

Ethiopia

*An update on the security and
human rights situation since
February 2022*



Ministry of Immigration
and Integration

The Danish
Immigration Service

This brief report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The brief report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service.

Furthermore, this brief report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

The brief report is a synthesis of information gathered from different sources, and it brings together condensed information in a relevant manner for the reader's COI needs and it organises information together thematically to form a coherent whole of the topic in question, instead of listing or quoting information source by source.

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Executive summary

In March 2022, the Ethiopian government declared a humanitarian truce, which was reciprocated by Tigray's regional government. In the following month, Tigrayan forces withdrew from most of their positions in neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions. As a result, active hostilities subsided. However, clashes continued in areas bordering Tigray, especially at Tigray's northern border towards Eritrea.

In June 2022, the warring parties expressed their willingness to participate in efforts to end the war. However, peace negotiations stagnated, as both sides put forth their preconditions. In August 2022, the conflict between the federal government and Tigrayan forces resumed, ending a five-month ceasefire.

Since the state of emergency was lifted in February 2022, reactions have continued to affect all persons of Tigrayan origin rather than targeting certain profiles, as all Tigrayans are suspected of affiliation with the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). In addition, relatives of alleged TPLF-members or prominent Tigrayans compose a target group of the federal government. There are reports of arrests, forced disappearances, threats of recruitment, detention of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa, which have intensified following the resumption of fighting on 24 August. Civilians in Western Tigray have been subjected to 'ethnic cleansing'. There are reports of forced recruitment by Tigrayan authorities in Tigray as well as imprisonment of parents or spouses, if a civilian refuses recruitment.

Tigrayans are restricted from moving in and out of Tigray by both sides of the conflict line. The deteriorating humanitarian situation in Tigray incites Tigrayans to leave Tigray through means of smuggling. Smuggled persons will likely face harassment, detentions, attacks and interception by armed groups and the federal authorities. Movement outside Tigray is associated with great risks for Tigrayans, particularly intellectuals and high-ranking profiles. Although several TPLF-members and other opposition groups were released from prisons in January, arrests and detentions still occur, and many remain in detention. Besides, Tigrayans outside Tigray are exposed to widespread discrimination, threats and deprivation of liberty, while those Tigrayans crossing the country to Addis Ababa face risks of interrogation and detention.

There is limited information regarding Tigrayans returning from abroad. The ethnic Tigrayans repatriated from Saudi Arabia in January were arrested upon return and placed in detention centres in Addis Ababa. Besides, it is likely that Ethiopian authorities still undertake security assessments of migrants returning to Ethiopia.

The Tigray region has been under a de-facto blockade manipulated by the federal government despite the declaration of a humanitarian truce in March, which consequently has affected the ability of humanitarian operations to dispatch supplies.

The Oromia region has been the site of anti-government protests and insurgency for many years. Since 2018, government forces and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) have been engaged in an armed conflict in western Oromia. Opposition parties in Oromia experience repression from federal authorities. Among the legal parties, Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is the main target. The government does not recognize OLA and OLF as separate organizations. Consequently, OLF members would be suspected of having links to OLA. There are reports of government forces targeting young Oromos and civil servants for alleged support to OLA.

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Introduction

This brief report is part of a series on the development of the human rights, political and security situation in Ethiopia. So far, the following reports have been published: *Ethiopia: Political opposition parties – recent developments* (March 2021) and *Etiopien: Sikkerhedssituationen* (February 2022). As such, this report seeks to bring forward updated information on the human rights, political and security situation in Ethiopia with focus on the conflict in Northern Ethiopia and the unrest in Oromo region.

The report is based on written public sources supplemented with information collected through online interviews with six sources with expertise on the topic. The consulted sources were briefed about the purpose of the report and that their statements would be included in a publicly available report. Minutes were written for each interview. These were forwarded to the sources for approval, giving them the possibility to amend, comment or correct their statements. All sources approved their statements, which can be found in Annex 1.

For the sake of reader-friendliness, transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the minutes of the interviews in Annex 1 have been given consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes. The Terms of Reference (ToR) are included in Annex 2.

Given the changeable political situation in Ethiopia, the information provided may quickly become outdated. The research and editing of this report was finalised in September 2022.

The report has been externally peer reviewed by the Norwegian COI-unit, Landinfo, in accordance with the *EASO COI Report Methodology*.¹

The report is available on the website of the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) www.us.dk and thus is available to all stakeholders in the refugee status determination process as well as to the general public.

¹ EASO (EUAA), *EASO Country of Origin Information Report Methodology*, June 2019, [url](#)

Access to information

It is difficult to access reliable information in Ethiopia, as the federal government controls the flow of information through communication shutdowns, including internet, mobile phone and landline communication. Since the war erupted in Northern Ethiopia in November 2020, the crackdown on the press has worsened conditions for journalists, undermining the credible documentation and verification of human rights abuses and attacks.² In the period between July 2021 and May 2022, 54 media personnel have been arrested and detained for a period ranging from days to months.³

In addition, there are few neutral sources to give an update on the political and security situation in Ethiopia. They are either pro-government or pro-opposition sources. The lack of verifiable data combined with disinformation and a polarised political climate makes it difficult to follow the development of the country and obtain reliable information on security incidents.⁴ The poor documentation and knowledgeability means that disinformation and misinformation about the conflict and the humanitarian situation have been widespread on social media.⁵

Especially in Tigray, it is difficult to access information about the situation in the Tigray region, as the entire region has been cut off from the rest of the world, particularly after the federal government imposed a humanitarian siege. Consequently, many abuses in Tigray have been hidden from view. The federal government has imposed communication restrictions throughout Tigray and refused access of independent investigators, journalists, and humanitarian workers, making it difficult to verify accounts from the region.⁶

The sources interviewed for this report are mainly receiving secondary data obtained through academic networks, national and international NGOs, traditional and social media. In addition, some primary data is obtained from beneficiaries, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), political leaders, refugees and individuals or data collected from the diaspora.⁷

²CPJ, *Journalists face growing hostility as Ethiopia's civil war persists*, 1 August 2022, [url](#); Africanews, *Ethiopia among worst jailers of journalists - rights group*, 2 August 2022, [url](#)

³ EHRC, *In a first of its kind Human Rights Situation Report on Ethiopia EHRC submitted to the House of Peoples' Representatives the Commission call for government to protect, respect and guarantee human rights at all times*, Press release, 8 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴ DIS, *Etiopien: Sikkerhedssituationen*, February 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁵ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2022 - Ethiopia*, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

⁶HRW, *Ethiopia's Invisible Ethnic Cleansing*, 16 June 2022, [url](#); Africanews, *Ethiopia, Eritrean forces launch joint offensive in Tigray*, 1 September 2022, [url](#)

⁷ Senior Consultant: 100; International organization: 5; International Researcher: 53-54; Independent Consultant: 27

Abbreviations

AMISOM	The African Union Mission in Somalia
AI	Amnesty International
COI	Country of Origin Information
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
EDF	Eritrean Defence Force
EHRC	Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defense Force
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
GBV	Gender-based violence
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OLA	Oromo Liberation Army
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OFC	Oromo Federal Congress
TDF	Tigray Defence Force
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
WFP	World Food Programme

Terminology

The terminology list is for the purpose of clarifying terms used in this report only. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

- OLF** The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is an Oromo nationalist opposition political party. The organisation is not homogenous and characterised by factionalism. The most recent split within the OLF came after the peace agreement with the government in 2018. One faction subsequently registered as a political party under the name OLF on 15 November 2019. The party is based in Addis Ababa and led by Dawud Ibsa.⁸
- OLA** The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) was formerly the armed wing of the OLF. After the OLF entered into a peace agreement with the federal government in January 2019, most of the OLA fighters laid down their weapons. However, some OLA factions are still engaged in the armed struggle with federal and national security forces in western and southern parts of Oromia.⁹
- OFC** The Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) is a political party established in 2009 by Merera Gudina. The OFC is a legal registered party, which has no representation in parliament, as they did not participate in the elections in June 2021. One of the leading figures of the OFC is Jawar Mohamed.¹⁰
- Fano** Fano is an Amhara nationalist movement that was active during the 2016-2018 protests. The group emerged as an armed informal militia. However, since 2018, government security forces - both at the federal and the regional levels - had largely tolerated violence by Fano.¹¹

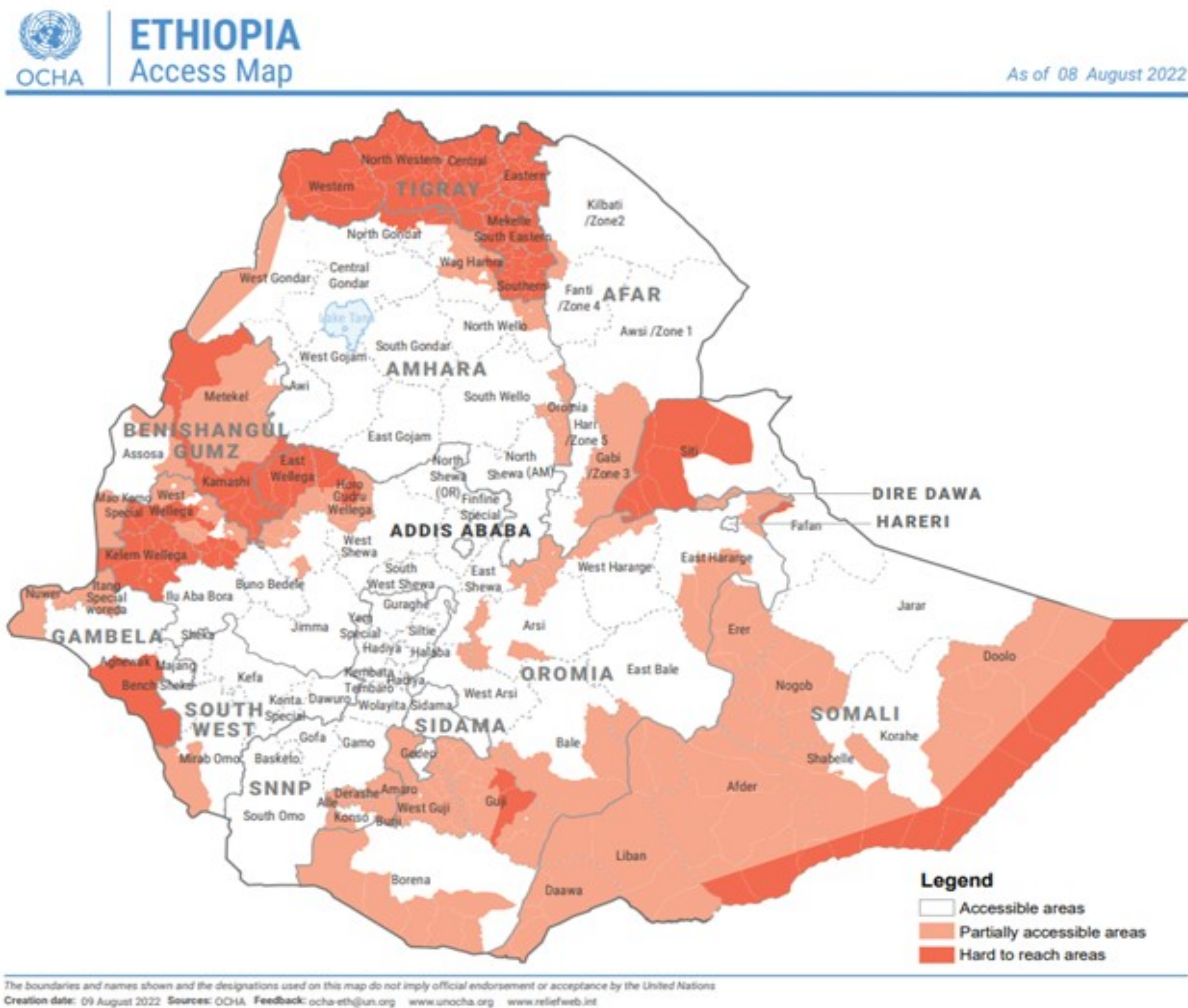
⁸ DIS, *Ethiopia Political opposition parties – recent developments*, March 2021, [url](#), p. 8-9

⁹ Landinfo, *Resposn Etiopia: Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)*, 9 March 2022, [url](#), p. 7; DIS, *Ethiopia Political opposition parties – recent developments*, March 2021, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁰ Landinfo, *Resposn Etiopia: Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)*, 9 March 2022, [url](#), p.3; DIS, *Ethiopia Political opposition parties – recent developments*, March 2021, [url](#), p. 10

¹¹ HRW, *“We Will Erase You from This Land” Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia’s Western Tigray Zone*, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

1. Ethiopia – access map



1. **Accessibility:** The population has optimal access to humanitarian assistance and services. The operational environment to relief operations – from a security perspective – is enabling, partners should apply caution as per normal. There are no physical access constraints impacting relief activities.
2. **Partially accessible:** The population is able to access limited humanitarian assistance and services. Insecurity continues affecting the safety and security of the population and aid workers, impeding relief operations on an intermittent basis. There are some restrictions to the operating environment, including in terms of the rights of the population to access aid. While some partners may be operating in the area, caution should be applied in light of risks and mitigation measures put in place. Some physical access constraints may impact relief activities.
3. **Hard-to-reach:** The population's access to humanitarian assistance and services is highly restricted. The security situation is extremely volatile, compromising the safety and security of the population and aid workers, impeding relief operations on a permanent basis. Aid personnel need to be extremely cautious when planning and conducting operations, which should be restricted to life-saving activities, and need to put in place extraordinary mitigation measures and consider alternative operational approaches. Physical environment constraints are having a major impact on relief operations and people's access to aid.

