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Introduction

This country of origin information report was prepared using the questions asked by the Ministry of Justice and Security as set out in the Terms of Reference. The Terms of Reference were confirmed on 6 July 2020. An anonymised version of these Terms of Reference, together with the general country of origin information report, has been published on the website of the Dutch Government.

This country of origin information report describes the situation in Ethiopia insofar as it is important for the assessment of applications for asylum from persons originating from this country and for the decision-making process regarding the return of rejected Ethiopian asylum seekers. The reporting period covers the period from July 2018, several months after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office, up to and including January 2021.

This country of origin information report is based on carefully selected, analysed and verified information from both public and confidential sources. Information from non-governmental organisations, professional literature, media coverage and (where applicable) relevant government agencies was used to compile this country of origin information report. Unless stated otherwise or when the facts are generally undisputed, the passages in this report are based on multiple sources. The consulted public sources are included in the bibliography. In the text, references are made to both public and confidential sources. The confidential sources are marked as a 'confidential source' in the footnotes and are accompanied by a date. The identity of the confidential sources is not disclosed.

This country of origin information report uses information from interviews conducted with relevant and expert sources. These interviews were mostly conducted online during the investigation in order to gather information for this country of origin information report. In addition, confidential information from the diplomatic representation in Ethiopia and other diplomatic missions of the Netherlands abroad was used. Where confidential information is used as the sole justification for passages in the country of origin information report, this is explicitly stated in the text. This official country report is a factual, neutral and objective representation of the findings that were made during the period under investigation and does not include any conclusions or recommendations. Chapter one deals with the political and security situation in Ethiopia. Chapter two deals with documents, identity and nationality. Chapter three deals with the state of affairs with regard to compliance with and violation of human rights. Chapter four deals with the situation of refugees and displaced persons in Ethiopia. This country of origin information report concludes with a chapter outlining the practical situation for Ethiopians returning to Ethiopia.

1 Political and security situation

1.1 Political and administrative developments

1.1.1 *Appointment of Abiy Ahmed*

The previous country of origin information report of July 2018 alluded to the appointment of Abiy Ahmed Ali, hereinafter Abiy, as the new Prime Minister of Ethiopia. Before Abiy took office, violent protests ravaged the country, particularly in the Oromia region; the Oromo, the largest population group of all of Ethiopia's ethnic groups, felt disadvantaged and oppressed by the government dominated by the *Tigrayan People's Liberation Front* (TPLF). The population of Tigray makes up around six percent of the entire Ethiopian population, but the TPLF, which represented Tigray in the then ruling party, the *Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front* (EPRDF), ruled this four-party coalition party. It managed the party's agenda and determined the party's policies. Furthermore, the TPLF had a disproportionate influence in Ethiopia's military and security services (see section 1.1.5).¹

With the election of an Oromo as Prime Minister, the authorities hoped to ease tensions in the country. At his inauguration, Abiy apologised for the crackdown by the authorities during demonstrations in which protesters had been killed. He called for unity and dialogue with opposition groups. Shortly after the new Prime Minister took office in early April 2018, the infamous Maekelawi prison definitively closed its doors after former Prime Minister Hailemariam had announced its closure in January of that year.²

At the end of the reporting period of the previous country of origin information report, a massive rally was held in Addis Ababa on 23 June 2018 at which at least one million Ethiopians expressed their solidarity with the new Prime Minister. Even a grenade attack on Abiy during the rally, which left two dead, had no effect on the festive atmosphere of the rally, according to an eyewitness account.³

1.1.2 *Honeymoon period*

After taking office in the spring of 2018, the new Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy announced reforms that envisioned a more democratic and prosperous Ethiopia. He released political prisoners and reviewed a number of controversial laws. He also sought to engage with outlawed opposition movements such as the *Ogaden National Liberation Front* (ONLF), the *Oromo Liberation Front* (OLF) and *Patriotic Ginbot 7* (PG7), many of which had their registered offices abroad. Abiy invited these parties to return to Ethiopia to participate legally in Ethiopian politics. In the context of Prime Minister Abiy's reforms, the Ethiopian Parliament unanimously approved a proposal at the beginning of July 2018 to remove the ONLF, the OLF and PG7 from the national list of terrorist organisations (see section 1.2).⁴ Abiy made peace with neighbouring Eritrea, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2019 (see section 1.7).⁵

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018*, 2 July 2018.

