

Ethiopia: Vigil Insight Situation Report

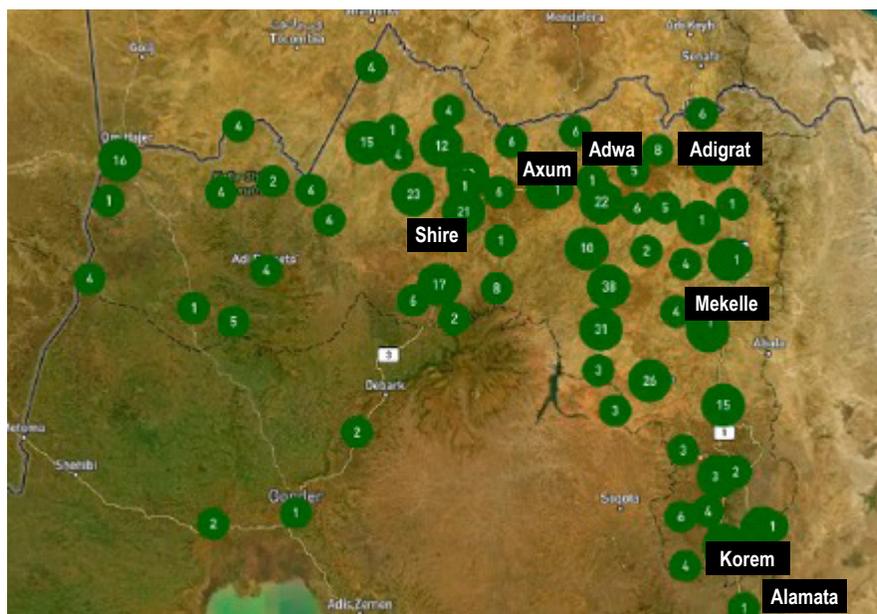
14 July 2021

The current ceasefire remains fragile, as the Ethiopian government will look to reinforce defences around Tigray, and the country's borders, while the TDF will seek to keep fighting until at least the pre-conflict borders are restored, adding to the complexity of delivering aid. Meanwhile Oromia and Amhara regions will continue to see sporadic clashes.

This document provides an analysis of the current situation within Ethiopia and the implications for aid agencies working there.

SUMMARY

- The Ethiopian Government's unilateral ceasefire of 28 June (see [previous report](#)), continues to hold, though it remains HIGHLY fragile.
- The Tigrayan Defence Force originally described the ceasefire as "a joke" but 04 July they accepted it "in principle" – but continues to recapture towns south of Mekelle from Ethiopian forces.
- The number of reported armed conflict events in Tigray has declined compared to November-March but have reportedly intensified in recent weeks in several parts of Tigray.
- Aid deliveries will remain piecemeal, with only international organisations such as the WFP/ UN having the diplomatic hard power to ensure supplies are delivered. An air bridge is UNLIKELY in the short term.
- Armed conflict events and violence against civilians³ in Oromia and Amhara also carry implications for aid operations.



Cluster map showing the location and number of reported armed conflict events¹ in Tigray, between 04 November 2020 and 25 June 2021.

Note: This map is based on the ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) data set²

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MITIGATION FOR AID ORGANISATIONS

Security force activity will remain significant, and the consequent high rate of incidents means the risk to aid organisations is currently rated as **HIGH** throughout the country, with Tigray region being rated as **VERY HIGH**. Aid agencies will need to continue their own assessments of how to adjust their security strategies, but there are options available:

- Those traveling to the field need to understand local complexities and ensure their team is composed in a manner that signals neutrality and are able to negotiate in tense situations.
- Programmes should be as open and transparent, and apolitical with all parties, especially at checkpoints and with equipment held in vehicles.
- Programs should be designed around your Acceptance Strategy, with regular communication with local civil and military leaders to monitor acceptance.
- Psychological first aid structure or system for staff to be implemented as an operational requirement.
- Ensure that communications with either HQ or a coordinating body such as OCHA, can be maintained. Ensure alternative means of communications in case of being stopped and drawn into an incident that may deteriorate.
- Ensure link up with larger organisations – such as the UN (where possible) – in order to take advantage of international pressure on both sides, as well as potential collaboration on the ground.
- Consider the safety and security implications for national staff working or traveling across Ethiopia in the context of ethnic violence in regions beyond Tigray.