Source: OCHA, 8 August 2022, [url](#)

2. Status of the conflict in Ethiopia

2.1 Development of the northern conflict – key events since February 2022

The armed conflict in Tigray has been taking place since November 2020 between government forces and Tigrayan forces. Amhara and Afar regional forces and militias as well as Eritrean government forces have supported the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF).¹² During 2021, the conflict spilled over into the regions of Amhara and Afar. Despite a unilateral ceasefire declared by the federal government on 28 June 2021, there was no de-escalation on the ground for many months.¹³

With the Tigrayan forces and their allies, making operational gains in Afar and Amhara and advancing south towards the capital Addis Ababa, the federal government announced a state of emergency in November 2021. The state of emergency authorised the government security forces to take various repressive measures of control against its citizens, such as restricting their rights to freedom of movement, expression and assembly, and to carry out arbitrary and unlawful detentions. The arrests and human rights violations were ethnically motivated, targeting ethnic Tigrayans.¹⁴

In December 2021, Tigrayan forces withdrew from Amhara and Afar. However, fighting continued in areas bordering Tigray, especially in Afar. The federal government continued to conduct airstrikes in Tigray, resulting in civilian casualties and displacement.¹⁵ On 15 February 2022, Ethiopia's parliament decided to lift the state of emergency.¹⁶ Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stated, 'The situation that led to the declaration of an emergency has changed, and the threat is now at a level that can be countered by formal law enforcement action'.¹⁷ On 24 March 2022, the federal government declared an indefinite 'humanitarian truce' in northern Ethiopia. The Tigrayan forces stated in response that they would observe a 'cessation of hostilities', if the federal government allowed humanitarian aid to enter the region. In the following month, Tigrayan forces withdrew from most of their positions in the neighbouring Afar-region. In June 2022, the federal government eased the blockade on Tigray, allowing significantly more aid into the region.¹⁸

¹² EASO (EUAA), *Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region between 1 March 2020 – 28 February 2021*, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 4-7; Landinfo, *Temanotat Etiopia: Utvikling siden november 2021*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹³ EASO (EUAA), *Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁴ Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia declares nationwide state of emergency*, 2 November 2021, [url](#); USDOS, *2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 12 April 2022, [url](#); AI, *Amnesty International Report 2021/22: The State of the World's Human Rights; Ethiopia 2021*, 29 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵ DW, *Tigrayan fighters announce they are withdrawing from rest of Ethiopia*, 20 December 2021, [url](#); Landinfo, *Temanotat Etiopia: Utvikling siden november 2021*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4; EASO (EUAA), *Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁶ Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia parliament votes to lift state of emergency early*, 15 February 2022, [url](#); UK Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Oromos, the Oromo Liberation Front and the Oromo Liberation Army*, March 2022, [url](#), p. 24

¹⁷ Bloomberg, *Ethiopia Lifts State of Emergency on Diminishing Security Threat*, 26 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸ ICG, *At Long Last, Ethiopia Prepares for Peace Talks*, 4 July 2022, [url](#); Landinfo, *Temanotat Etiopia: Utvikling siden november 2021*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p. 9

During June 2022, the federal government and Tigray regional leaders confirmed their willingness to participate in efforts to end the war.¹⁹ According to a well-informed source interviewed by DIS in August 2022, peace negotiations between the parties have stagnated, with both sides putting forth their preconditions. The most important element being the blockade on Tigray, imposed since the onset of the conflict by the federal government. As the region continues to lack essential services, such as food, medicine, electricity, telecommunications, banks and fuel, Tigrayan officials push for a complete termination of the blockade in order to proceed with the peace process.²⁰ Another source advised that, despite the peace talks, tensions remain high, and already during the first week of August 2022, sporadic fighting has been reported in areas bordering Western Tigray.²¹

On 24 August 2022, fighting broke out between government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), ending a five-month truce between the warring sides, with both sides blaming the other for violating the truce. Fighting erupted near the town of Kobo in Amhara bordering Tigray and Afar, following weeks of military build-up on both sides of the front line.²² The Ethiopian government announced on 31 August 2022 that the renewed hostilities have extended towards the border areas between the regions of Wag, Wolkait and Amhara and Sudan.²³ According to a statement issued by Tigrayan authorities on 1 September 2022, Ethiopian and Eritrean forces have launched a massive joint offensive against areas of Tigray bordering Eritrea.²⁴ BBC News reported on 16 September 2022 that Eritrea is mobilising reservists as fighting escalates in northern Ethiopia.²⁵

2.1.1 Tigray and Amhara region

While the Tigray region has been stable since Tigrayan forces retreated from Amhara and Afar in early 2022, areas along the Eritrean borders and Western Zone of the region remain inaccessible due to insecurity.²⁶ In March 2022, the federal government was responsible for two drone attacks in Bahre-Negash territory and Shire airport. No clashes were reported during April; however, the federal government and its allies increased its presence in Western Tigray, which is currently under control of Amhara Special Forces. Meanwhile, clashes between Tigray and Eritrean forces erupted in border areas of Badme town in Eritrea

¹⁹ The Africa Report, *Ethiopia: An end in sight to the Tigray conflict?*, 27 July 2022, [url](#); ICG, *At Long Last, Ethiopia Prepares for Peace Talks*, 4 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁰ Independent Consultant: 28

²¹ ICG Senior Analyst: 37

²² Al Jazeera, *Fighting resumes in Ethiopia despite truce – Tigray forces*, 24 August 2022, [url](#); The New York Times, *Fighting Erupts in Northern Ethiopia, Shattering Cease-Fire*, 24 August 2022, [url](#); CNN, *Ethiopia's fragile ceasefire ends as government forces and Tigrayan fighters clash*, 24 August 2022, [url](#)

²³ Addis Standard, *News: Govt says renewed hostilities between national army, Tigrayan forces extend to border with Sudan*, 31 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁴ AfricaNews, *Ethiopia, Eritrean forces launch joint offensive in Tigray*, 1 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁵ BBC News, *Eritrea's mass mobilisation amid Ethiopia civil war*, 16 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁶ Migrationsverket, *Etiopien, Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 5 May 2020, [url](#), p. 13; International Organisation: 1; ICG Senior Analyst: 37; OCHA, *Ethiopia, Humanitarian Update Situation Report*, 7 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2; World Vision, *Northern Ethiopia Crisis Response Situation Report 25 June 2022*, 14 July 2022, [url](#)

and Rama town in Tigray.²⁷ Following the re-escalation of the conflict, airstrikes on Tigray have been reported on the 27 and 30 August 2022, seemingly hitting civilian targets.²⁸

Tigray borders are militarised on both sides; inside Tigray, Tigrayan forces control the border, whereas Afar and Amhara forces, including Fano militias, control the other side of the border.²⁹ The borders of Tigray are said to compose a grey zone controlled by a mix of actors.³⁰ One source assessed that government-allied forces along with Eritrean troops control the Tigrayan border towards Afar.³¹ This information remains unverified. Moreover, it is assessed that the border between Western Tigray and Sudan is controlled by Eritrean troops.³²

According to data published by ACLED, active fighting in the Amhara region subsided during the first and second quarter of the year.³³ In July 2022, OCHA reported that the overall security situation in Amhara region remains volatile and unpredictable, especially in areas bordering Tigray.³⁴ As hostilities resumed in late August 2022, the Amhara regional government imposed restrictions on the movement of people and vehicles as well as possession of unauthorised weapons in several cities, including Kombolcha and Sekota.³⁵

Apart from the ongoing Tigray-conflict, which spilled over to Amhara region, tensions in other areas remain high with several reports of inter-communal violence during this year. According to International Crisis Group (ICG), religious tensions spiked in April when Muslim worshippers in Gondar city were killed. In the same month, a retaliation attack was carried out against Orthodox Christians and Protestants.³⁶ Moreover, Fano and Amhara ethnic militias clashed with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in areas bordering North Shewa and Oromo Special zones.³⁷

2.1.2 Afar region

The conflict, which initially started in Tigray in November 2020, spilled over into parts of the neighbouring Afar region.³⁸ In mid-December 2021, fighting broke out in the town of Abala between TPLF and Afar forces about 50 kilometres east of Mekelle, Tigray's regional capital. In January 2022, TPLF announced that it had expanded operations into Afar, claiming it had been provoked by attacks on its positions by pro-government forces. The fighting in Afar spread in January and February 2022 to other parts of the Kilbeti zone, which

²⁷ ICG, *Crisis Watch*, August 2022, [url](#); Reuters, *Eritrean troops shell town in north Ethiopia - U.N.*, 31 May 2022, [url](#)

²⁸ France24, *Ethiopia airstrike on Tigray: 'Worryingly high chance this escalates into return to full-scale war'*, 27 August 2022, [url](#); Reuters, *Air strike on playground kills 7 in Ethiopia's Tigray region – hospital*, 27 August 2022, [url](#); AFP, *Air Strike Hits Tigray Capital Mekele: Rebels, Hospital*, 30 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁹ Independent Consultant: 33, 35

³⁰ International Organisation: 21; Independent Consultant: 35

³¹ Independent Consultant: 35

³² Independent Consultant: 32

³³ DIS analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Dashboard, Ethiopia, Afar*, 23 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁴ OCHA, *Ethiopia, Humanitarian Update Situation Report*, 7 July 2022, [url](#), p.2

³⁵ Addis Standard, *News: Lalibela imposes curfew, movement restrictions, unauthorized firearm possession*, 30 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁶ ICG, *Crisis Watch*, August 2022, [url](#)

³⁷ ACLED, *Ethiopia Ethiopia Peace Observatory Weekly: 16-22 April 2022*, 27 April 2022, [url](#)

³⁸ EUAA, *Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p.17

borders Tigray.³⁹ At the beginning of February 2022, a refugee camp in Berhale was attacked as part of a broader offensive in Afar.⁴⁰

After the enactment of the humanitarian truce on 24 March 2022, Tigrayan forces withdrew from much of the territory they controlled in Afar.⁴¹ Since the Tigrayan forces left Abala and other parts of Afar, the security situation calmed with no new fighting reported during the second quarter of 2022; however, tensions remain, especially in border areas in Abala.⁴² According to data published by ACLED, registered battles dropped from 22 to two between January and April 2022 in the Afar region. ACLED did not reregister any battles in Afar from June to July 2022, and data for August was not available during the drafting of this report.⁴³ A senior analyst for ICG informed that while the peace process was stumbling, there were no increase in tension on the Afar and Tigray border; however, this has now changed with a renewed conflict in late August.⁴⁴

2.2 Oromia region

The Oromia region has been the site of anti-government protests and insurgency for many years. In the early 1970s, the Oromo national movement was active through the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and its declared mission was self-determination for the Oromo people. The organisation operated in the eastern parts of the region; however, since the 1980s, Wollega zone in Oromia became an important site for the OLF.⁴⁵ During the transitional period in the early 1990s, OLF withdrew from the political and democratic process, and continued its armed struggle against the central government.⁴⁶

In July 2018, Abiy Ahmed's government invited the OLF back into the political landscape, and a ceasefire was declared between the federal government and OLF. The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), which emerged as a faction of OLF's forces, refused to be disarmed and continued its armed struggle against the federal government in the western parts of Wollega.⁴⁷ The government refers to the faction as OLA-Shene or Shene. Since 2018, government forces and the OLA have been engaged in an armed conflict in western and southern Oromia.⁴⁸

³⁹ Landinfo, *Temanotat Etiopia: Utvikling siden november 2021*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p.7; Al Jazeera, *Attack on Ethiopia refugee camp kills five: UN*, 18 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰ Africa News, *Unprecedented' attacks hound Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia*, 28 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹ ISS, *The AU and regional bodies should support dialogue in Ethiopia*, 7 June 2022, [url](#); ICG, *At Long Last, Ethiopia Prepares for Peace Talks*, 14 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴² Reuters, *Tigray forces leaving Ethiopia's Afar region, says spokesperson*, 25 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴³ DIS analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Dashboard, Ethiopia, Afar*, 23 August 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴ ICG Senior Analyst: 52

⁴⁵ Global Security, *Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)*, updated 2022, [url](#); International researcher: 55; Migrationsverket, *Etiopien, Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 5 May 2020, [url](#), p. 15-16

⁴⁶ International researcher: 55; Global Security, *Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)*, updated 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Landinfo, *Respons Etiopia: Politisk utvikling i 2018*, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 3-4; International researcher: 55; Migrationsverket, *Etiopien, Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 5 May 2020, [url](#) p. 15

⁴⁸ Al, *Ethiopia: Authorities must investigate massacre of ethnic Amhara in Tole*, 21 July 2022, [url](#); International researcher: 56; UK Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Oromos, the Oromo Liberation Front and the Oromo Liberation Army*, March 2022, [url](#), p.27

Ethiopian federal armed forces launched a military offensive against the OLA at the beginning of April 2022. According to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Germany), available information regarding the conflict is contradictory. Some sources inform that the fighting is concentrated in the areas of Wollega, while others report military clashes in the Borena zone in southern Ethiopia.⁴⁹

Since 2019, the government and OLA have been fighting in the western Oromia region.⁵⁰ According to a well-informed international researcher, areas such as Wollega, Shewa and Gugi as well as parts of Borana are insecure due to active insurgency. The source further stated that these areas remain inaccessible for journalists and aid workers. Thus, it is difficult to assess the level of insecurity. However, the source argued that the situation is volatile, and the civilian population is highly affected by the current instability.⁵¹

Government forces carried out executions, arbitrary arrests and detentions of Oromos and at times blocked communication to some areas. While the OLA is accused of killing government officials, the ethnic Amharas in the region are the primary targets of kidnappings and human rights violations by the OLA.⁵² On 2 September 2022, Al Jazeera reported that fighting between Oromo and Amhara groups escalated in the recent months. According to witnesses, the Fano militias group⁵³ reportedly killed 42 people on 30 August in Amuru district, which lies 370 km west of the capital, Addis Ababa.⁵⁴ In July 2022, more than 200 people, most of whom were ethnic Amhara, were killed in the Oromia region. Eyewitnesses blamed OLA for the attack; however, the group denied responsibility for the killings.⁵⁵

The Oromo opposition group Oromo Federal Congress (OFC) issued a press release in May 2022 stating that the government's military operation in the Oromo region is led by the principle of 'drying the sea to catch fish'. Oromo opposition officials claim that government officials have killed civilians, burned houses, looted and destroyed properties, and sometimes killed parents to children allegedly affiliated with OLA.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ BAMF, *Briefing Notes Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration*, 11 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁰ HRW, *Ethiopia: Civilians in Western Oromia Left Unprotected; Armed Group Kills Hundreds of Amharas in June Massacre; Independent Inquiries Needed*, 31 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹ International researcher:56

⁵² HRW, *Ethiopia: Civilians in Western Oromia Left Unprotected; Armed Group Kills Hundreds of Amharas in June Massacre; Independent Inquiries Needed*, 31 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵³ "Fano" an Amhara nationalist movement that was active during the 2016-2018 protests, emerged as an armed informal militia. Since 2018, government security forces - both at the federal and the regional levels - had largely tolerated violence by Fano. HRW, "We Will Erase You from This Land" Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia's Western Tigray Zone, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴ Al Jazeera, *Gunmen kill dozens in Ethiopia's Oromia region: Report*, 2 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵ The Guardian, *Ethiopia: more than 200 Amhara people killed in attack blamed on rebels*, 19 June 2022, [url](#); The Africa Report, *Ethiopia: Inside the Oromia massacre – 'There were corpses everywhere'*, 23 June 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶ Addis Standard, *News: OFC says gov't use of "drone, helicopter strikes" in Oromia killing civilians*, 2 May 2022, [url](#)

3. Human rights situation and treatment of specific groups

All parties involved have committed abuses during the current conflict in Northern Ethiopia, including federal government forces, Amhara special forces and militias, Eritrean troops, as well as Tigrayan forces.⁵⁷ The following section concentrates on the treatment and profiling of Tigrayans. Furthermore, the section sheds light on the conditions for Oromo opposition groups.