² Idem.

³ Idem; Confidential source, 12 July 2020; BBC News, *Ethiopia attack: Five charged for trying to kill PM Abiy Ahmed*, 28 September 2018; Ezega News, *Court Finds 5 Guilty of Plot to Kill PM Abiy Ahmed*, 28 August 2020: Five people were convicted of the attack in early 2020. The charges included plotting an attack on Abiy with the aim of bringing the formerly banned OLF to power.

⁴ Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia removes OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 from terror list*, 5 July 2018

⁵ The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

With the new Prime Minister's actions and reforms, Ethiopia seemed to be democratising and breaking away from previous governments that had often been associated with human rights violations. The *International Crisis Group* (ICG) wrote that the transition within Ethiopia's administrative power structure was a source of hope for many inside and outside the country, but that the recurrences of unrest and particularly the deadly clashes of the summer of 2020 after the murder of the popular singer Hachalu showed that the path was not without obstacles (see section 1.8.2).⁶ In August 2018, a few months after Abiy took office, journalist René Lefort wondered whether the new Prime Minister was heading towards a democratic, prosperous Ethiopia with his reforms or whether they provoked so much aversion, especially among the old elite of the TPLF and others, that they could cause the disintegration of Ethiopia.⁷

By 2020, the honeymoon period had come to an end, according to various sources.⁸ Some Ethiopians, both in the opposition and in Abiy's own party, feel that the reforms are not going fast enough and that the mass arrests – for example after the failed 'coup attempt' in June 2019 and after the murder of the singer Hachalu at the end of June 2020 (see sections 1.8.2 and 1.8.3) – and the shutdown of the Internet are a signal that the promise of creating more space for opposition parties is not being kept.⁹ Others, including Oromo and the former TPLF rulers, believe that Abiy Ahmed's policies run counter to their interests. According to a confidential source, the initial optimism about Abiy's appointment has turned into widespread disappointment. Abiy preaches a message of pan-Ethiopianism ('*Medemer*'), whereas some regions actually want greater autonomy. Two years after Abiy took office, the Qeerroo¹⁰ are possibly even poorer and their job prospects have diminished even more, according to the confidential source. Many Oromo, especially the Qeerroo, blame Abiy for squandering the Oromo revolution on the other ethnic group, 'the Amhara', who ruled Ethiopia for centuries, while many mistrust Amhara Abiy because of his Oromo ancestry (see section 3.1).¹¹

1.1.2.1

Conflict in Tigray

The Ethiopian government is facing increasing conflicts and estrangement along ethnic, religious, political and regional lines. The resulting tensions have regularly led to violence and fatalities.¹² The climax of these mounting conflicts was reached in early November 2020, when an armed struggle broke out between regional forces and militias from Tigray on the one hand, and federal forces backed by militias and forces from other regions, notably from Amhara and Afar, on the other hand.¹³ The trigger for the battle was the decision of the Tigrayan government to attack the federal army unit, the Northern Command, which is stationed in the regional state.¹⁴

⁶ ICG, *Defusing Ethiopia's Latest Perilous Crisis*, 3 July 2020.

⁷ Open Democracy, *Pacified politics or risk of disintegration? A race against time in Ethiopia*, 21 August 2018.

⁸ Confidential source, 12 July 2020; Corporate Africa, @CorpAfrica, 10.30 p.m., 5 November 2019: <https://twitter.com/CorpAfrica/status/1191830092667871232>.

⁹ VOA News, *Assassinations, Arrests Test Ethiopia's Fragile Push Toward Democracy*, 5 July 2019; confidential source, 30 September 2020.

¹⁰ Qeerroo are Oromo adolescents who took to the streets en masse, particularly in 2017 and 2018, to demonstrate against the then government, which ultimately led to the appointment of Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister (see also the General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018).

¹¹ Confidential source, 12 July 2020; confidential source, 21 October 2020.

¹² Confidential source, 12 July 2020.

¹³ The regions of Amhara and Tigray in particular have been at odds with each other for many years. The Amhara felt oppressed during the EPRDF/TPLF regime. Amhara activists drew up a detailed report seeking to expose all the abuses of the TPLF against the Amhara population. The report refers to alleged 'genocide' against the Amhara population between 1991 and 2015: Ethiopia Insight, *Violent Qemant dispute fueling explosive Amhara-Tigray divide*, 16 December 2018.