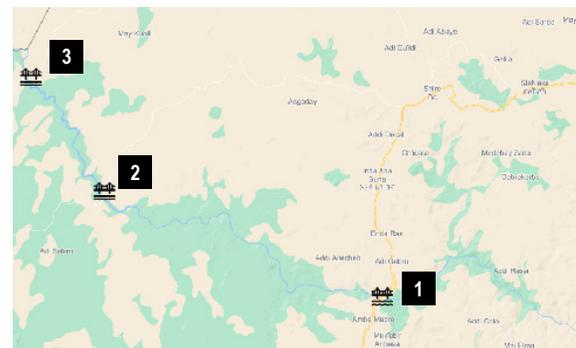
Developments in Tigray

The Ethiopian Government's **unilateral ceasefire of 28 June**, continues to hold, though it remains **HIGHLY** fragile. The Tigrayan Defence Force (TDF) originally described the ceasefire as “a joke” but on 04 July they accepted it “in principle” – albeit with very stringent terms. These included that there would be no further “invasions” as a “fool-proof guarantee that the security of our people will not be compromised”. Since then, the TDF has claimed to have recaptured Korem, 170 km south of Mekelle, and to be pushing further south towards Alamata.

Other demands include the delivery of aid and the return of displaced people. This came as **two bridges** over the Tekeze River were destroyed, with credible reports that the Amhara Special Forces were responsible. Despite this and increased checkpoint controls, the WFP has managed to resume aid deliveries into Tigray after a pause of several days, with aid now reaching at least 40,000 in the north-west. A WFP spokesperson was reported as saying that he was “cautiously optimistic” an air bridge could be set up in the next few days.

Separately, MSF has halted operations in Tigray due to the murder of three staff members, noted in the **last report**.

Map showing the bridges over the Tekeze river. It is likely that the first and second bridge were destroyed, but it has also been reported the third bridge was destroyed.



Election related Violence

Election results were declared on 10 July, with Prime Minister's Ahmed Abiy's Prosperity Party winning 410 out of 436 parliamentary seats, granting him another five- year term in office. Both pre-and post-election has seen limited reports of violence.

Reported incidents of election violence in June 2021

Oromia⁴

21 June: In Liben Jawi (Nono election constituency, North Shewa), the election process in two polling stations was interrupted due to an attack by members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)-Shane on three individuals.

21 June: In Mieso, a convoy escorting electoral officers was attacked as they travelled to a polling station. Two federal police officers were killed and three others injured.

20 June: In the Dugda Dawa area, unidentified armed perpetrators attacked federal police as they escorted electoral officials on the road toward Yabelo. One security officer died and a second was wounded.

19 June: In Reda Soroma (East Wolega), unidentified armed perpetrators attacked an election polling station. One person died and three others were injured.

16 June: In Liben Arsi Woreda (West Arsi) near Kofele, unidentified armed perpetrators **shot and killed an election the deputy head of the education bureau, who was working as an election official.**

Amhara

21 June: In Dembecha (West Gojam), Baso Liben (East Gojam) and Goncha Woreda (West Gojam), security forces reportedly beat members of EZEMA and NaMA parties on election day.

20 June: In Dabat Woreda, a polling station was attacked by unidentified armed perpetrators. One police officer was killed and another officer was injured, whilst two of the perpetrators were also killed after the police returned fire.

SNNP

19 June: In Jarso, local kebele militias beat an EZEMA party supporter.



ANALYSIS

Open source data shows that armed conflict events in the Tigray region have decreased.

The Eritrean military has pulled back from Shire, Axum, and Adwa to defensive positions on the Eritrean – Ethiopian border, whilst the Ethiopian Army has pulled out troops of Western Tigray towards the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and the borders with Sudan and Egypt.

Meanwhile propaganda or “fake news” remains prevalent with both sides maintaining the other destroyed the bridges over the Tekeze River. However, claims that the TDF blew the bridges as a defensive “moat ” lack credibility given their recent military successes. The credible media reports referencing the Amhara special forces suggest that the Ethiopian government and Eritrean Army are attempting to encircle Tigray, in order to prevent any further TDF gains, as well as pressurising the TDF and the civilians currently supporting them. A key way of doing this is by limiting supplies into the area, although the Ethiopian government has denied this is happening.

Nonetheless, aid is being delivered, despite INGO staff members previously reporting that they were initially struggling to get supplies into Tigray, by international organisations such as the WFP, with a convoy from the WFP arriving in Mekelle on 12 July. Although the government said on 05 July that it has opened up air space for aid into Tigray, none has so far been delivered by air. It is **LIKELY** that the government was under international pressure when it stated air space was open, implying that on occasions the Ethiopian government will react positively towards international influence.

Transport of aid may further be impaired by the start of the “rainy” season, leading to some roads becoming heavy with mud. This will, however, also be an advantage in maintaining the ceasefire, as both sides will find it increasingly hard to bring up heavy weapons as weather conditions deteriorate.