3.1 Profiling and identification of ethnic Tigrayans

The Norwegian Landinfo noted that until the withdrawal of the Ethiopian army from Tigray on 28 June 2021, reactions had primarily, but not exclusively, targeted Tigrayans of a certain profile, including high position leaders of Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and influential businesspersons. After the summer of 2021, reactions potentially affected all persons of Tigrayan origin.⁵⁸

Under the state of emergency, the federal and regional governments of Afar and Amhara targeted and detained thousands of ethnic Tigrayans, who were perceived as a security risk due to suspected collaboration with Tigrayan Forces.⁵⁹ In a statement from March 2022 by Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, she raised concerns that most of the 15,000 arbitrary arrests and detentions in connection with the state of emergency appeared to be ordinary citizens of Tigrayan ethnicity.⁶⁰ Hence, under the state of emergency, the reaction hit all Tigrayans solely based on ethnicity rather than an individual assessment.⁶¹

Rather than targeting certain profiles, the federal government's arrests and abuses of persons with Tigrayan ethnicity have remained widespread after the state of emergency.⁶² For instance, based on personal accounts Tigrayans have said they were held by police after revealing their Tigrayan ethnicity.⁶³ Moreover, up to 550 Ethiopian peacekeepers working in Sudan have sought asylum rather than returning home for fear of persecution due to their Tigrayan ethnicity.⁶⁴ Sources consulted for this report confirmed that in practice all persons of Tigrayan origin are a potential target group of the federal government and its forces.⁶⁵ This contradicts the announcements from the Ethiopian government that it is fighting TPLF-members and not targeting Tigrayans based on their ethnicity.⁶⁶ The ICG Senior Analyst opined that as a

⁵⁷ EHRC, *Afar and Amhara Regions: Report on Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law in Afar and Amhara Regions of Ethiopia*, 11 March 2022, [url](#); DIS, *Etiopien: Sikkerhedssituationen*, February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

⁵⁸ Landinfo, *Etiopia: Utvikling siden november 2021*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p. 13

⁵⁹ EHRC, *Afar and Amhara Regions: Report on Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law in Afar and Amhara Regions of Ethiopia*, 11 March 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁰ OHCHR, *Oral Update on the situation of human rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and on progress made in the context of the Joint Investigation*, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹ Al Jazeera, *Ethiopian officials accused of extorting Tigrayan detainees*, 10 February 2022, [url](#); OHCHR, *Oral Update on the situation of human rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and on progress made in the context of the Joint Investigation*, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

⁶² Landinfo, *Etiopia: Forhold for etniske tigrayer utenfor Tigray*, 19 August 2022, [url](#), p. 3; HRW, *EU Should Press Ethiopia for Tangible Rights Progress*, 17 June 2022, [url](#)

⁶³ Reuters, *Deadly detentions*, 17 June 2022, [url](#);

⁶⁴ Reuters, *Ethiopian soldiers seek asylum in Sudan, fear returning home due to Tigrayan ethnicity*, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵ ICG Senior Analyst: 46; Jan Nyssen: 84, 89, 92

⁶⁶ Reuters, *Deadly detentions*, 17 June 2022, [url](#); Reuters, *Ethiopian soldiers seek asylum in Sudan, fear returning home due to Tigrayan ethnicity*, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

large portion of Tigrayans sympathise with the Tigrayan government led by TPLF, all Tigrayans are suspected of affiliation with TPLF, which turn Tigrayans into a target of the federal government.⁶⁷ Jan Nyssen, Professor at Ghent University and a Senior Consultant, added that while the federal government potentially targets all Tigrayans, high-profile leaders of TPLF and Tigrayan businesspersons are most vulnerable to reactions from federal forces.⁶⁸

The ICG Senior Analyst assessed that relatives of suspected or actual TPLF-members and prominent Tigrayans also compose a potential target group of the federal government, as relatives may fall under suspicion for affiliation with TPLF. Therefore, relatives of suspected TPLF-members or prominent Tigrayans are exposed to the same type of sanctions as suspected or actual TPLF-members.⁶⁹ This resonates with a statement from the UN Security Council, saying that Tigrayan women and girls with family members in the Tigray Special Forces have been targeted as victims of sexual violence.⁷⁰

Jan Nyssen further stressed that Tigrayan ethnicity is identified through names, language, accent, and traditional scarifications, or may be identified through alerts from neighbors or through *kebele* cards (ID-cards).⁷¹

According to Jan Nyssen, the indication of ethnicity is removed from *kebele* cards in Addis Ababa.⁷² In a Dutch COI-report from 2021, it is stressed that there are reports from 2019 saying that ethnicity will no longer be shown on *kebele* cards. Whether this is actually the case and whether the transition is occurring is uncertain. The same source notes that the Oromia region and Addis Ababa stopped indicating ethnicity when updating cards after 2018.⁷³ According to the Swedish Migrationsverket (2022), other states are following this practice, but it is unclear how far they are with the transition. During a fact-finding mission in Ethiopia by Migrationsverket in 2019, it became clear that the appearance of ethnicity on *kebele* cards are common, but that ethnicity is not always shown on cards that were issued at that time. Moreover, if a child has parents of different ethnicities, it is common to choose the father's ethnicity.⁷⁴

According to Migrationsverket, Tigrinya is the standard language of Tigrayans, and most Tigrayans are fluent in Amharic. Nevertheless, they have an accent that distinguishes them from Amharas.⁷⁵ In the border areas of Tigray, there are many people who speak both languages that dominate on each side of the border. It is furthermore assumed that other ethnic groups who do not live in Tigray, do not speak

⁶⁷ ICG Senior Analyst: 46

⁶⁸ Jan Nyssen: 92; Senior Consultant: 102

⁶⁹ ICG Senior Analyst: 48

⁷⁰ UN Security Council: *Conflict-related sexual violence; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/272]*, 29 March 2022, [url](#), p. 22

⁷¹ Jan Nyssen: 96

⁷² Jan Nyssen: 96

⁷³ The Government of Netherlands, Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia, August 2021, [url](#), p. 51, 44

⁷⁴ Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 15

⁷⁵ Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 18

Tigrinya.⁷⁶ In the previous DIS report, it is noted that it is easy to recognize Tigrayans by accent with an exception of Tigrayans who grew up outside Tigray.⁷⁷

3.2 Treatment of Tigrayans in Tigray

Since the onset of the conflict, the Tigray region has been largely cut off from the world. Ethiopian authorities have restricted access and closed down internet communication, which makes it hard to get verified information.⁷⁸ A Belgian-led academic team estimates that between 250,000 and 500,000 civilians have died in Tigray, including an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 victims of direct killings, 150,000 to 200,000 starvation deaths, and more than 100,000 deaths caused by a lack of health care.⁷⁹ Due to the communication blockade, the number is poorly documented, and therefore, the actual number of deaths is likely higher than the sample collected.⁸⁰

After the humanitarian truce was declared in March 2022 and the peace talks began in May 2022, violence has decreased and the situation in Tigray improved.⁸¹ Despite the changed circumstances, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) noted that several human rights violations have been committed between June 2021 and June 2022, such as deaths, injuries, displacement and destruction of property, targeting of civilians, including women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities, which were carried out in extreme brutality.⁸² A Human Rights Watch (HRW) article from June 2022 noted that for the past year and a half the federal government has been hiding abuses in Tigray from view, whereby ethnic cleansing has been carried out, especially in Western Tigray.⁸³

Sexual violence and rape have been widely used as a weapon of war ‘to inflict lasting physical and psychological damage on women and girls in Tigray’.⁸⁴ A UN Security Council report from March 2022 details incidents of different forms of sexual violence reported across different parts of Tigray mainly committed by members of ENDF, EDF, Amhara special forces and militias, and Fano.⁸⁵ In the same context, the term ‘sexual slavery’ has been used to describe torture and rape of women in Tigray.⁸⁶ In general, conflict-related sexual violence remains underreported due to fears of reprisals, gender inequality and

⁷⁶ Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 18 – 19

⁷⁷ DIS, *Etiopien: Sikkerhedssituationen*, February 2022, [url](#), p. 55

⁷⁸ The Guardian, *‘It’s death either way’: desperate Tigrayans flee starvation and forced conscription*, 20 June 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁹ Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopian officials admit using a Biafra-like siege to starve Tigray*, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰ The Globe and Mail, *Tigray war has seen up to half a million dead from violence and starvation, say researchers*, 15 March 2022, [url](#)

⁸¹ ACLED, *Ethiopia Mid-Year Update, Multiple Complications Threaten to Result in a Dangerous Re-escalation*, [url](#)

⁸² EHRC, *In a first of its kind Human Rights Situation Report on Ethiopia EHRC submitted to the House of Peoples’ Representatives the Commission call for government to protect, respect and guarantee human rights at all times*, Press release, 8 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸³ HRW, *Ethiopia’s Invisible Ethnic Cleansing*, 16 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁴ AI, *Ethiopia: Troops and militia rape, abduct women and girls in Tigray conflict – new report*, 10 August 2021, [url](#); UN Security Council, *Protection of civilians in armed conflict, Report of the Secretary-General*, 10 May 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁵ UN Security Council, *Conflict-related sexual violence, Report of the Secretary-General*, 29 March 2022, [url](#), p. 22;

EUAA, *Ethiopia; Security situation in Tigray region [Q19-2022]*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p. 21; AI, *Ethiopia: Troops and militia rape, abduct women and girls in Tigray conflict – new report*, 10 August 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶ EUAA, *Ethiopia; Security situation in Tigray region [Q19-2022]*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p. 21; Reuters, *Ethiopia at war: Ethiopia’s crackdown on ethnic Tigrayans snares thousands*, 7 May 2021, [url](#)

stigma, while impunity for perpetrators persists. Women and girls account for at least 97 percent of recorded victims.⁸⁷

After the war resumed on 24 August 2022, the Ethiopian air force bombed the capital of Tigray, Mekelle, hitting a kindergarten and killing seven, including three children. A second air strike was reported in Mekelle on 30 August, and Mekelle Hospital was reportedly among the targets.⁸⁸ Another air strike on 14 September in Mekelle killed ten people a few days after the TPLF had offered a ceasefire.⁸⁹ Following the resumption of fighting, there are reports that the Eritrean forces have joined the fight against TPLF. Witnesses in Tigray have reported heavy artillery shelling from Eritrea into Tigray around the town of Shiraro.⁹⁰ On 14 September, it was reported that Eritrea's military had taken the town of Shiraro.⁹¹

According to Reuters, there are several accusations of forced recruitment by Tigrayan authorities with purpose of fighting the federal government, while there are reports of imprisonment of parents or spouses if civilians do not join the forces.⁹² The Tigrayan regional government has claimed that forced recruitment has stopped and that it was not systematic.⁹³ In response, civilian Tigrayans have reported that forced recruitment is ongoing. Some Tigrayans have reported that persons between 40 to 55 years old have been ordered to join the army. Even families who previously sent children to the army are forced to send more. Parents refusing to send their children are subjected to arrest.⁹⁴

The ICG Senior Analyst further stressed that the pressure to join Tigrayan forces is limited to Tigray, and that Tigrayan authorities carry out arbitrary detentions in connection to the interventions.⁹⁵ According to Jan Nyssen, the line between joining Tigrayan forces forcibly or voluntarily is unclear. While Jan Nyssen did not rule out the possibility of forced recruitment, he highlighted that recruitment to the Tigrayan forces is largely on a voluntary basis, as Tigrayans view the federal government as the enemy and the Tigrayan forces as freedom fighters.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, Reuters assesses that Tigrayans have become increasingly reluctant to take part in the fight, following the ceasefire in March.⁹⁷ In connection with the resumption of fighting on 24 August, it is reported that Tigrayan forces have recruited massively and devoted much of its resources to training and rearming, although forced recruitment was denied by TPLF.⁹⁸

⁸⁷ UN Security Council, *Protection of civilians in armed conflict, Report of the Secretary-General*, 10 May 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸ BBC, *Ethiopia civil war: Why fighting has resumed in Tigray and Amhara*, 1 September 2022, [url](#); Barrons, *Air Strike Hits Tigray Capital Mekele: Rebels, Hospital*, 30 August 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁹ Reuters, *Ten killed in air strikes on capital of Ethiopia's Tigray region – hospital*, 14 September 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰ Reuters, *New front opens in Ethiopia's resurging Tigray war*, 31 August 2022, [url](#); Reuters, *Air strike on playground kills 7 in Ethiopia's Tigray region – hospital*, 27 August 2022, [url](#); VOA, *TPLF Reports 'Massive' Offensive by Ethiopian Government, Eritrean Forces*, 1 September 2022, [url](#)

⁹¹ Reuters, *Ten killed in air strikes on capital of Ethiopia's Tigray region – hospital*, 14 September 2022, [url](#)

⁹² Reuters, *Some Ethiopians claim forced recruitment by Tigrayan forces*, 16 May 2022, [url](#); Reuters, *Explainer: Why has fighting restarted in north Ethiopia?*, 2 September 2022, [url](#); ICG Senior Analyst: 41

⁹³ The Guardian, *'It's death either way': desperate Tigrayans flee starvation and forced conscription*, 20 June 2022, [url](#); Senior Consultant: 105

⁹⁴ The Guardian, *'It's death either way': desperate Tigrayans flee starvation and forced conscription*, 20 June 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁵ ICG Senior Analyst: 41

⁹⁶ Jan Nyssen: 91

⁹⁷ Reuters, *Some Ethiopians claim forced recruitment by Tigrayan forces*, 16 May 2022, [url](#); Reuters, *Explainer: Why has fighting restarted in north Ethiopia?*, 2 September 2022, [url](#); ICG Senior Analyst: 41

⁹⁸ BBC, *Ethiopia civil war: Why fighting has resumed in Tigray and Amhara*, 1 September 2022, [url](#)

3.2.1 Treatment of Tigrayans in Western Tigray

Western Tigray has been under the control of Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) and allied forces and militias from the Amhara region since two weeks after the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray in November 2020.⁹⁹

HRW and Amnesty International (AI) reported jointly in April 2022 how Amhara regional forces, with participation of federal forces and militias, have subjected Tigrayans in Western Tigray to a coordinated and systematic campaign of ‘ethnic cleansing’. This includes mass expulsions, killings, disappearances, deportation, looting of crops and livestock and sexual violence, which amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹⁰⁰

HRW noted that the Ethiopian authorities imposed restrictions on movement and humanitarian relief and that they banned the Tigrinya language.¹⁰¹ Some Tigrayans who stayed in Western Tigray have since January 2022 been subjected to detention, where hundreds or possibly thousands of Tigrayans have been held in overcrowded facilities, facing killings, torture, and denial of adequate food and medical care.¹⁰² In addition, authorities deprived Tigrayan communities of resources key to their survival and coerced people to depart for Sudan or other parts of Tigray. In some places, local authorities forcibly removed Tigrayans from the area.¹⁰³ Sexual violence was documented towards women and girls fleeing the conflict.¹⁰⁴ According to Jan Nyssen, ethnic profiling, arrests and killings of Tigrayans in Western Tigray have continued in an attempt to eradicate the Tigrayan population and integrate Western Tigray into Amhara. He further claimed that many Tigrayans from Western Tigray are still detained, while some have managed to escape to Sudan.¹⁰⁵