¹⁴ Confidential source, 4 November 2020; ENA, *Senior Military Officer Hostages Freed from TPLF Junta*, 9 December 2020; Fana Broadcasting Corporate, *About 1,000 Military Officers Kidnapped By TPLF Junta Rescued*, 9 December

In one week, the conflict claimed the lives of hundreds of soldiers on both the Tigrayan and the federal side. It also resulted in hundreds of civilian casualties in the longer term. The warring parties accused each other of war crimes and gross human rights violations.¹⁵ After a missile attack from the Tigrayan side on Asmara, the capital of 'arch enemy' Eritrea, during the weekend of 14 and 15 November 2020, the conflict also spread beyond Ethiopia's borders.¹⁶ Eritrea would later support Abiy with soldiers and equipment in his fight against Tigray (see also sections 1.7.1 and 1.8.7).¹⁷

On 28 November 2020, the Ethiopian authorities announced that the Tigrayan capital of Mekelle had fallen into federal hands. The battle, dubbed by the federal government as 'a law enforcement operation in Tigray', would eventually claim the lives of thousands, many of them civilians. More than 50,000 people are said to have fled the area and moved to Sudan. However, the battle was not over at the end of the reporting period for this country of origin information report.¹⁸ Many TPLF leaders, such as the former president of Tigray, Debretsion Gebremichael, went into hiding from the Ethiopian government and are continuing the fight from the more inaccessible areas of Tigray.¹⁹

1.1.3

Ethnic Federalism

Ethiopia became an ethnic-based federal state after the ratification of the federal constitution in 1994. The new constitution gave ethnic groups the right to self-government as well as the option to secede.²⁰ After the overthrow of the Derg regime in 1991,²¹ Ethiopia was divided into nine regional states (*kililoch*, singular - *kili*)²² and two administratively independent cities.²³ At the end of June 2020, Sidama became the tenth regional state of Ethiopia. On 20 November 2019, the Sidama, one of 56 ethnic groups in the *Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State* (SNNPRS), held a constitutional referendum in which they voted en masse to secede from the SNNPRS. The run-up to the referendum in 2019 was anything but peaceful; groups of young people demanded immediate secession and clashed with security forces, and several people were killed (see also section 1.8.5).²⁴

The purpose of the system of 'ethnic federalism' was on the one hand to meet the wishes of the different ethnic groups in Ethiopia and on the other hand to keep the country together.²⁵ Critics believe that the system has placed too much emphasis on

2020: In this action by the TPLF, the Tigrayans captured almost 1,000 federal troops. These troops would be liberated by their colleagues in the federal army around one month after the outbreak of the conflict.

¹⁵ NRCNext, *Unclear insight into war in Ethiopia; Tigray conflict Reliable information from Ethiopia is scarce*, 16 November 2020.

¹⁶ Euobserver, *Ethiopia conflict risks drawing in Eritrea*, 16 November 2020.

¹⁷ Human Rights Concern-Eritrea, *Eritrean Armed Forces Fighting Inside Tigray*, 24 November 2020; The Guardian, *'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses*, 21 December 2020.

¹⁸ BBC Monitoring (Tigray Television), *Tigrayan forces explain 'withdrawal' from regional capital*, 3 December 2020; Addis Standard, *NEWS: MEKELLE CITY INTERIM MAYOR ADMITS PRESENCE AND PARTICIPATION OF ERITREAN FORCES IN TIGRAY CONFLICT*, 4 January 2021.

¹⁹ BBC Monitoring (ENA), *Ethiopia orders Tigray state workers to return to work*, 13 December 2020; The Guardian, *'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses*, 21 December 2020.

²⁰ Anadolu Agency, *Ethiopia: 10th regional gov't goes official*, 18 June 2020.

²¹ In 1974, a communist military junta called the Derg (Committee) deposed Emperor Haile Selassie, ending the Ethiopian monarchy, the house of Solomon. The Derg pursued a policy of nationalisation and collectivism. Between 1976 and 1978, the Derg killed thousands of opponents (the Red Terror campaign). Rebels from the *Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front* (EPRDF), a TPLF-led multi-ethnic alliance, ousted the Derg in 1991, ending years of civil war. The EPRDF and its successor, the *Ethiopian Prosperity Party* (EPP), have ruled Ethiopia ever since. The TPLF that led/headed the EPRDF is not part of the EPP.

²² Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambela, Harari, Oromiya, *Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State*, Somali en Tigray.

²³ Addis Abeba en Dire Dawa.

²⁴ Anadolu Agency, *Ethiopia: 10th regional gov't goes official*, 18 June 2020.

²⁵ Confidential source, 28 August 2020.

the ethnic awareness of Ethiopians and even aggravated it.²⁶ Particularly the younger generations see themselves as 'Oromo', 'Tigrayan', 'Amhara', or 'Somali' rather than 'Ethiopian'. According to a confidential source, at the recent demonstrations some protesters chanted: 'We are not Ethiopians.'²⁷ Abiy's aforementioned pan-Ethiopian Medemer policy was precisely intended to give more emphasis to Ethiopian identity but several sources claim that it is counter-productive. One source believes that when people talk about the Ethiopian identity, they actually mean the Amhara identity. The culture and language of this population group have predominated in Ethiopia for decades: Amharic, for example, is the official language of Ethiopia.²⁸ Abiy is often accused of defending the interests of the Amhara too much through his politics and the appointments of Amhara to high posts.²⁹ Conversely, another confidential source says that many Amhara distrust Abiy because of his Oromo ancestry.³⁰

1.1.4

Reforms

In the context of the reforms, Abiy's government has taken steps to prosecute certain senior officials of the previous government, notably members of the TPLF, for human rights violations. On the other hand, Abiy has also decided to adopt a policy of forgiveness for lower officials in the wider spectrum of reconciliation efforts.³¹ Amnesty International wrote that while the first steps had been taken towards improving the human rights situation in Ethiopia, the old pattern of violence adopted by the security forces, such as extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests at demonstrations, had not disappeared. According to Amnesty International, this could jeopardise the long-term goals of the government (Chapter 3 takes a closer look at the human rights situation in Ethiopia).³²

The 2020 report by *Freedom House* reaffirmed the information in the 2019 report that stated that Abiy's government had announced reforms that would make it easier for political parties to function, but that fundamental changes were required to actually achieve that.³³ Abiy's reforms included allowing political movements accused of treason by previous cabinets to participate in the political spectrum. Furthermore, opposition leaders abroad were invited to return to Ethiopia and resume their political activities. The government of Ahmed Abiy allowed peaceful actions and demonstrations to take place and made it possible for new political parties to be established and to operate freely in Ethiopia.³⁴ To ensure the independence and credibility of the National Electoral Council (NEBE: *National Electoral Board of Ethiopia*), after consultation with opposition parties Birtukan Mideksa, a former judge and opposition party leader, was sworn in by parliament as the new chairman in September 2019.³⁵ A confidential source noted that the consultation had not yet been completed when Abiy appointed Birtukan.³⁶

Despite all the (planned) reforms, a number of sources have reservations about Abiy's plans and actions. A source from the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) said

²⁶ The New York Times, *Opinion: The Trouble With Ethiopia's Ethnic Federalism*, 3 June 2019; International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and Its Discontents*, page 22, 4 September 2009.

²⁷ Confidential source, 28 August 2020.

²⁸ Confidential source, 30 September 2020.

²⁹ Confidential source, 10 November 2020; confidential source, 30 September 2020; confidential source, 23 September 2020.

³⁰ Confidential source, 21 October 2020.

³¹ United States Department of State, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 2, 11 March 2020.

³² AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

³³ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia*, Key Developments, 4 March 2020.

³⁴ United States Department of State, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 1, 11 March 2020.

³⁵ Africa Up Close, *The Prospects of Ethiopia's 2020 General Election*, 30 September 2019.