Total number of reported armed conflict events in Tigray 04 November 2020 to 25 June 2021, by month

- Although there is a reduction in reported armed conflict events since April 2021, the involved conflict parties have not changed.
- Armed conflict has reportedly intensified over the second and third week of June in North-Western, Central, and Southern Tigray, which is not yet reflected in the graph.



Note: This graph is based on the ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) data⁵ set from the Ethiopia Peace Observatory.⁶

Beyond Tigray: Oromia and Amhara

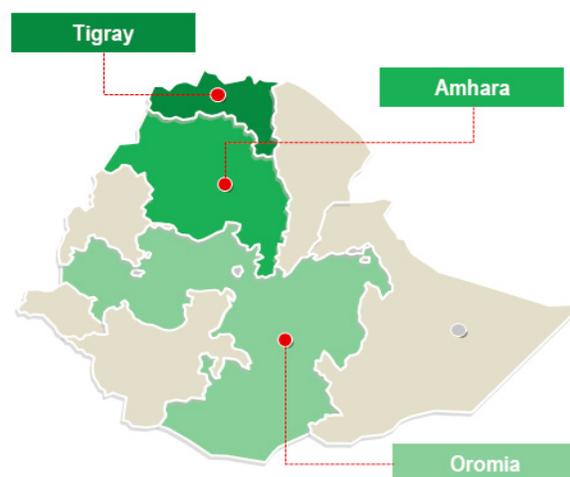
ARMED CONFLICT has been ongoing in both Oromia and Amhara since November 2020 with 47 and 38 armed conflict events and violence against civilians reported respectively.⁷

In Oromia, armed conflicts primarily involve the Ethiopian military or regional police forces, and members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), although armed conflicts between Oromo armed groups with Amhara and Somali armed groups have also occurred.

In Amhara, armed conflict mostly involves Oromo armed groups and Amhara special forces or armed groups, although previously the TDF also engaged in armed conflict around the border towns.

Near the border with Sudan, Sudanese troops reportedly shelled Ethiopian military positions in January 2021 and fired heavy artillery into a farm on the Ethiopian side of the border in April 2021.

Map of Ethiopia showing Amhara, Oromia and Tigray regions



VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS is prevalent in Oromia and Amhara with 73 and 20 reported incidents respectively between 04 November 2020 and 25 June 2021. In Oromia, such violence is often directed towards civilians who are alleged to support the OLF and ethnic Amhara civilians.

Violence is typically reported as perpetrated by regional police or special forces or the OLF. In Amhara, violence mostly targets ethnic Amhara and Oromo civilians and is typically reported to be perpetrated by Amhara armed groups, the OLF, and regional police forces or the Ethiopian military, although a relatively recent attack on civilians in March 2021 was reportedly perpetrated by the TDF.

PROTESTS have also occurred in Oromia and Amhara in recent months with 38 and 34 protests-and protest-related incidents respectively reported between 04 November 2020 and 25 June 2021. Protests in Oromia mostly took place in January, February, and March and revolved around the release of political prisoners or protests against the OLF.

More recent protests in Oromia denounced the conflict in the Wollo area of the country. Protests in Amhara occurred mostly in April and protested against the violence towards ethnic Amhara civilians.

Aid operations in Tigray⁸

Reported incidents and most commonly reported concerns of threats and violence affecting aid operations in Tigray

		
32 reported incidents	12 aid workers killed	5 aid workers arrested
Source: Ethiopia: Attacks on aid operations, education, health and protection		

- Around a third of reported incidents of concern involved direct violence against aid workers.
- Aid workers were assaulted and killed in incidents that appear to have been cases of selective targeting.⁹ For example, in April 2021, a staff member of an INGO partner organisation was killed in Kola Temben town by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers after identifying himself as an aid worker.
- Other aid workers were harmed in cases of indiscriminate violence.¹⁰ In May 2021, an aid worker died in Adigrat after being hit by a stray bullet in an indiscriminate event of violence.
- Aid workers have been arrested in Tigray after being accused of passing checkpoints without appropriate permission, and as armed forces consolidate their control in particular areas they have arrested aid workers for questioning.
- A high number of reported incidents took place either in the vicinity of IDP or refugee camps and on roads.

- Around a third of the reported incidents were closely linked with violence against civilians. For example, violence against refugees and IDP's in Tigray has taken place in and around project sites, and in March 2021 an INGO driver was beaten by Ethiopian armed forces after he witnessed the extrajudicial killing of 4 civilian men aboard a minibus.
- Aid workers have also experienced interference whilst traveling. Aid trucks and vehicles have been stopped on the road and at checkpoints, seized, looted, and destroyed. For example, in June 120 WFP trucks carrying emergency food aid were blocked by unidentified perpetrators, and three trucks from an LINGO were seized by Eritrean soldiers and used for military purposes.