It is documented that Eritrean forces were present in Western Tigray. They made roundups of ethnic Tigrayans and have acted alongside Amhara security forces and militias. Eritrean forces have continued to be present in towns in Western Tigray, where they have looted crops, livestock, and equipment and deprived Tigrayans of their means of survival.¹⁰⁶ An independent consultant confirms that Eritrean forces have remained in Western Tigray.¹⁰⁷ Since the war resumed on 24 August, fighting has been reported in Western Tigray towards the border with Sudan.¹⁰⁸

3.2.2 Tigray – freedom of movement and smuggling

All the sources consulted on the topic of border control agreed that Tigrayans are under full restriction to move in and out of Tigray.¹⁰⁹ One source stressed that the regional government of Tigray controls

⁹⁹ HRW, *Ethiopia: Crimes Against Humanity in Western Tigray Zone*, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ HRW, AI, *We Will Erase You from This Land. Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia's Western Tigray Zone*, 6 April 2022, [url](#), p. 234

¹⁰¹ HRW, *Ethiopia: Crimes Against Humanity in Western Tigray Zone*, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰² HRW, *Ethiopia's Invisible Ethnic Cleansing*, 16 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰³ HRW, AI, *We Will Erase You from This Land. Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia's Western Tigray Zone*, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ UN Security Council, *Conflict-related sexual violence, Report of the Secretary-General*, 29 March 2022, [url](#), p. 22

¹⁰⁵ Jan Nyssen: 85

¹⁰⁶ HRW, *Ethiopia: Crimes Against Humanity in Western Tigray Zone*, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ Independent Consultant: 31

¹⁰⁸ BBC, *Ethiopia civil war: Why fighting has resumed in Tigray and Amhara*, 1 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ International Organization: 22; Independent Consultant: 33

movement out of Tigray in anticipation that they may be called to fight.¹¹⁰ Moreover, sources interviewed for this report confirmed that the federal government restricts movement in and out of Tigray.¹¹¹ The reason for this is that free movement of Tigrayans may have military and security-related implications for the federal government, as TPLF is widely supported by ordinary Tigrayans.¹¹² One source claimed that it is hard for Tigrayans to enter Sudan because the Eritrean army has closed and controls the Tigray border with Sudan.¹¹³ Jan Nyssen confirmed, however, that Tigrayans have managed to escape to Sudan from time to time.¹¹⁴ He added that massacres have presumably occurred in border areas controlled by Eritrean troops, and inhabitants have been forced to accept Eritrean ID-cards.¹¹⁵

According to sources consulted for this report, despite movement restrictions, the deteriorating humanitarian situation has incited Tigrayans to leave Tigray to look for food in Amhara or Afar, while other Tigrayans take the risk of moving to Addis Ababa.¹¹⁶ It was explained that a number of Tigrayans leave the region primarily through southern Tigray bordering the Amharan town, Alamata, which is considered a hub for getting in contact with the outside world. From Alamata, it is reportedly possible to walk to Kobo, which is located 40 kilometer from Alamata.¹¹⁷

According to sources consulted, Tigrayans who defy movement restrictions leave Tigray out of necessity. Generally speaking, Tigrayans are subjected to harsh treatment when moving outside the Tigray region.¹¹⁸ In Amhara, particularly, Tigrayans face harassment and attacks from the federal forces and Fano militias.¹¹⁹ The continuous fighting in the border region between Tigray and Afar adds to the danger of crossing the border.¹²⁰ Thus, movement outside of Tigray is associated with great risks, especially for intellectuals and other high-ranking profiles who are particularly vulnerable to risks of persecution from authorities.¹²¹

Due to the militarization of borders and the risks associated with moving out of Tigray, it is common to get assistance through means of smuggling through dangerous smuggling routes. The increased demand for exiting Tigray has led to an upsurge in smugglers who take payments to transport people across borders.¹²² The price is as high as 40,000 birr (625 GDP) for a person to escape through a smuggler.¹²³ A source claimed that the price for smuggling is on a continuous rise.¹²⁴

The network of smugglers, including Ethiopian army officers, transport the smuggled Tigrayans to Jari, a detention camp in Amhara, from where they are held until ransom is paid. Those who wish to reach Addis

¹¹⁰ Independent Consultant: 33

¹¹¹ Jan Nyssen: 90; Independent Consultant: 33

¹¹² Independent Consultant: 33

¹¹³ Independent Consultant: 32

¹¹⁴ Jan Nyssen: 85

¹¹⁵ Jan Nyssen: 86

¹¹⁶ ICG Senior Analyst: 43-44; Jan Nyssen: 87, 88; Senior consultant: 113

¹¹⁷ Jan Nyssen: 88

¹¹⁸ Senior Consultant: 112, 115; Independent Consultant: 34; Jan Nyssen: 87, 89; ICG Senior Analyst: 43-45

¹¹⁹ Jan Nyssen: 87

¹²⁰ Independent Consultant: 32

¹²¹ Jan Nyssen: 87

¹²² Jan Nyssen: 88; ICG Senior Analyst: 44; Independent consultant 34; The Guardian, *'It's death either way': desperate Tigrayans flee starvation and forced conscription*, 20 June 2022, [url](#)

¹²³ The Guardian, *'It's death either way': desperate Tigrayans flee starvation and forced conscription*, 20 June 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁴ Independent Consultant: 34

Ababa cross the Amhara region to Addis Ababa.¹²⁵ According to an independent consultant, armed groups from both sides of the conflict may intercept the smuggled Tigrayans and perceive them as infiltrators.¹²⁶ Some smuggled Tigrayans, who arrive in the neighbouring Afar or Amhara regions, are interrogated by the federal authorities and placed in detention centres for government surveillance and money extraction.¹²⁷

3.3 Treatment of ethnic Tigrayans outside Tigray

When Tigrayan forces retreated into their region in late December 2021 and when the state of emergency was lifted in February 2022, there appeared to be a decline in mass arrests of Tigrayans.¹²⁸ The Ethiopian government dropped the charges against a number of high-profile TPLF-members and other opposition members. In the same instance, several opposition leaders, who were arrested in connection with the outbreak of war in November 2020, were freed from prison.¹²⁹

Arrests and detentions have still occurred from January 2022 onwards, despite the development of fewer arrests and releases of political leaders. Thousands remain in detention, contradicting the government's announcement that most have been released.¹³⁰ The ICG Senior Analyst expressed uncertainty about whether the magnitude of arrest and detention has actually changed following the lifting of the state of emergency.¹³¹ The consulted sources stressed that a significant number of Tigrayans are detained. One source stated that up to 20,000 are detained, including those held in IDP-camps.¹³² Ethiopian authorities have detained several senior officials from Tigray, including members of the government's last administration in Tigray and a former head of Tigray's justice bureau, while 12 Tigrayan officials and an activist were arrested in a series of raids in March 2022.¹³³ In early May 2022, a Tigrayan general and former commander of The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) died of hardship in custody. He was arrested in November 2020.¹³⁴ The Senior Consultant noted in August 2022 that he received unverified reports of 33 Tigrayans who presumably were detained in Sokota town in Amhara.¹³⁵

¹²⁵ The Guardian, *'It's death either way': desperate Tigrayans flee starvation and forced conscription*, 20 June 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁶ Independent Consultant: 34

¹²⁷ Jan Nyssen: 89

¹²⁸ Al Jazeera, *Ethiopian officials accused of extorting Tigrayan detainees*, 10 February 2022, [url](#); Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 33, 36; Landinfo, *Etiopia: Utvikling siden november 2021*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p. 14

¹²⁹ AP News, *Ethiopia grants amnesty to high-profile political detainees*, 7 January 2022, [url](#); Reuters, *Ethiopia frees opposition leaders from prison, announces political dialogue*, 8 January 2022, [url](#); New York Times, *Ethiopia Frees Prominent Political Prisoners, Calls for Reconciliation*, 7 January 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁰ Reuters, *Deadly detentions*, 17 June 2022, [url](#); Foreign Policy, *There Is a Path to Peace in Tigray*, 5 March 2022, [url](#); Reuters, *Ethiopia's parliament lifts state of emergency early*, 15 February 2022, [url](#); Senior Consultant: 102

¹³¹ ICG Senior Analyst: 50

¹³² ICG Senior Analyst: 39; Senior Consultant: 104

¹³³ Reuters, *Ethiopia arrests former government officials from Tigray, rights body says*, 19 March 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁴ RFI, *Éthiopie: mort en prison d'un général tigréen (Ethiopia: death in prison of a Tigrayan general)*, 4 May 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁵ Senior Consultant: 103

In addition, bribing for release is common in detentions¹³⁶, while there are recent reports of Tigrayan women who have been asked for sex in exchange for their release from detention in Amhara.¹³⁷ As cited by the HRW Director for the Horn of Africa, Laetitia Bader, releases seem to be as arbitrary as arrests.¹³⁸

According to Landinfo, many Tigrayan detainees are transferred from Addis Ababa to detention centres in other parts of Ethiopia.¹³⁹ Detailed accounts of detention conditions describe overcrowded and dirty facilities with scarcity of water, medicine and food, where beating and bribing in exchange for medicine are common, and several detainees have died.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, there are well-documented reports of detainees who since January 2022 have been killed, tortured, and denied adequate food and medical care.¹⁴¹

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) reported that in the month of May 2022 around 9,000 Tigrayans were kept detained ‘illegally and unconstitutionally’ in Semera and Agatina camps in Afar since December 2021.¹⁴² The detained Tigrayans were arrested in the districts of Abala, Konaba and Berhale on the border of Tigray. Some of these detainees are kept in camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP).¹⁴³ A source consulted for this report stressed that IDP-camps are a synonym for detention, which also go under the name ‘concentration camps’ as people are held against their will and abused by authorities.¹⁴⁴ According to EHRC, detainees in these camps have suffered from epidemic diseases and human rights violations, including loss of lives.¹⁴⁵ Following the EHRC’s documentation and their plea to end the detention, thousands of the detained Tigrayans began returning to Abala town on the border of Afar and northern Tigray with UN assistance in mid-August.¹⁴⁶ At the time of reporting there is no further update on the situation, although it is confirmed that Abala town is left in ruins and basic services in the town are non-functional.¹⁴⁷ According to an international organisation interviewed for this report, it is a common procedure of the Ethiopian government to return IDPs to their areas of origin where all basic services have

¹³⁶ Al Jazeera, *Ethiopian officials accused of extorting Tigrayan detainees*, 10 February 2022, [url](#); Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹³⁷ The Guardian, *‘It’s death either way’: desperate Tigrayans flee starvation and forced conscription*, 20 June 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁸ Aljazeera, *Ethiopian officials accused of extorting Tigrayan detainees*, 10 February 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁹ Landinfo, *Etiopia: Forhold for etniske tigrayer utenfor Tigray*, 19 August 2022, [url](#), p. 4; Reuters, *Deadly detentions*, 17 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ Reuters, *Deadly detentions*, 17 June 2022, [url](#); Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 38-39; Al Jazeera, *Ethiopian officials accused of extorting Tigrayan detainees*, 10 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ HRW, *Ethiopia’s Invisible Ethnic Cleansing*, 16 June 2022, [url](#); Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 40-41

¹⁴² EHRC, *In a first of its kind Human Rights Situation Report on Ethiopia EHRC submitted to the House of Peoples’ Representatives the Commission call for government to protect, respect and guarantee human rights at all times*, Press release, 8 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴³ Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 28; Addis Standard, *News: Ethiopia rights body calls for immediate end to illegal detention of around 9,000 Tigrayans in Afar state*, 30 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ Senior Consultant: 103-104

¹⁴⁵ Addis Standard, *News: Ethiopia rights body calls for immediate end to illegal detention of around 9,000 Tigrayans in Afar state*, 30 June 2022, [url](#); EHRC, *In a first of its kind Human Rights Situation Report on Ethiopia EHRC submitted to the House of Peoples’ Representatives the Commission call for government to protect, respect and guarantee human rights at all times*, Press release, 8 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ Addis Standard, *News: Thousands of Tigrayans illegally held in Afar camps begin return to Ab’ala town*, 16 August 2022, [url](#); VOA, *Ethiopia: Detained Tigrayans Return to Hometown*, 17 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ The New Humanitarian, *EXCLUSIVE: The Ethiopian border town left in ruins as a ceasefire takes hold*, 2 June 2022, [url](#); VOA, *Ethiopia: Detained Tigrayans Return to Hometown*, 17 August 2022, [url](#)

been destroyed or damaged, and therefore areas of origin do not make up a conducive environment for safe returns of IDPs.¹⁴⁸

After the state of emergency was lifted in February 2022, Tigrayans outside Tigray are still exposed to widespread discrimination, persistent threats and deprivation of liberty.¹⁴⁹ The EHRC reported in July 2022 that detainees have been subject to unlawful treatment, while armed and organised groups and individuals have carried out ethnic motivated killings, physical injury and destruction or looting of property against civilians across many parts of the country.¹⁵⁰

Moreover, ethnic Tigrayans are constrained from moving freely not only in Tigray but in the whole country, due to the likelihood of falling under suspicion from federal authorities, police and security forces. This create an overall atmosphere of fear that in turn acts as a constraining factor on the free movement of Tigrayans. However, movement restrictions are not formal or uniform across the country.¹⁵¹

According to sources consulted for this report, Tigrayans who cross the country from Tigray to Addis Ababa face risks of interrogation and detention for the purpose of government surveillance and money extraction in Afar and Amhara.¹⁵² One source added that due to government surveillance, some high-ranking Tigrayans stay in Tigray out of fear of being persecuted outside Tigray.¹⁵³

3.3.1 Treatment of ethnic Tigrayans in Addis Ababa

Following the Tigrayan forces' withdrawal to Tigray in late December 2021, the number of reported reactions against ethnic Tigrayans decreased in Addis Ababa.¹⁵⁴ According to Landinfo's reports from April and August 2022, the situation in Addis Ababa has normalised compared to the preceding state of emergency, referring to the functioning of shops, hotels, schools and embassies and the decrease of police checks and arrests, and that it generally has become easier to manage a living in Addis Ababa.¹⁵⁵ Based on anecdotal accounts from a Tigrayan source from March 2022, Migrationsverket noted that the situation in Addis Ababa had improved, despite uncertainty as to what extend the new conditions were permanent or temporary.¹⁵⁶ The ICG Senior Analyst interviewed for this report confirmed that he is not acquainted with recent large-scale detentions of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa, at the time of reporting, compared to mass detentions in 2021, although confirming that roundups still occur.¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁸ International Organization: 26

¹⁴⁹ Foreign Policy, *There Is a Path to Peace in Tigray*, 5 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ EHRC, *In a first of its kind Human Rights Situation Report on Ethiopia EHRC submitted to the House of Peoples' Representatives the Commission call for government to protect, respect and guarantee human rights at all times*, Press release, 8 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ ICG Senior Analyst: 45

¹⁵² Senior Consultant: 113; ICG Senior Analyst: 43; Jan Nyssen: 89

¹⁵³ Jan Nyssen: 97

¹⁵⁴ Landinfo, *Etiopia: Utvikling siden november 2021*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁵⁵ Landinfo, *Etiopia: Utvikling siden november 2021*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p. 13; Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 35; Landinfo, *Etiopia: Forhold for etniske tigrayer utenfor Tigray*, 19 August 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁵⁶ Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p.