³⁶ Confidential source, 14 January 2021.

that although Abiy's new government had indicated that it wanted to improve the human rights situation in the country, human rights violations and abuses would probably continue at local level (see also section 3.1.1 on the protection of civilians).³⁷ Ethiopia expert William Davison of ICG was of the opinion that the Ethiopian government would ultimately not be strong enough to implement the reforms. He said that while many democratic reforms had been announced, the government was not in a position to implement them. He also said that local grievances were now being fought out at a regional level because of the wider political space.³⁸ According to ICG, despite their initial support for him as Prime Minister, many of Abiy's rivals resent him for not consulting them on important decisions.³⁹ Several confidential sources believe that Abiy is following his own course too much and not involving or consulting others enough.⁴⁰ More and more opposition movements in Ethiopia are losing faith in Prime Minister Abiy's democratic reforms.⁴¹

1.1.5 Prosperity Party & Elections

Prosperity Party

Ethiopia is a federal republic that has been governed for years by a coalition of ethnic-based parties. This coalition was called the *Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front* (EPRDF) and consisted of four parties: the *Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organisation* (OPDO), the *Amhara National Democratic Movement* (ANDM), the *Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement* (SEPDM), and the *Tigrayan People's Liberation Front* (TPLF). In December 2019, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed dissolved the EPRDF and founded the *Prosperity Party* (PP). His intention in setting up this party was to break with ethnicity-oriented politics.⁴² Besides the former EPRDF coalition members (the SEPDM, the OPDO and the ANDM), of which the latter two parties changed their names to the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) and Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), respectively, the *Prosperity Party* also includes five smaller parties⁴³.⁴⁴ Former EPRDF coalition partner, the *Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front*, which previously held sway in the coalition, refused to join the new party.⁴⁵

Division inside PP

Although the PP may emanate its support for the pan-Ethiopian idea, various sources say that opinions inside the party are divided about the course to be taken.⁴⁶ In early August 2020, Minister of Defence Lemma Megersa was first expelled from the party and then released from his ministerial post due to this internal struggle. In 2018, Abiy was still part of Team Lemma, the team of reformers from Oromia that is held responsible for the 2018 revolution, among other things. The fact that the team bore the name of the ex-Minister of Defence shows

³⁷ DIS, Country of Origin Information, Ethiopia: Political situation and treatment of opposition, page 10, September 2018.

³⁸ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 29, July 2020.

³⁹ ICG, *Defusing Ethiopia's Latest Perilous Crisis*, 3 July 2020.

⁴⁰ Confidential source, 14 October 2020; confidential source, 9 November 2020.

⁴¹ Confidential source, 7 October 2020.

⁴² United States Department of State, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 20, 11 March 2020; Borkena, *Ethiopia's election board recognized Prosperity Party*, 25 December 2019.

⁴³ *Afar National Democratic Party* (ANDP), *Benishangul-Gumuz Democratic Party* (BDP), *Somali Democratic Party* (SPD), *Gambela People's Democratic Movement* (GPDM), *en Harari National League* (HNL)

⁴⁴ Borkena, *Ethiopia's election board recognized Prosperity Party*, 25 December 2019.

⁴⁵ United States Department of State, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 20, 11 March 2020; Borkena, *Ethiopia's election board recognized Prosperity Party*, 25 December 2019; Al Jazeera, *Why Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party is good news for Ethiopia*, 18 December 2019.

⁴⁶ Confidential source, 17 September 2020; confidential source, 21 September 2020.

that Megersa ruled the reformers' club at the time.⁴⁷ Megersa did not agree with Abiy's Medemer philosophy and wanted greater rapprochement with the ethnic federalists. Because this position was seen as a threat, Abiy sidelined Megersa, according to a confidential source.⁴⁸ With the outbreak of the internal struggle against Tigray, Abiy also made changes in his government. A few days after the outbreak of the conflict on 4 November 2020, Abiy replaced his army chief, the chief of intelligence and security (NISS: *National Intelligence and Security Service*) and the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs. He did this entirely on his own initiative, according to a confidential source.⁴⁹ According to Reuters, Abiy gave no reasons for these changes.⁵⁰

A confidential source has reported that the conflict in Tigray is also causing disagreement inside the PP. For example, the Oromo section of the party is said to be dissatisfied with the conquest of parts of Tigray by Amhara militias. Dignitaries of the Amhara region have indicated that they will not give up these areas because areas such as Welkait, the Raya Valley and Humera have traditionally been part of Amhara.⁵¹ There is also alleged dissatisfaction with how to deal with the escalation of violence in Benishangul Gumuz, the regional state to the south-west of Tigray (see sections 1.8.4 and 1.8.7 for more information).⁵²