Aid operations in Oromia

- Two incidents have been reported in Oromia since 04 November 2020. In one of the incidents, unidentified gunmen forced an INGO staff member and their driver out of a rental vehicle and questioned them. The driver was shot and killed whilst the staff member managed to escape.

Aid operations in Amhara

- Armed conflict, and violence against civilians as well as protests in Amhara pose risks to aid operations in the region as well as transit towards Tigray.



PREDICTION

- The ceasefire will broadly continue to hold, though it will remain fragile. There have been “hot zones” of conflict – but so far only sporadic clashes. However, there will be three trigger points / red lines for either side to break the ceasefire:
- If the Eritrean Army moves against the TDF from the border area.
- If either the Ethiopian government or Amhara forces look to resume major offensive operations.
- If the TDF try to move beyond Tigray – though this is **UNLIKELY** due their lack of air support. However, they have said they are prepared to move militarily if a political solution cannot be found. This is also more **LIKELY** if aid supplies remain interrupted and the TDF tries to establish a supply line with Sudan, which would take them through Amhara territory.
- The Ethiopian Government will undoubtedly continue to control movement and goods into Tigray, as well as communications, in order to pressure the TDF and also civilians in the region, the majority who appear to support them. If these controls continue and aid supplies become more sporadic, public anger could rise against TDF, leading to pressure on it to engage politically with Ethiopian Government, as well as internationally (as was seen in previous encirclement scenarios in such as Aleppo, Syria).
- The EDF will **LIKELY** try to maintain the ceasefire until the end of the harvest (see **last report**) – in order to regroup and re-supply. However, any movement by the TDF out of Tigray will probably see the EDF retaliate.
- Concerns remain over tensions around the GERD and the border area with Sudan/ Egypt. Indeed, one of the reasons suggested by Prime Minister Ahmed for the ceasefire was that the government had “larger concerns to contend with”.
- Despite assurances that from the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments that Eritrean forces would withdraw – this remains **UNLIKELY**. Indeed, if clashes occur along the Sudanese / Egyptian border area due to current tensions over the GERD, then the Eritreans and Amhara troops will **LIKELY** be used to blockade Tigray, as well as reinforcing Ethiopia's border areas.

- Aid deliveries will remain piecemeal, with only international organisations such as the WFP/ UN having the diplomatic hard power to ensure supplies are delivered. An air bridge is **UNLIKELY** for in the short term (two weeks to a month) due to the politicking with the Ethiopian government and their reluctance to allow flights from Sudan in the West. Although this would ease the current blockade it would necessitate engagement with their regional rival during a period of high tensions over the GERD. Indeed, the US government has already issued advice to US aircraft to avoid flying over the Tigray region.
- Oromia and Amhara will see further armed conflict events. Any movement by the TDF into Amhara – will certainly see clashes rise as well as protests. Meanwhile aid operations are **LIKELY** to be affected by ongoing conflict and access difficulties leading to sporadic delivery of humanitarian supplies.

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¹ Battles defined as “a violent interaction between two politically organised armed groups at a particular time and location” by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED Codebook). Note that this does not include shelling, artillery and missile attacks or air/drone strikes.

² Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) [database attribution policy](#). Accessed on 02 July 2021.

³ Violence against civilians is defined in the ACLED dataset as “violent events where an armed organised group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants” ([ACLED codebook](#))

⁴ Incidents taken from the ACLED dataset.

⁵ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). Accessed on 02 July 2021.

⁶ <https://epo.acleddata.com/data/>

⁷ Armed conflict can be state-based or non-state armed conflict. It is defined the use of armed force between two organized armed groups, usually related to contested incompatibility over territory or governance.

⁸ Based on data from Insecurity Insight. Insecurity Insight collated data from multiple public sources and confidential contributions from aid agencies. The data may differ from other sources. The data is part of the Aid in Danger project. For more information on Insecurity Insight visit our website on [Aid Security](#) and [Bi-Monthly News Brief](#), or [subscribe](#) for updates.

⁹ Selective targeting of **aid workers**: The context in which an aid worker is killed or wounded makes it highly likely that the effects on the staff were intended and the aid worker was consciously selected as a victim. Link to Insecurity Insight.

¹⁰ Indiscriminate violence against aid workers: The context in which an aid worker was killed or wounded makes it highly likely that the perpetrator used violence with the intention to harm but was indiscriminate in the selection of victims. Indiscriminate events can be part of one-sided violence (attacks on civilians) or battle or conflict related armed violence.