34

¹⁵⁷ ICG Senior Analyst: 39

Despite the decrease of arbitrary mass arrests of Tigrayans over the past months, targeted arrests of ethnic Tigrayans are still commonly practiced in Addis Ababa.¹⁵⁸ Interviewed sources confirmed the Ethiopian authorities' continuous practice of conducting arbitrary arrests in the capital, despite release of a significant numbers of detainees after the state of emergency was lifted.¹⁵⁹ In late May 2022, there were unverified reports of 349 people being arrested in Addis Ababa due to suspicion of terrorism. Reportedly, TPLF sympathizers were among the arrested.¹⁶⁰ Jan Nyssen added that Tigrayans in Addis Ababa and other locations across Ethiopia are continuously under pressure due to the fear of being detained in prison camps. According to the same source, many remain in detention centres in Addis Ababa. All Tigrayans – whether TPLF-members or not – are under government suspicion, and subsequently there exists an overall assumption that all Tigrayans are a potential risk to the federal government.¹⁶¹

Jan Nyssen added that Tigrayans are likely to face interception by authorities in Addis Ababa when moving in public spaces. Nevertheless, the same source claimed that Tigrayans in Addis Ababa are in a better position to hide their ethnicity due to the ethnic pluralism whereby all Ethiopian ethnicities are represented in the capital compared to other regions in Ethiopia.¹⁶² As of 2021, CIA World Factbook recorded 169,182 Tigrayans in Addis Ababa out of a total population of 5 million.¹⁶³ The ICG Senior Analyst differed in his view, saying that the level of government surveillance is high in the capital due to the relatively high concentration of Tigrayans.¹⁶⁴

Due to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Tigray, it is well-known that Tigrayans escape Tigray to Addis Ababa. There are recent reports of ethnic Tigrayans disappearing after they have been transported from Jari Camp in Amhara to Addis Ababa, including threats of recruitment to an army wing to fight the Tigrayan forces.¹⁶⁵ The information remains unverified at the time of reporting. However, there are similar reports of forced disappearance of detained Tigrayans in Addis Ababa from June 2021.¹⁶⁶

There are new reports of roundups, dozens of arrests and assumed forced disappearances of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa since the resumption of violence on 24 August this year. For instance, a senior Tigrayan opposition figure based in Addis Ababa has been missing since 29 August.¹⁶⁷ It is not unusual that detentions take the form of disappearance when the arrested are taken to an unknown location.¹⁶⁸

¹⁵⁸ Landinfo, *Etiopia: Forhold for etniske tigrayer utenfor Tigray*, 19 August 2022, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁵⁹ ICG Senior Analyst: 50; Jan Nyssen: 94

¹⁶⁰ Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#) p. 35

¹⁶¹ Jan Nyssen: 93-94

¹⁶² Jan Nyssen: 96; Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁶³ Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁶⁴ ICG Senior Analyst: 49

¹⁶⁵ The Guardian, *'It's death either way': desperate Tigrayans flee starvation and forced conscription*, 20 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ HRW, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Tigrayans Forcibly Disappeared*, 18 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷ Reuters, *Ethiopian, Eritrean troops clash with Tigrayan forces in the north*, 1 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p.

3.4 Treatment of alleged members or persons affiliated with TPLF

As detailed in section [3.1](#), reactions from the federal government potentially target all persons of Tigrayan origin rather than alleged or actual TPLF members or supporters solely.¹⁶⁹ The practice of targeting all persons with Tigrayan ethnicity has continued even after the state of emergency was lifted despite an announcement from the Ethiopian government that it is fighting TPLF-members.¹⁷⁰ As highlighted by two sources, while all Tigrayans are potentially targeted, high-profile leaders of TPLF and Tigrayan businesspersons are most vulnerable to reactions from federal forces.¹⁷¹

Moreover, relatives of suspected or actual TPLF members and prominent Tigrayans may fall under suspicion for affiliation with TPLF, and hence, relatives are exposed to the same type of sanctions as suspected or actual TPLF-members.¹⁷² See section [3.1](#) for more details.

3.5 Treatment of ethnic Tigrayans returning from abroad

Two sources consulted for this report did not have information regarding ethnic Tigrayans who have returned from abroad, besides the Ethiopian nationals who were repatriated from Saudi Arabia in January 2022, including ethnic Tigrayans. According to both sources, federal authorities arrested Tigrayans upon return and placed them in detention centres in Addis Ababa, Afar and other locations across Ethiopia. The Ethiopian authorities kept detainees under overcrowded and unhygienic conditions and abused them. Some detainees were subjected to forced disappearances, and an unknown number of detainees died. This account is echoed in several written sources emphasizing that detained Tigrayans were subjected to beatings, torture and inadequate access to food, water and medical care.¹⁷³ According to HRW, 40 percent of 40,000 repatriated Ethiopian nationals were Tigrayans, and the persecution and detention pertained to returnees with Tigrayan ethnicity.¹⁷⁴ An interviewed source noted that the federal government perceives returned Tigrayans from Saudi Arabia as a security treat.¹⁷⁵ Landinfo writes in their latest report from August 2022 that it is likely that Ethiopian authorities still undertake security assessments of migrants returning to Ethiopia.¹⁷⁶

In spite of limited evidence on conditions for returned Tigrayans, it is documented that up to 550 Ethiopian peacekeepers with Tigrayan ethnicity working in Sudan have sought asylum rather than returning home to Ethiopia, based on fear of being persecuted due to their Tigrayan ethnicity, as already mentioned.¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁹ Landinfo, *Etiopia: Forhold for etniske tigrayer utenfor Tigray*, 19 August 2022, [url](#), p. 3; HRW, *EU Should Press Ethiopia for Tangible Rights Progress*, 17 June 2022, [url](#); ICG Senior Analyst: 46; Jan Nyssen: 84, 89, 92

¹⁷⁰ Reuters, *Deadly detentions*, 17 June 2022, [url](#); Reuters, *Ethiopian soldiers seek asylum in Sudan, fear returning home due to Tigrayan ethnicity*, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ Jan Nyssen: 92; Senior Consultant: 102

¹⁷² ICG Senior Analyst: 48

¹⁷³ HRW, *Ethiopia: Returned Tigrayans Detained, Abused*, 5 January 2022, [url](#); Addis Standard, *News: Tigrayans repatriated from Saudi Arabia kept in detention, police unwilling to comment*, 10 May 2021, [url](#); VOA, *Ethiopia Dismisses Accusations of Abusing Repatriated Tigrayans from Saudi Arabia*, 6 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ HRW, *Ethiopia: Returned Tigrayans Detained, Abused*, 5 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ ICG Senior Analyst: 51

¹⁷⁶ Landinfo, *Etiopia: Forhold for etniske tigrayer utenfor Tigray*, 19 August 2022, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁷⁷ Reuters, *Ethiopian soldiers seek asylum in Sudan, fear returning home due to Tigrayan ethnicity*, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

Moreover, Tigrayan diplomats were dismissed or suspended from their postings after refusing summons to return to Ethiopia.¹⁷⁸

3.6 Surveillance and intelligence gathering

The ICG Senior Analyst assessed that large-scale arrests are accompanied by certain amounts of surveillance carried out by federal forces.¹⁷⁹ Government surveillance is primarily carried out physically at community and neighbourhood level, through networks of informants, combined with electronic surveillance. As an example, informants may alert authorities based on identification of public statements, which may be followed up with neighbourhood surveillance.¹⁸⁰ In addition, the government applies telecommunication and social media to monitor political activities.¹⁸¹

Two sources agreed in their views that the government, prior to Abiy Ahmed's takeover in 2018, had implemented a well-structured surveillance system. The sources deemed it hard to determine to what extent the type of surveillance system is re-established under the new government, and yet it is the impression of ordinary people that the system has been rebuilt in Addis Ababa and other regions.¹⁸² Nonetheless, surveillance finds considerable use as a repressive tactic through low-level intelligence and police activities, which are comparable to previous structures of surveillance.¹⁸³ According to the ICG Senior Analyst, the level of surveillance is particularly high in Addis Ababa due to the relatively high concentration of Tigrayans, as already mentioned.¹⁸⁴ Jan Nyssen stressed that Tigrayans under government surveillance would rather not leave Tigray, as the risk of persecution outside Tigray is too high.¹⁸⁵ In general, the level of fear is high¹⁸⁶, and Tigrayans are likely to keep a low profile, which especially applies to politically active people, as they are monitored and intercepted by the Ethiopian government.¹⁸⁷

Finally, according to the Dutch Foreign Ministry's COI-report from 2021, it is noted that the current government has informants in the diaspora who report to the Ethiopian authorities. However, this information is not confirmed by publicly available sources.¹⁸⁸

3.7 Treatment of alleged members or persons affiliated with Oromo opposition groups

A source interviewed by DIS in February 2021 stated the opposition parties in Oromo, including the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Oromo Federal Congress (OFC), receives the brunt of the federal authorities' repressive measures because these political parties pose the greatest threat to the current government. An

¹⁷⁸ Reuters, *Ethiopia at war: Ethiopia's crackdown on ethnic Tigrayans snares thousands*, 7 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ ICG Senior Analyst: 40

¹⁸⁰ ICG Senior Analyst: 40

¹⁸¹ International researcher: 66

¹⁸² ICG Senior Analyst: 40; International Researcher: 65

¹⁸³ ICG Senior Analyst: 40

¹⁸⁴ ICG Senior Analyst: 49

¹⁸⁵ Jan Nyssen: 97

¹⁸⁶ International researcher: 65

¹⁸⁷ Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 37

¹⁸⁸ GoN, *Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia*, February 2021, [url](#), p. 74

Ethiopian researcher told DIS in 2021 that OLF has been amid the main targets.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, a source interviewed in August 2022 argued that OLF is subject to more restrictions than OFC.¹⁹⁰ The section below will thus, among the legal parties in Oromia focus on the treatment of OLF members/supporters and the armed group OLA.

Formally, OLF is a legal party and its leadership distances itself from the OLA. However, the federal government does not recognize OLA and OLF as separate organisations. Consequently, OLF members would be suspected of having links to OLA.¹⁹¹

The killing of the prominent Oromo singer Hachlu Hundessa in June 2020 triggered widespread unrest in the Oromo region and parts of Addis Ababa. In response, the government cracked down on opposition groups in the region, including OLF members/supporters, accusing them of orchestrating and enacting the violence. Several opposition leaders and members were arrested, including Dawud Ibsa, chairman for OLF.¹⁹² All OLF offices were shut down and remain closed. In February 2022, Dawud Ibsa was released from house arrest; however, six senior officials remain in prison.¹⁹³

Regarding treatment of OLF members, supporters and family members, a source stated that available information is unverified. However, there are numerous stories about disappearances, mass arrests and torture of OLF members. Thus, perceived OLF supporters or members are likely to be ill-treated by the authorities according to the source.¹⁹⁴

According to Human Rights Watch's (HRW) publication from July 2022, government forces have targeted young Oromos, accusing them of supporting or affiliating with the armed group OLA.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, the international researcher said that there are numerous stories of alleged OLA supporters being tortured and family members being targeted by the authorities.¹⁹⁶ In July 2022, ICG reported that residents in western Oromo said that federal forces killed civil servants allegedly for refusing to cooperate against OLA.¹⁹⁷

¹⁸⁹ DIS, *Ethiopia Political opposition parties – recent developments*, March 2021, [url](#), p. 9-10

¹⁹⁰ International researcher: 63

¹⁹¹ International Researcher: 70; GoN, *Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia*, February 2021, [url](#), p. 20-21

¹⁹² HRW, *Ethiopia's Other Conflict Ethiopia's Tigray War Overshadows Ongoing Cycles of Violence in Oromia*, 4 June 2022, [url](#); International Researcher: 61-63; BTI, *Ethiopia Country Report 2022*, 2022, [url](#), p. 13; DIS, *Ethiopia Political opposition parties – recent developments*, March 2021, [url](#), p.7-8

¹⁹³ AfricaNews, *Ethiopia opposition leader released from house arrest*, 18 March 2022, [url](#); International Researcher: 62-64

¹⁹⁴ International Researcher: 67

¹⁹⁵ HRW, *Ethiopia's Other Conflict Ethiopia's Tigray War Overshadows Ongoing Cycles of Violence in Oromia*, 4 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶ International researcher: 61

¹⁹⁷ ICG, *Crisis Watch*, August 2022, [url](#)

4. Humanitarian situation in Tigray

Since the conflict erupted in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region in November 2020, the Tigray region has been under a de-facto blockade according to the UN. The Ethiopian government imposed a blockade, restricting humanitarian assistance to enter Tigray, including shutdown of telecommunications, electricity and banking services.¹⁹⁸

The humanitarian truce declared by the Ethiopian government in March 2022 and reciprocated by Tigray's regional government, allowed humanitarian aid to enter the region.¹⁹⁹ Although the humanitarian truce has enabled humanitarian convoys to move lifesaving supplies to Tigray since April, the disruption of and damage to market, roads, telecommunication and electricity continue to delay the humanitarian operations' ability to dispatch supplies, particularly outside Mekelle.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, several sources have raised concerns about the federal government's manipulation of humanitarian access and inducement of famine conditions in Tigray²⁰¹, while conflicts in other regions have impeded the access of humanitarian assistance into Tigray. Finally, the World Food Programme (WFP) has accused TPLF of looting fuel and food.²⁰²

4.1 Access to food

According to the Tigray Emergency Food Security Assessment, 83 percent of the population in Tigray are food insecure and 40 percent are suffering from an extreme lack of food.²⁰³ From April to June 2022, humanitarian aid only reached 25 percent of Tigray's population.²⁰⁴ Throughout July and August the blockade has been largely kept, which amounts to 'using hunger as a weapon of war'.²⁰⁵ The blockade continues to cause starvation and death from curable diseases.²⁰⁶ A Norwegian-based Tigrayan, with relatives inside Tigray, reported that people die from starvation rather than armed violence.²⁰⁷ US officials have assessed that roughly 700,000 people in Tigray live under famine-like conditions.²⁰⁸ Based on a WFP emergency food assessment²⁰⁹, half of all pregnant and breastfeeding women are malnourished, which also applies to nearly one in five children under the age of five.²¹⁰

¹⁹⁸ UNHCR, *Ethiopia Humanitarian Crisis*, updated August 2022, [url](#); AI, *Demand full humanitarian access into Tigray*, n.d, 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ Landinfo, *Temanotat Etiopia: Utvikling siden november 2021*, 8 April 2022, [url](#), p. 9

²⁰⁰ International organization:16

²⁰¹ Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopian officials admit using a Biafra-like siege to starve Tigray*, 11 August 2022, [url](#); ICG), *Building on Ethiopia's Fragile Truce*, 15 April 2022, [url](#); Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopian officials admit using a Biafra-like siege to starve Tigray*, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁰² The East African, *Food aid agency accuses TPLF fighters of looting 12 trucks of fuel*, 26 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁰³ WFP, *Severe hunger tightens grip on northern Ethiopia*, 28 January 2022, [url](#); UNHCR, *Ethiopia Humanitarian Crisis*, updated August 2022, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopian officials admit using a Biafra-like siege to starve Tigray*, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ BBC, *Ethiopia civil war: Why fighting has resumed in Tigray and Amhara*, 1 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ The Guardian, *'It's death either way': desperate Tigrayans flee starvation and forced conscription*, 20 June 2022, [url](#)

²⁰⁷ Bistandsaktuel, *Journalister smuglet inn i Tigray, dokumenterte ekstreme forhold*, 4 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ The Guardian, *'Trying to survive': millions in Tigray face hunger as they wait in vain for aid*, 23 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁰⁹ The assessment did not cover Western Tigray due to inaccessibility.