Elections 2020

More than one hundred political parties signed a code of conduct on 14 March 2019 as part of the democratic steps that would be taken in the run-up to the 2020 elections. Abiy declared in August 2018 that he was committed to the election and promised that his reforms would not stand in the way of the election. The government's willingness to facilitate a referendum on the future status of the Sidama zone in November 2019 and to accept the outcome was seen as a new tolerance for opposition activities (see section 1.1.3).⁵³

The constitutional term of the current parliament expired in October 2020. Elections were therefore planned for August 2020, for which almost 170 parties had registered.⁵⁴ Because of Covid-19, the government postponed the elections until further notice. According to *The Economist*, this brought Ethiopia close to a constitutional crisis. The country would be without a legitimate parliament or government after October 2020. Jawar Mohammed of the opposition Oromo Federal Congress (OFC) called on Abiy to form an interim government. Abiy discussed the constitutional stalemate with the opposition but rejected calls for an interim government, warning that 'illegal elections' would harm the country and the Ethiopian people.⁵⁵ At the end of December 2020, the Ethiopian Electoral Council,

⁴⁷ Borkena, *Lemma Megersa, Ethiopian Defense Minister, terminated from party position*, 9 August 2020; Reuters, *Ethiopia PM fires defence minister, a one-time ally, in major reshuffle*, 18 August 2020

⁴⁸ Confidential source, 30 September 2020.

⁴⁹ Confidential source, 9 November 2020; Reuters, *Ethiopian PM replaces top officials as conflict in Tigray region escalates*, 8 November 2020.

⁵⁰ Reuters, *Ethiopian PM replaces top officials as conflict in Tigray region escalates*, 8 November 2020.

⁵¹ Confidential source, 14 January 2021: The authorities of the Amhara region have appointed their own administrative structures since the 'reconquest' of these areas.

⁵² Confidential source, 16 December 2020; Addis Standard, *NEWS: RULING PARTY MEMBERS SPEAK OF NEED TO REPEAT TIGRAY MILITARY OPERATION IN BENISHANGUL GUMUZ AS AMHARA REGION GOV'T, NAMA RAMP-UP CALLS FOR ACTIONS*, 15 December 2020; Addis Standard, @addisstandard, 18 December 2020: twitter.com/addisstandard/status/1339851029970620416.

⁵³ Africanews, *Ethiopia parties sign pact ahead of 2020 polls, PM stresses fairness*, 15 March 2019; Confidential source, 14 January 2021: According to a confidential source, the federal government tried to delay the process by ignoring the issue.

⁵⁴ Anadolu Agency, *Ethiopia: Merger, election and popular apprehension*, 6 December 2019.

⁵⁵ *The Economist*, *Ethiopia is entering constitutional limbo*, 16 May 2020.

NEBE, announced that the postponed parliamentary elections would be held on 5 June 2021.⁵⁶

In late 2020, NEBE declared that it had annulled the registration of 26 political parties and that it had placed an additional twelve parties under investigation. The registration of the parties was annulled because the parties would not meet the new requirements set by the Electoral Council. Earlier that year, in May, NEBE had also annulled the registration of 27 other parties.⁵⁷ It is not known which parties this involves.⁵⁸

According to a confidential source, trust in the NEBE electoral council is said to be low; some political parties may boycott the elections and security concerns could prevent the elections from being held in some parts of the country.⁵⁹ Nor is it known which political parties are involved.

The TPLF, which is strongly opposed to the postponement of the elections, called on its delegation to the federal parliament to step down on 6 October 2020. This happened after the House of Federation (the upper house of the Ethiopian parliament) decided to end federal support for the Tigray region due to the unconstitutional elections in Tigray (see below). Until the TPLF delegates withdrew from the Ethiopian parliament, their party was essentially the only opposition in the Ethiopian parliament (see also section 1.2).⁶⁰

Reaction of the opposition

According to *Ethiopia Insight*, in response to the government's proposal to postpone elections, members of various opposition parties, such as the OLF, the ONLF, the *Oromo Federalist Congress* (OFC), the *Agaw National Congress* (ANC), the *Mocha Democratic Party* (MDP), the *Kaffa Green Party* (KGR) and *Arena Tigray for Democracy and Sovereignty*, issued a statement on 4 May 2020 under the banner of the *Alliance for Democratic Federalism*. The parties declared that the best and only option to combat the pandemic was to achieve a national consensus among the political parties in order to legitimately fill the impending power vacuum. They also said that any other way of extending the term of the current government lacked any political and legal legitimacy and could lead to both a political and a security crisis.⁶¹

