributing relief commodities—including WASH supplies—to conflict-affected and displaced populations, as well as delivering equipment to support the rehabilitation of WASH infrastructure damaged by the conflict. In response to elevated WASH needs across Tigray, CRS was providing emergency water services to more than 140,000 conflict-affected people in accessible areas of central, eastern, and western Tigray through the USAID/BHA-supported UNICEF-led Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), as of late January. In addition, through the RRM, CRS had reached an estimated 28,000 people with hygiene promotion campaigns.

CONTEXT IN BRIEF

- Following weeks of escalating tensions between regional and federal authorities, clashes erupted between the TPLF and the ENDF in several locations across Tigray on November 4. Though the GoE declared victory against the TPLF on November 28, security conditions remain volatile across Tigray, with fighting between several armed elements continuing in many locations.
- Active conflict continues to endanger populations in affected areas, while the insecurity and its effects on livelihoods, markets, and the availability of services have generated and exacerbated humanitarian needs among local populations in Tigray and neighboring areas, endangering and displacing populations within Tigray, into other regions of Ethiopia, and into adjacent areas of eastern Sudan.
- On November 17, 2020, U.S. Ambassador Michael A. Raynor reissued a disaster declaration for Ethiopia for FY 2021 due to the continued humanitarian needs resulting from the complex emergency—including the conflict in Tigray—and the impact of ongoing climate, conflict, food insecurity, and health shocks on vulnerable populations. Separately, on October 16, 2020, Ambassador Raynor reissued a disaster declaration for Ethiopia due to the sustained widespread impacts of desert locust infestations in the country.

PUBLIC DONATION INFORMATION

- The most effective way people can assist relief efforts is by making cash contributions to humanitarian organizations that are conducting relief operations. A list of humanitarian organizations that are accepting cash donations for disaster responses around the world can be found at [interaction.org](https://www.interaction.org).
- USAID encourages cash donations because they allow aid professionals to procure the exact items needed (often in the affected region); reduce the burden on scarce resources (such as transportation routes, staff time, and warehouse

space); can be transferred very quickly and without transportation costs; support the economy of the disaster-stricken region; and ensure culturally, dietarily, and environmentally appropriate assistance.

- More information can be found at:
 - USAID Center for International Disaster Information: cidi.org
 - Information on relief activities of the humanitarian community can be found at reliefweb.int.

USAID/BHA bulletins appear on the USAID website at [usaaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/where-we-work](https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/where-we-work)