²¹⁰ The Guardian, *Tigray: almost one in three children under five malnourished, UN says*, 20 August 2022, [url](#)

4.2 Access to water

Since the onset of the conflict, trade, markets, and essential services such as banking, telecommunication, water and electricity have been obstructed and non-functional in Tigray. There is limited access to water, as the water points connected to the country network have been cut off. Only selected locations have access to running water, since electricity is a prerequisite for functioning water facilities. Humanitarian organisations have implemented water trucking although limited fuel hinder organisations from delivering sufficient amounts of water.²¹¹

4.3 Access to health

The conflict in Tigray has caused enormous damage to the health system. According to a survey by the regional health bureau, 90 percent of Tigray's hospitals and clinics are completely non-functional. Health-care facilities and medical equipment were looted or destroyed.²¹² In addition, a report by the UN Security Council (2022) stated that remaining hospitals in the Tigray region are used for military purposes.²¹³

4.4 Operationalization of airports

Commercial flights to the Tigray region have not been operating since the onset of the conflict in 2020. However, since June 2021, UN and Red Cross flights were given access to operate from Mekelle to Addis Ababa. Mekelle airport is the only functioning airport in Tigray for humanitarian means; however, a source from an international organisation noted that requests have been made by an international organisation to use the airport of Shire to transport goods and personnel.²¹⁴

²¹¹ International organization: 7,9

²¹² TNH, *Tigray's health system 'totally collapsed', say health workers*, 26 April 2022, [url](#); BMJ Global Health, *The impact of war on the health system of the Tigray region in Ethiopia: an assessment*, 8 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1-3

²¹³ UNSC, *Protection of civilians in armed conflict*, 10 May 2022, [url](#), p.21

²¹⁴ International organization: 23, 24; Independent Consultant: 36

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5. Annex 1: Meeting minutes

International Organization

27 July 2022, Microsoft Teams Interview

Brief overview of the humanitarian situation in northern Ethiopia

1. The conflict, which initially started in Tigray in November 2020, has spilled over to other surrounding regions, Amhara and Afar. Since April 2022 a humanitarian truce was declared by the Government of Ethiopia and accepted by Tigrayan officials. Most of the active combats and hostilities has ceased completely or diminished by large, except in boundary areas and around the borders with Eritrea. The line of conflict between the two sides (The Federal Government and Tigrayan forces) has been more or less static. However, people continue to move from Tigray to parts of Amhara. Since March 2022, Tigrayan troops have retreated from Afar. In addition, some IDPs in Afar have intentions to return to Tigray. According to a humanitarian situation update from July 2022, about 738 IDPs have expressed their intention to return to Tigray from Berhale Woreda in Afar. Some Tigrayans, who had been living in Ab'ala, Berhale would want to return to their home towns within Afar. Other Tigrayans working as daily laborers or undertaking seasonal jobs in Afar have asked to be sent to Tigray. According to the source, most IDPs have already returned on their own. As of 16 August, the return and relocation of IDPs into Afar has commenced. Those who want to be sent to Tigray will be part of this process
2. There are reports of clashes and hostilities occurring in border areas close to Eritrea. Some locations, particularly in the northeastern part of Ethiopia, have been difficult to reach by humanitarian agencies. In addition, there is a tense situation in the border areas of Sudan and Western Tigray, based on reports of hostilities. People residing in these border areas and boundary areas between regions, such as Afar and Amhara, face severe conditions.
3. Humanitarian organisations aim at delivering relief assistance across all sectors; education, nutrition, shelter, camp coordination and management, water and sanitation, protection, GBV prevention and child protection with a new focus area is explosive ordnance risk education.
4. The overall humanitarian situation in Ethiopia has significantly deteriorated since the beginning of the year leading to increased humanitarian needs across the country. Since 2020 the number of people in need has increased from 9 million to a bit less than 30 million across the country. There are at least 9 million of people in need in Afar, Amhara and Tigray, while the estimated number is 9 million people.

Access to information

5. The source obtains information mainly based on contacts on the ground, discussions with officials, discussions with people in need of humanitarian aid staff. In certain locations the source receives information from national and international NGOs. In addition, beneficiaries and stakeholders are

another key source of information, besides traditional and social Medias. However, the key source of information are affected people.

Impact of the humanitarian situation

6. Since government forces retreated from Tigray in July 2021, the whole Tigray region has remained under a de facto blockade. Western Tigray is under the de facto administration of the Amhara region with a limited presence of humanitarian organisations. The main towns in this region are Humera, Wolkayit and Dansha.
7. Since the outbreak of the conflict trade, markets, and essential services such as banking, telecom, water and electricity have been obstructed and non-functional in Tigray.
8. A major issue concerns access to electricity. Sources of electricity in Tigray are cut off from the rest of the country. However, stakeholders in Tigray have managed to find a way to restore electric power in Mekelle (regional capital). Electric power outside Mekelle is available though at times unstable and unreliable.
9. Access to water has been diminished as result of power disruptions. In addition, every water point or service that were connected to the country network have been cut off. These are mostly concentrated around the boundary areas between regions, which have affected access to water in Tigray but also affected services in Afar and Amhara. Only water sources from within Tigray are functioning, whereas water facilities that are connected to surrounding regions are disconnected. Only selected locations have access to running water, since electricity is a prerequisite for functioning water facilities. Campsites are particularly affected by water shortage. In response, humanitarian organisations implement water trucking although limited fuel hinder organisations from delivering sufficient amounts of water. Notwithstanding, the delivery of water, water trucks cannot compensate for the damage and destruction of the many water points.
10. Telecommunication, mobile phone and internet have been completely shut down. Only some selected humanitarian organisations have gained limited access to internet based on permission from the government. Affected people of Tigray have no access to phone service and internet, which prevent access to information and communication with relatives.
11. It has not been possible to import any goods to the Tigray region except from humanitarian aid through the land corridor to Afar or Amhara or via the air bridge from Addis Ababa to the airport in Mekelle. Humanitarian organisations have been able to bring in food, water, medicine, sanitation items and equipment to restore water points. Nevertheless, the source stressed the fact that humanitarian aid is intended to respond rapidly to a crisis and cannot substitute for the disruptions of markets, governments and services. Therefore, humanitarian aid is only a drop in the ocean when responding to the needs of affected populations within the region.
12. Basic services, such as power, banking, telecommunication, have completely stopped. All banks in Tigray are disconnected to the rest of the banks across the country which hinder transactions. On

top of that, people who have savings cannot access them due to destructions of banks, and therefore they would need to go outside Tigray to launch the process of accessing their accounts.

Extent of people in need

13. The number of people in need has increased. The source stated that a food security assessment is underway. Across Tigray, Amhara and afar more than 9 million people will be targeted for food assistance for this year. The number of people in need of different kind of food assistance in the whole country has increased to a bit less than 30 million people.

Humanitarian truce

14. The source stressed the difficulty of assessing all people in need and IDPs across the entire country.
15. In Tigray only humanitarian aid is being delivered from outside. Humanitarian organisations rely on one corridor to Afar, which was shut down between 15 December 2021 until 1 April 2022, which amounts to more than 100 days. However, as of 2 April 2022 humanitarian aid was delivered on regular basis into Tigray. In April 2022 40-50 trucks per day entered Tigray whereas in June 2022 more than 500 trucks have accessed Tigray per week, which amounts to 100 trucks per day. However, in July 2022 the number of trucks entering Tigray has fallen due to limited fuel available in the market, operational prioritization and pending receipt of goods for further transfer. Since this interview was held, the number of trucks has again been picked up and an arrangement has been found to secure a good amount of fuel.
16. Although the humanitarian truce has enabled humanitarian convoys to move much needed lifesaving supplies to Tigray since 2 April, the disruption and damage of market, roads, telecommunication and electricity impede the humanitarian operations' ability to dispatch supplies, particularly outside Mekelle. Due to shortage of fuel, delivery has to be facilitated via the land corridor to Mekelle. In same connection, humanitarian organisations are not able to dispatch services in the same speed they would like to due to fuel shortage. Fuel issues are affecting the whole country, not only northern Ethiopia. The source emphasised that organisations are aiming to find a solution to have regular access to fuel. In addition, high-level meetings are ongoing with the aim of gaining better access to fuel.
17. Food insecurity composed a main humanitarian concern in January 2022, which was mitigated by the successful harvest that contributed to higher resilience amongst the affected population until humanitarian operations were able to deliver assistance. Last year, the federal government was administering the region, so they did provide fertilizers (bulk) and humanitarian organisations did a part. As of mid-July, humanitarian organisations have managed to send fertilizers to Tigray.
18. The source is not sure whether there is an intentional blockage of humanitarian aid, but stressed the need of monitoring the situation over the coming weeks in order to draw any conclusions on that matter. Up to 17 August, no humanitarian blockade has been observed, according to the source.

How the humanitarian situation affecting Tigray, Amhara and Afar

19. The people living in the border areas between the three regions are faced with a similar situation, as they have limited or no access to electricity, running water or telecommunication. Those who reside near the conflict line are severely affected by the situation and experience worse conditions. Only in some pockets of Amhara or Afar some people are doing a bit better. Those persons who have returned to their area of origin have most often returned to a place where nothing is functioning.

Controlling of the border of Tigray

20. People cannot enter and leave Tigray. However, some people are managing to exit from Tigray and enter northeastern Amhara although there are no official routes open, except for the routes used for only humanitarian aid. The fact that there is no entrance or exit route to and from Tigray compose a major protection concern. This protection situation is exacerbated by the closure of banks, the poor operation and equipment of health care facilities and the fact that that affected populations are relying on humanitarian aid.
21. The source cannot confirm who controls the borders. However, the respective parties (ENDF and TPLF) control their part of the conflict line. Moreover, the borders compose a grey zone or buffer zone controlled by many actors. Some of the actors involved in border controlling include ENDF, Tigrayan forces and other groups in between, though other groups might be involved.
22. The ability to move in and out of Tigray has remained the same as there exist no freedom of movement. The source stressed that the international community should highlight that access to the region should not only include humanitarian assistance but the ability of civilians to exit and return.

Operationalization of airports

23. Only the airport of Mekelle is functioning in Tigray for humanitarian means, however, the source noted that his organisation has made a request to use the airport of Shire to transport goods and personnel.
24. Commercial flights are not operating but since June or July 2021 only UN or Red Cross flights are allowed.

Internally Displaced Persons

25. There is still a high amount of people living in camps and in host communities while many are still being displaced. The level of displacement has remained unchanged, although displacement in Amhara and Afar has been much less at the moment. In Amhara people arrive in displacement site from Tigray or the bordering area between Amhara and Tigray. In Afar some IDPs have started returning to their area of origin, some are planning to return soon, while others are expected to be relocated to Tigray soon upon their request. In Amhara there have been some returns to displacement sites not far from Addis in the southeastern part of Amhara. Another flow of movement is seen from the Oromia region to Amhara.

26. The source noted that there has always been high levels of displacement within the country and IDPs are displaced or returning to locations where nothing is functioning, and humanitarians struggle to provide them with basic services. In Ethiopia, once a situation has improved the government decides to return IDPs to their areas of origin where often they will find that all basic services have been destroyed or damaged. Moreover, IDPs are often kept in a form of open-air camp, which needs to be set up or equipped as an IDP camp. In many cases the extensive damage and destruction of private property as well as infrastructure does not provide a conducive environment for safe returns to the areas of origin.

Independent Consultant

Skype interview, 9 August 2022

Access to Information

27. The source obtains information mainly from primary data and secondary data. The primary data includes data collected from Diasporas (travelers) and informants from Eritrea as well as interviews with Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia. The secondary data covers publicly available sources, academic and non-academic, including traditional and social media sources.

Status of the conflict – the initial phase of the peace process

28. Peace negotiations between TPLF and the federal government have stagnated, with both sides emphasizing on their preconditions. The most important element being the siege/blockade on Tigray, which has been imposed since the onset of the conflict. The region continues to lack essential services such as food, medicine, electricity, telecommunications, banks and fuel. Thus, the Tigrayan officials are demanding a complete lifting of the blockade in order to proceed to the next stage of the peace process. According to the source, if the blockade is not lifted, hostilities between the warring parties may resume. The source further stated that the tensions are high, and already during the first week of August, sporadic fighting has been reported in the border areas in Western Tigray. TPLF stated in a press release on the 17 of August 2022 that the federal government is committing an unprovoked attack against the TPLF forces and thereby endangering the peace process.

Attack against civilians from the Eritrean side

29. During the initial phase of the conflict, all parties in conflict, including the Eritrea forces committed serious human rights violations and abuses, including extrajudicial killings and sexual violence against women. However, as a result of the March 2022 humanitarian ceasefire, active hostilities has subsided and attacks against civilians has reduced.

Humanitarian situation

30. In June, the federal government eased the blockade on Tigray, allowing significantly more aid into the region. However, the humanitarian situation in Tigray remains dire. According to the source, the humanitarian operations in Tigray are significantly hampered, as a result of severe shortage of fuel and cash.

Presence of Eritrean forces in Northern Ethiopia

31. Eritrean forces has been involved in conflict in Tigray since the conflict broke out in November 2020. Eritrean forces remain in the disputed Western Tigray Zone of Ethiopia. Ethiopia's border with Sudan is strictly controlled by the Eritrean forces with some support from the Amhara regional militia forces. The Eritrean government has deployed its regular army, and their aim is to prevent people and goods entering Tigray from Sudan, according to the source.