The TPLF lost its position of power after the arrival of Abiy and it considered the takeover of the *Prosperity Party* to be unconstitutional/illegal. The party also regarded the postponement of the elections scheduled for August 2020 as an illegal ploy by Abiy to remain in power for as long as possible.⁶² To the dismay of the federal government, the Tigray region called elections in the region for 9 September 2020, in which the TPLF secured 189 of the 190 seats. The opposition party *Salsay Woyane Tigray*, which had participated in the regional elections, reported possible fraud and intimidation by the TPLF during the elections. Before taking any steps, the opposition party said it first wanted to obtain more information about the exact state of affairs.⁶³

⁵⁶ Reuters, *Ethiopia says national election to be held in June*, 25 December 2020.

⁵⁷ Fana Broadcasting Corporate, *NEBE Cancels Registration Of 26 Political Parties*, 23 December 2020.

⁵⁸ Addis Standard (Facebook), 15 May 2020: **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid..**

⁵⁹ Confidential source, 16 December 2020

⁶⁰ Al Jazeera, *In Ethiopia, a heated political tug-of-war sparks security fears*, 19 October 2020.

⁶¹ Ethiopia Insight, *Opposition parties statement on election postponement*, 4 May 2020.

⁶² Confidential source, 12 July 2020; The New York Times, *They Once Ruled Ethiopia. Now They Revolt*, 16 November 2020.

⁶³ Al Jazeera, *Governing party in Ethiopia's Tigray sweeps regional polls*, 11 September 2020; Ethiopia Observer, *Opposition party complains of intimidation*, 14 September 2020.

According to *Al Jazeera*, the elections in Tigray were a low point in the struggle between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the Tigray region.⁶⁴ In an interview with a government news medium, the Prime Minister expressed his displeasure with the regional elections. At the time, it was still unclear whether the federal government would take steps against the region, *France24* wrote after the Tigray elections.⁶⁵ However, in early November 2020 the situation between Tigray and the federal government escalated, resulting in a bloody conflict between the two parties.⁶⁶

1.2 Legal opposition movements

Freedom House wrote in its 2020 report that the new electoral law, passed in August 2019, exemplified the government's efforts to hold inclusive multi-party elections. According to the report by *Freedom House*, several regions – particularly Tigray, Oromia and Somali – had well-organised opposition parties with traditionally broad support. That meant that the opposition had a better chance of opposing the ruling party, which held all the seats in parliament, than it had had in the previous elections.⁶⁷ As stated earlier in this country of origin information report, approximately 170 parties had registered for the (now postponed) elections of 2020. An overview of the parties that played a role in Ethiopian politics during the reporting period is displayed below.

1.2.1 Coalitions/partnerships/alliances

Block against Prosperity Party

In order to form a block against the newly formed Prosperity Party, ten opposition parties decided to form an alliance, *Fana Broadcasting Corporate* wrote on 6 December 2019. The ten parties that signed up to the alliance at a ceremony in Addis Ababa were: the OLF (*Oromo Liberation Front*), the ONLF (*Ogaden National Liberation Front*), the *Afar People's Liberation Party* (APLP), the *Sidama People's Liberation Movement* (SPLM), the *Agaw National Congress* (ANC),⁶⁸ the *Kaffa Green Party* (KGP), the *Benishangul Gumuz People's Liberation Movement* (BPLM), the *Kimant Democratic Party* (KDP), the *Gambela People's Liberation Movement* (GPLM) and the (*Mocha Democratic Party*) MDP.⁶⁹ The main goal of these parties was to form a common front against the newly formed Prosperity Party in the 2020 general election.⁷⁰ The elections were ultimately cancelled and it is not known whether the alliance was followed up.

Opposition parties in exile

Shortly after Abiy took office in June 2018, PG7, the ONLF and OLF were removed from the list of terrorist organisations. Members of the three groups subsequently returned to Ethiopia from exile. Armed fighters, including around 1,500 armed OLF fighters, returned from Eritrea to Ethiopia in the leadership's wake. Members of other illegal armed organisations, such as the *Sidama Liberation Front*, the *Gambela (People's) Liberation Front*, the *Tigray People's Democratic Movement*,⁷¹ and the

⁶⁴ Al Jazeera, *Governing party in Ethiopia's Tigray sweeps regional polls*, 11 September 2020.