Access to Tigray

32. There is no access via Tigray's northern border. The main routes have been blocked due to the ongoing conflict. Continued fighting in the border regions between Tigray and neighboring Afar province to the east had made that route too dangerous to cross. Roads from Amhara region to the south and Sudan to west have also been closed as opposing militias contest for control of these areas. The source stated that Tigray's border with Sudan is completely closed and controlled by Eritrean troops. The border towards Sudan is extremely difficult to cross for Tigrayans, as it is firmly controlled by the Eritrean army.
33. Movement inside Tigray is not restricted. However, people cannot enter or leave Tigray. The borders are controlled from both sides. The source stated that under normal circumstances children and women would be able to leave a conflict zone. However, the regional government of Tigray have restricted all people from leaving the region, in anticipation that they may be called to fight. The Ethiopian government has imposed restrictions on movement in Tigray since the onset of the conflict. Tigrayans outside of Tigray region cannot enter the region. The federal government strictly controls this movement. Questioning why Ethiopian government restricts movement to and from the Tigray region, the source informed that in military terms, free movement of people from and to territories under the control of "enemy," in this case the TPLF is completely unacceptable. As this has military and security implications for the federal government, given that TPLF has wider support from ordinary Tigrayans.
34. Some people manage to leave Tigray by taking dangerous smuggling routes out of the region. The smuggling price is very high. According to the source, the price is in a continuous rise. One of the potential risks of being smuggled is that they may be intercepted by armed groups from both sides of the war and may be perceived as infiltrators.

Control of Tigray's border

35. The respective conflicting parties control their part of the conflict line. The Amhara regional militia forces (Fano) control Amhara's border with Tigray. The regional Amhara militias and the special federal forces occupy the disputed Western Tigray Zone of Ethiopia. The Western Tigray Zone shares borders with Sudan and this border area is (almost) fully controlled by the Eritrean forces. Government-allied forces, including Eritrean troops, control Tigray's border with the Afar-region. According to the source, the TPLF withdrew its forces from Afar a while ago, at least after the humanitarian truce of March 2022.

Airport in Tigray

36. The airports in Tigray region have been closed since the onset of the conflict. The airport in Mekelle has been operational with the aim of delivering humanitarian aid to the region. Diplomats and other officials participating in the peace talks have also used the Mekelle airport. Apart from the reasons mentioned above, the airport in Mekelle remains closed, according to the source.

International Crisis Group, Senior Analyst for Ethiopia**Skype meeting, 10 August 2022***Status on the conflict – focus on Tigray and Western Tigray*

37. The scale of conflict has decreased this year compared to last year. There has not been any large-scale confrontation between the federal military and Tigrayan forces. However, there are tensions on the border between Eritrean troops and Tigrayan forces as well as the southern border of Tigray (area claimed by the Amhara region).
38. There are reports of movement of forces in Western Tigray, especially Eritrean troops shifting their positions, including some rotation out of Tigray. Recently, there has not been reports of any major insurgencies in Western Tigray, as well as no sustained efforts of Tigrayan forces to retake Western Tigray. Western Tigray is primarily controlled by Amhara regional forces in combination with Eritrean and federal troops. The source is not sure about the positioning of the federal troops. There have been reports of Tigrayan efforts to retake parts of Western Tigray, which has not happened up to now. Although conflicts have decreased in Western Tigray, there are clashes on borders between Amhara militias, federal troops as well as Sudanese troops, which pertain to contested Ethiopia-Sudan border areas and not Western Tigray, specifically.

Profiling, arbitrary detention, forced recruitment and surveillance of Tigrayans

39. There are still significant numbers of Tigrayans who are detained across various locations in Ethiopia, although the source is not sure about the details and exact numbers. There has not been reports of large-scale detentions of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa or elsewhere in the last few months – nothing compared to the scale of detention in 2021. Occasionally, arrest roundups occur although the degree of arrests does not reach the scale of mass arrests in late 2021.
40. Large-scale arrests are accompanied by certain amounts of surveillance carried out by federal forces. Surveillance is primarily carried out physically at community and neighborhood level combined with electronic surveillance. For instance, informants may alert authorities based on identification of public statements, which may be followed up with neighborhood surveillance. The previous Ethiopian government had a well-structured surveillance system implemented at household level. According to the source, it is uncertain to which extent the same type of network has been reestablished under the new government. However, surveillance is considerably used as a repressive tactic through low-level intelligence and police activities, which appear similar to previous structures of surveillance.

41. Regarding forced recruitment into the TDF, the source stated that during this year (2022) there have been reports on the Tigray regional government forcing young people to join their army. There are also reports on families and individuals being pressured to coerce individuals join the TDF. The source further mentioned that this only occurred in Tigray, and arbitrary detentions were carried out in connection to this intervention; however, the magnitude of this is difficult to access.

Border control and movement constraints

42. The Tigray borders are militarised on both sides. Inside Tigray the border is controlled by Tigrayan forces, whereas Amhara and Afar forces control the other side of border.
43. There has been a significant number of Tigrayans leaving primarily through southern Tigray that borders with Amhara. The movement is a high-risk operation due to constraints on the border. The main concern of border-crossing includes the risk of detention after leaving Tigray as well as exposure to harassment or attacks. While these risks apply to the border area outside Tigray, the source isn't sure about the constraints that apply on the Tigray-side of the border and to what extent Tigrayan authorities restrict Tigrayans from leaving Tigray. However, it is reported earlier this year that societal pressure has been put on families and individuals to join the resistance of the Tigrayan forces as coercive measures by Tigrayan authorities, which is reportedly carried out primarily at local level.
44. The deteriorating humanitarian and economic situation in Tigray has spurred the motivation to leave Tigray, which in turn has led to an upsurge in smugglers who take payments to transport people across borders. Due to militarization of borders, getting assistance through means of smuggling has become one of few options to cross the border out of Tigray, while avoiding risks of detentions, arbitrary arrest and harassment. The source received the information from people who have crossed the border as well as secondary sources.
45. Ethnic Tigrayans are particularly constrained from moving freely in Ethiopia due to the increased risks of falling under suspicion from federal authorities, police and security forces. This create an overall atmosphere of fear that acts as a constraining factor on free movement of Tigrayans. The source points at the fact that movement restrictions are not formal and uniform, but individuals of Tigrayan ethnicity may also consider themselves more at risk that discourage travelling. During the first half of 2021, more formal travel restrictions were imposed as many Tigrayans consistently tried to leave Ethiopia by air through international airports.

TPFL profiling and opposition groups

46. The federal government has formally announced that TPLF-members are the problem and not Tigrayans. In addition, the Ethiopian government officially classified TPLF as a terrorist organisation. However, in practice all persons of Tigrayan origin are a potential target group of the federal government and forces. In addition, a large portion of Tigrayans support the autonomy position of the Tigrayan government which is run by TPLF. Thus, there is a large portion of Tigrayans who sympathize with the Tigrayan government positions, which has turned Tigrayans into a target of the federal government. According to the source, the targeting of Tigrayans, rather than TPLF-members

solely, has remained a critical problem for over a year now. Since 2021 it has been a common practice to target persons of Tigrayan origin, based on suspected affiliation with TPLF, rather than high-profile TPLF leaders solely.

47. In general, repression of opposition groups is arbitrarily enforced and not uniform across the country. For instance, the postponement of election in July 2020 led to a large round up of Oromo opposition parties and supporters at that time. However, the recent mass arrest of Amhara opposition supporters and militias in May was carried out as result of a government crackdown. Similar waves of repression and arrests has occasionally occurred across Ethiopia. According to the source, repressive measures and sanctions are enforced at different times and towards different political groups and constituencies, which create an overall atmosphere of fear that refrain political groups from operating politically.
48. Tigrayans, who are suspected by the federal government, are facing risks of arbitrary killings and detention for long periods without recourse to travel. Relatives of suspected TPLF-members are exposed to the same type of sanctions. The source exemplifies an incidence of prominent Tigrayans or prominent Tigrayan academics, who have no formal connection to TPLF, but are being suspected or detained based on their sympathy with the constitutional arguments made by Tigrayan government. In such a case, relatives would also fall under suspicion. Hence, it is a practice that family members of prominent Tigrayans are exposed to risks of arrest and detention.

Treatment in Addis Ababa

49. According to the source, the level of surveillance is high in Addis Abeba due to the relatively high concentration of Tigrayans.
50. At the beginning of the war, as well as the second half of 2021, there were periods of heightened tension and massive detentions that worsened the security situation in Addis. During the second half of 2021 when Tigrayan forces advanced towards Addis, the capital composed another insecure situation with renewed detentions. As Addis has the highest concentrations of Tigrayans, there is a high amount of arrests and detentions, although similar level of persecution has been present elsewhere in Ethiopia, such as in Amhara, despite a lower concentration of Tigrayans. The source is not sure to what degree the practice of arrest and detention has changed following the lifting of the state of emergency in February. The enactment of the state of emergency did formalize and legitimize arbitrary detention, which heightened the insecurity and increased the number of arbitrary detentions. When the state of emergency was eased in February, a significant number of detainees were released, but federal authorities have continued the practice of conducting arbitrary detention.

Returning Tigrayans

51. The source is not aware of Tigrayans who have returned to Ethiopia recently, except from [Tigrayans who were deported back to Ethiopia from Saudi Arabia](#). The returned Tigrayans from Saudi Arabia were perceived as security treat who became subject of detention and forced disappearance. The current status of the detained Tigrayans from Saudi Arabia is unknown.

TPLF in Afar

52. After the enactment of the humanitarian truce on 24 March Tigrayan forces completely withdraw from Afar in response to a perceived threat from local armed groups. This is stressed in a [Q&A from the International Crisis Group](#). While the peace process is stumbling, the source was not aware of any increase of tension on the Afar and Tigray border. However, following this interview, the source has added that this has now changed with renewed conflict in late August.

International researcher**Skype interview, 11 August 2022***Access to Information*

53. When asked about access to information, the source stressed that it is difficult to access verified information about the current situation in the Oromo region. Available information is provided by sources invested in the conflict. Thus, reliable information is limited. For instance, the source further explained that it is difficult to obtain information about the number of casualties or number of internally displaced persons in the Oromo region. Although, the assumption is that these numbers are high.
54. The source obtains information from informants in the region or persons who have family members in the region. According to their accounts, the civilian population is caught in the armed struggle between government forces and Oromo Liberation Army (OLA).

General security situation in the Oromo region

55. The Oromo region has been the site of anti-government protests and insurgency for many years. Since early 1970s, the Oromo national movement has been active through the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), mainly operating in the eastern parts of the region. However, since the 1980s Wollega became an important site for the OLF. The fighting at this time remained on a low scale. The Ethiopian government banned OLF, however, the organisation returned as a political actor in the early 90s. During the transitional period, the OLF withdrew from the political and democratic process, and continued its armed struggle with the Ethiopian government. In 2018, Abiy Ahmed invited the OLF back into the political landscape, and OLF was registered as a legal political party. The OLA that emerged was a faction of OLF's forces that refused to be disarmed and continued its armed struggle against the government in the western parts of Wollega.
56. Since 2018, instability in the region has increased, as fighting between the actors have intensified. The security situation is relative stable throughout the region. However, areas such as Wollega, Shewa and Gugi are particularly affected by the insecurity as well as parts of Borana. These areas remain inaccessible for journalists and aid worker, thus, it is difficult to assess the level of insecurity. Nevertheless, the source stressed that the situation is volatile and the civilian population is highly affected by the current instability.

57. The source stated that violence and instability in the Oromo region has increased since 2018, as the government and OLA fight for power and control over the region. The main reason being the physical presence of the Oromo opposition groups. Prior to 2018, the opposition groups had limited presence in the region, as many were in exile in neighboring countries. However, since 2018 opposition members have returned to the region, which has enabled them to conduct large operations and gain control of large areas, such as Wollega, Shawe and Gugi.
58. OLA has gained ground in western Oromo and controls larger rural areas, whereas, the regional forces has retreated to towns. In many cases, an area is controlled by the government during the day and by OLA at the night.
59. OLA has been successful in recruiting new soldiers to its ranks. Many of the new recruits are from the Qeeroo-movement. After the government crackdown on the movement, many of its members joined the OLA to continue their fight. The Qeeroo is an Oromo ethnic based youth movement, which launched mass protests in the region between 2014 and 2018, resulting in the coming to power of the current Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed. The Qeeroo youth movement was able to enforce economic strikes and disrupt government activities on regular basis.
60. According to the source, the situation in Oromo region is in a stalemate. The armed conflict between OLA and the government forces has been ongoing for two years. The government is unable to combat OLA, and OLA have been unsuccessful in gaining control of larger areas and establishing structures of governance.

Treatment of OLF/OLA-members

61. Since Abiy took office, there have been several waves of mass arrests of people perceived to be opposed the government. According to the source, the authoritarian system architected by the EPRDF has been re-installed. The government cracks down on OLA's activities or suspected OLA activities. The source further stated that thousands of people are in prison. There are numerous stories of people being tortured and family members being targeted by the authorities.

OLF office

62. After the prominent Oromo singer, Hachlu Hundessa, was shot and killed in Addis Ababa in June 2002, protests resumed in the Oromo region and parts of Addis Ababa. In response, the government cracked down on OLF and OFC, arresting several senior officials, including Jawer Mohamed. All OLF offices were shut down and remain closed.
63. Dawud Ibsa, the chairperson of OLF, was released from house arrest in February 2022. Since then, Dawud Ibsa has not made any official statements. The organisation is not allowed to hold meetings or rallies, and their infrastructure is demolished. According to the source, OLF is simply a political party on paper. The OFC have more room to operate and were able to convene some meetings during the year.

OLF/OFC officials in prison

64. Jawar Mohamed, Dawud Ibas and some other OFC officials were released in January and February this year (2022). However, six senior officials remain in prison.

Surveillance

65. The EPRDF, which has ruled the country for more than 27 years, was known for its repressive laws and other measures against political opposition. The Tigrayans who dominated the government (EPRDF) did build a very structured surveillance system. When Abiy Ahmed came to power, many Tigrayans officials were released from their positions and reforms were passed to dismantle the system. Thus, the source argues that it is difficult to determine to what extent the surveillance system from the previous regime has been rebuilt. However, the impression of people on the grassroots in general is that the system has been rebuilt in Addis Ababa and in others regions. According to the source, the level of fear is high and people are careful to whom they speak to and what they say.
66. The main monitoring tools/surveillance methods applied by the government include telecommunication and the network of informants. The latter is implemented throughout the country and has gradually been rebuilt, according to the source. The government monitors activities via social media, (those they suspect of political activities), Informants listen in on conversations (for example in cafes and other public spaces), Informants try to engage people in conversations about politics, then report to the authorities. This does not applies only people engaged in combat, but anyone suspected of sympathy for OLA, etc.

Treatment of OLA/OLF- members

67. Regarding treatment of OLF members, supporters and family members, the source stated that available information is unconfirmed. However, there are many stories about disappearances, mass arrests and torture, which makes this highly likely, according to the source. Perceived supporters or alleged members of OLF are met with harsh treatment.
68. Assuming that the “old” surveillance system has not been reestablished 100 %, the consequence will then be that the government’s action /repressive tactics might be carried out in arbitrary/ random manners, resulting in mass arrest and targeting large group of people (mostly Tigrayans), in an attempt to capture persons in opposition to the government.
69. Asked about if individuals under government surveillance are able to relocate to Addis Ababa, the sources stated that it depends on the level of suspicion. Generally, there is a great need for ID-cards in Addis, due to the high-level of bureaucracy. Thus, individuals under government surveillance seek refuge in smaller towns. However, there are anecdote accounts that the government has been able to track people relocating to new areas.

OLA vs. OLF

70. Formally, OLF is a legal party. The OLF leadership distance itself from the OLA; however, the government does not recognize OLA and OLA as separate organisations. Thus, members of OLF would be suspected of having links to OLA.

Activities monitored by the government

71. The main monitoring tools/surveillance methods applied by the government include telecommunication and the network of informants. The latter is implemented throughout the country and has gradually been rebuilt, according to the source. The government monitors activities via social media, especially those suspected of political activities. Informants listen in on conversations, for example in cafes and other public spaces. Moreover, Informants try to engage people in conversations about politics and then report to the authorities. The source advised that this do not apply only people engaged in combat, but anyone suspected of sympathy for OLA, etc.

Jan Nyssen, Professor of Physical Geography, Ghent University

Skype interview, 16 August 2022

Jan Nyssen is a professor in physical geography. His research (mainly in Ethiopia) focuses on land degradation and resilience.

Methodology

81. Jan Nyssen is part of a research group collecting data on the situation in Tigray, focusing on civilian casualties. The research group records incidents. Volunteers collect the data on ground and the findings are cross-checked with other sources.
82. The research is mainly done on voluntary basis; four months funding was provided by *Every Causality Counts* (doing investigation on civilian victims in conflicts) that is an independent not-for-profit organisation, exclusively focused on promoting effective casualty recording in situations of armed violence. The ECC funding allowed publishing a website holding all information collected (www.ethiopiaticgraywar.com)

Status of the conflict

83. The Tigray region remains under blockade imposed by the federal government of Ethiopia. As result, the region continues to lack essential services, such as food, medicine, electricity, telecommunications, trade, banks and fuel. Consequently, residents of the region are more or less cut off from communication to the outside world. International aid organisations continue to struggle in their efforts to provide humanitarian aid into the region. The amount of humanitarian aid is far from meeting the needs of people.

Situation of Tigrayans

84. According to the source, Tigrayans are generally under suspicion throughout the country. The government carried out mass arrests targeting ethnic Tigrayans, especially during active periods of the conflict. They are kept in prison camps (with high mortality rate).
85. Western Tigray is a disputed area, which came under the control of the Amhara regional forces within two weeks of the outbreak of the conflict. Since then Tigrayans have been displaced from the region, some of them to Sudan, most to other parts of Tigray. According to the source, ethnic profiling, arrest and killing of Tigrayans continues in Western Tigray in an attempt to eradicate the Tigray population and integrate Western Tigray into Amhara region. Many Tigrayans from western Tigray are still detained. From time to time some have managed to escape to Sudan.
86. A quite large strip of Tigray, along the northern border has been controlled by Eritrea since the start of the conflict and is still in Eritrean hands. Very little is known about these places, presumably a lot of massacres and the inhabitants have been forced to accept Eritrean ID cards.

Exit and enter into the Tigray region

87. As the humanitarian situation in the region deteriorates, some people try to leave the region in an attempt to find food in the neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions, although there are high risks of harassment and detention from militia groups. Other Tigrayans try to reach Addis Ababa, which is considered a highly risky journey. There are no flights out of the region, and the roads are highly insecure. The source stressed that the Fano militia group that controls Tigray's border with Amhara region is known for its harsh treatment of Tigrayans, including killings. Thus, moving out of Tigray region is associated with great risks, especially for intellectuals and other high-ranking profiles who risk persecution from the authorities.
88. Tigrayans exiting the Tigray region may use the route via Alamata in the southern part of the region. The source stated that there are other routes; however, Alamata is considered a hub for getting in contact with the outside world. Busses operate between Mekelle and Alamata. In Alamata it is possible to catch the mobile signal and to give a telephone call to relatives or money smugglers. From Alamata people would normally walk to Kobo, which is approx. 40km away from Alamata. However, as the road between Alamata and Kobo is dangerous, due to the presence of militia groups, people thus opt to use smugglers.
89. When Tigrayans arrive in the neighbouring regions of Afar and Amhara, they are interrogated by the federal authorities and placed in detention centres for purpose of surveillance and extracting money. In some cases, people are released from the detention centres and able to proceed their journey to Addis; such is particularly the case for non-Tigrayans, people willing to enrol in the ENDF, and those who make public statements against the Tigray authorities. While others remain in detention centres. The general assumption by security forces is that all Tigrayans are spies and support the regional government in Tigray.

90. Regarding, the extent to which the federal government controls movement in and out of the region, the source confirmed that the government exercises some level of control – this is evident from the government control over the humanitarian sector. Other cases are known where goods (coffee, fuel) and cash that were carried by private traders to Tigray had been confiscated. Except the UN convoys, not any vehicle will pass across the Tigray regional borders. The Tigrayan forces seem to restrict movement out of Tigray, most probably due to “regional pride” and possibly to sustain the recruitment of people to the Tigray army (TDF).

Recruitment to TDF

91. Tigrayans view the federal government as an enemy that sided with the ethnic Amharas, and carried out many massacres, whereas TDF are regarded as freedom fighters protecting the Tigrayans. Recruitment to the TDF is thus largely on a voluntary basis. However, the source did not rule out the possibility of forced recruitment and especially social pressure to join the TDF.

Profiling and conditions in Addis Ababa and other Ethiopian towns

92. The federal government potentially targets all Tigrayans. However, there is a focus on the leaders of the TPLF and TDF, some were killed during the conflict and others were captured when the federal government took control over Mekelle. High-profile leaders of TPLF are specifically targeted. A government list featuring more than hundred wanted persons consisting of TPLF leaders. According to the source, several from the list have been executed and others were killed during warfare, others were imprisoned when ENDF occupied Mekelle. The majority of them are in Mekelle now. In addition, Tigrayan business persons (hotel owners in Addis Ababa for instance) are specifically targeted with the aim of extracting money.

93. The source states that Tigrayans in Addis Ababa and other places in Ethiopia are continuously under pressure due to fear of being detained in prison camps. In addition, Tigrayans are hindered from getting jobs and are hence prone to beg for survival. Any hire of Tigrayan would lead to suspicion of being a TPLF-spy.

94. During the state of emergency, the government security forces arrested and imprisoned many Tigrayan civilians across the country, especially in Addis Ababa. When the state of emergency was lifted in February 2020, many Tigrayans were released, however the sources is of the impression that many remain in detention centres and Tigrayans continue to be targeted by security forces in Addis Ababa and other locations. The source further stated that, Tigrayans living in Addis Ababa take cautious measures to avoid attention from the authorities. All Tigrayans, TPLF or not, are under suspicion. As mentioned early, the general assumption is that all Tigrayans are a potential risk to the federal government.

95. Regarding sanctions on Tigrayans in Addis, the source stated that Tigrayans in varies of public institutions were released from the positions.

96. Tigrayans are identified through their names (while some names are shared with Amhara, other names are typical Tigrayan), their language, their accent, traditional scarifications on their temples,

through alerts from neighbours, and to some extent via their ID-cards. ID-cards mention the region of origin. However, as far as the source is aware, ethnicity does not appear on the ID-cards in Addis Ababa. Almost all the Ethiopian ethnic groups are represented in Addis Ababa to some extent. Therefore, Tigrayans can easily blend into the population, whereas in Bahir Dar (and other cities of the Amhara region) with less ethnic diversity, Tigrayans can be singled out and risk persecution from the authorities. However, once Tigrayans move in public spaces and speak their language there are increased risks of being captured by authorities.

Surveillance

97. Tigrayans under government surveillance would not leave the Tigray region, as the risk of being arrested is too high. Generally, high-ranking Tigrayans stay in Tigray, as they fear persecution from the authorities.
98. During the conflict, two groups of people were detained. Military and security personal of Tigrayan background were arrested and placed in detention centres across the country. Majority are still in such prison camps. Tigrayan civilians were targeted by the security forces and arrested, however, many of the detained have been released.

Treatment of returnees – Tigrayans

99. During 2021 and beginning of 2022, Ethiopian nationals were repatriated from Saudi Arabia, including ethnic Tigrayans. Upon return to Ethiopia, the Tigrayans were arrested and placed in detention centers in Addis Ababa, Afar and other locations in the country. According to anecdotal accounts, the detainees were kept in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions, and were subjected to abuse by the Ethiopian authorities. Many died.

Senior Consultant

Zoom meeting, 16 August 2022

The source works as a Professor and Senior Consultant in topics of peace, security, law and governance, human rights, and humanitarian and migration issues and is well-informed about the situation of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

Sources of information

81. As a professor and researcher, the source has access to different datasets, including statistics and information from European commission, UNHCR, IOM etc. the source has access to wider networks of scholars in the region in different parts of Africa and networks of experts that share and compile information. The source also receives first-hand information from individuals, including scholars, refugees, IDPs, political leaders etc. Some missions share information with the source, verify information from other sources and compile information in systematic ways.

Update on the conflict situation after February 2022 up to now

82. The fighting has subsided significantly but there are clashes between Amhara and Tigray regions, reports of artillery exchange with Eritrea and tension in Tigray on the border to Eritrea. There is hope that mediation will bring some sense of formal cessation of hostilities, but the region is extremely volatile. There can be a return to conflict any time.

Profiling and arbitrary detention of Tigrayans

83. The number of detentions have decreased compared to a year ago, when a massive campaign of arrest and disappearance started. Despite the decrease of arrests, arrests continue. Particularly high-profile Tigrayans and opposition leaders are targeted to a wide degree. Recently, the head of foreign affairs relations of the [National Congress of Great Tigray \(Baytona Party\), Kibrom Berhe, was rearrested](#). He is in *incommunicado*, so no one - not even his family - knows where he is placed. Beside this incidence, there are several cases of arrests there were reported recently. Arrests are not limited to TPLF-members, as most have been arrested already. Amongst the arrested are also opposition leaders and Tigrayans who are outspoken and speaks against the regional government.
84. In Afar and Amhara Tigrayans are kept in detention. For instance, those Tigrayan civilians who left Tigray for the purpose of looking for food and services are being detained in Amhara and Afar. In Afar Tigrayans are harassed as the regional government suspect them for being members of TPLF. In Amhara, Tigrayans are put in detention centres or IDP camps immediately. The source recently received unverified reports of 33 Tigrayans who were detained in Sokota town in Amhara, close to the border of Tigray, which is controlled by Amhara regional state. It is well-known that there exists 'concentration camps', in which a significant number of people have been sent to, including political leaders.
85. The source estimated that the total number of detainees across Ethiopia accounts to 20,000, based on UN and Reuters reports. The number includes those held in IDP-camps, which are actual detention places where people are held against their will. The source stressed that arrests of Tigrayans are still ongoing although a significant number of Tigrayans have been released. This has brought confusion and uncertainty about whether detainees are new or old.

Forced recruitment to join Tigrayan forces

86. According to the source, four months ago there were reports of Tigrayan families who were being pressured to send their children to be deployed to the TDF by local authorities – even those families who had left Tigray region. The regional government of Tigray spoke out against the incidents of induced or forced military recruitment, stating that the cases were separate and specific incidents that did not reflect the general practice or policy of the region and that corrective measure had been taken. The source is not aware of recent reports of forced recruitment or pressure to join TDF. Some Tigrayans who left Tigray have said that the reason they left was due to pressure they were put under when they refused to join the TDF.

Tigray Border control and freedom of movement

87. TDF is in charge of border areas in collaboration with local militias who play a major role along with the local police. The recent police force in Tigray has recently been reconstituted and trained because the previous police structure was disrupted. However, TDF and local militias mainly control the borders.
88. ENDF along with regional police and special forces are in charge of the Tigrayan borders outside Tigray.
89. There are reports that Eritrea Defence Force (EDF) control Tigray northern border towards Eritrea. There have been unverified reports of tensions and exchange of artilleries with EDF.
90. Western Tigray is controlled mainly by Amhara Special Forces and Amhara militias. There are few areas that are controlled by EDF bordering Eritrea.
91. Tigray is under total lockdown in terms of movement. The ease of the humanitarian blockade only serves the purpose of delivering humanitarian aid to Tigray, which is insufficient. The blockade or siege is maintained and affects communication and transport to and from the region. The recent pronouncement of the UN, EU and Us envoys gave hope that they would push for the lifting of the siege in order to give full access of humanitarian aid, but up to today there is no change.
92. Tigrayans are completely restricted from leaving Tigray and travelling to other parts of the country. Majority of the movement out of Tigray happens by foot, as other means of transportation is not available due to the restrictions imposed on the region.
93. Persons who move out of Tigray do it out of necessity. Generally speaking, Tigrayans are subjected to harsh treatment outside of Tigray-region.
94. Some individuals are smuggled to Addis Ababa with all associated risks of mistreatment in Amhara and Afar. Regional authorities in Amhara and Afar may suspect Tigrayans for spying, and they extract money and demand bribes, based on the intention of impoverishing Tigrayans.
95. There is no agreement between parties after the cessation of hostilities, and consequently arrests and detentions have continued from federal forces. According to the source, there are tens of thousands in detentions and in *incommunicado* which add to the overall atmosphere of fear amongst the Tigrayan population that has a hindering effect on Tigrayans' movement.
96. There are high risk of arrest and detention in the border areas near Tigray, particularly on the border to Amhara and to some extent Afar. For instance, the 33 Tigrayans who reportedly were arrested in Sokota in Amhara is located near the border. Though reports state that Tigrayans have been located to IDP-camps in Amhara region, the reality is that people are forcefully placed in detention centers under government surveillance. The assumption is that all Tigrayans are under suspicion.

6. Annex 2: Terms of Reference

1.1 Development of the conflict in Ethiopia – key events since February 2022

1.2 Update on the security situation

1.2.1 Tigray

1.2.2 Amhara

1.2.3 Afar

1.2.4 Oromia

2. Human rights situation and treatment of specific groups

2.1 Treatment of ethnic Tigrayans in Tigray

2.1.1. The situation in Western Tigray

2.2 Treatment of ethnic Tigrayans outside Tigray and in Addis Ababa

2.3 Conditions for ethnic Tigrayans returning to Ethiopia

2.4 Treatment of alleged members or persons affiliated with TPLF

2.5 Treatment of alleged members or persons affiliated with opposition groups in Oromia

3. Humanitarian situation in Tigray

3.1 Access to Food

3.2 Access to Water

3.3. Access to Health