⁶⁵ France24, *Ethiopia's Tigray region defies PM Abiy with 'illegal' election*, 9 September 2020.

⁶⁶ The New York Times, *They Once Ruled Ethiopia. Now They Revolt*, 16 November 2020.

⁶⁷ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia*, (section B2), 4 March 2020

⁶⁸ In addition to being called the Agaw National Congress, it is also called the Agew National Council.

⁶⁹ Fana Broadcasting Corporate, @fanatelevision, *Ten political parties agree to work together*, 6 December 2019: <https://twitter.com/fanatelevision/status/1202965298724384769>.

⁷⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Ten Ethiopian opposition parties agree to work together*, 7 December 2019.

⁷¹ Borkena, *Tigray People's Democratic Movement (TPDM) announces merger with TPLF*, 9 December 2019: in this article, Borkena refers to the decision of the TPDM faction to merge into the TPLF.

Afar Liberation Front (ALF),⁷² also returned (see sections 3.2.4 and 3.2.5 on the treatment of alleged members of the ONLF or the OLF).⁷³

E-ZEMA

After PG7 had returned from exile in 2018, the disarmament and rehabilitation of the party's armed faction generally went smoothly. A confidential source told the UK Home Office that the integration of former armed groups, such as PG7, into military or civilian positions in the regional state of Amhara appeared to have been successful.⁷⁴ Members of PG7 dissolved their party in May 2019 with the aim of forming a new party together with other parties. The new party to which PG7 is affiliated is the *Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (ECPSJ)/E-ZEMA*. Berhanu Nega, the former leader of PG7, took over the leadership of the new party.⁷⁵ In addition to PG7, six other parties disbanded and then merged into the new party. The six other parties are: The *Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP)*, the *All Ethiopian Democratic Party (AEDP)*, the *Semayawi (Blue) Party*, the *New Generation Party (NGP)*, the *Gambela Regional Movement (GRM)* and the *Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ)*.⁷⁶ Berhanu Nega stated that the democratisation and stability of Ethiopia were the party's priorities.⁷⁷ E-ZEMA is described as a party that wants to cross ethnic divides and to be there for all Ethiopians.⁷⁸

MEDREK

According to *The Reporter*, another coalition party, *Medrek*, officially named the *Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum*, consists of four parties, namely the *Ethiopian Socialist Democratic Party (ESDP)*,⁷⁹ the *Arena for Sovereignty and Democracy (Arena)*,⁸⁰ the *Sidama People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)* and the *Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)*.⁸¹ In December 2019, *Anadolu Agency* called the party a three-party coalition, of which Merera Gudina's OFC was one. The other two coalition parties were not named.⁸² When asked, however, a confidential source said that Medrek was no longer a homogeneous whole and that the various parties were following their own course. The ESPD, the SPLM and Arena were said to be on good terms with the reigning Prosperity Party, while the OFC was following its own independent course.⁸³ As mentioned above, in late 2019 the SPLM did join the block of opposition parties that wanted to contest the election with the PP.

Alliance of parties from Oromia

⁷² In early January 2021, the Ethiopian Ministry of Defence declared that fighters of the ALF, whom, on their return, the TPLF had rescued and trained to take up arms against the state of Ethiopia, had voluntarily returned to Afar. Leaders of the group of fighters had said that they did not want to take part in what they said was the 'betrayal' of the TPLF when militias of the TPLF started attacking federal forces in Tigray in early November 2020. However, the article in BBC Monitoring also refers to fighters of the *Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front (ARDUF of Ugugumo)*, which is a different group. It is not clear which group this involves: BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopia says 120 Afar rebels surrender after Tigray operation*, 13 January 2021.

⁷³ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 26, July 2020; Gambella Media Network, *Gambella People's Liberation Movement (GPLM) returned home for peaceful struggle*, 22 April 2019.

⁷⁴ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 25, July 2020.

⁷⁵ The Reporter, *Newly formed party elects former exiled, imprisoned political figures as Leaders*, 11 May 2019. Africanews, *Ethiopia's Ginbot 7 dissolves, transforms into new 'united' party*, 10 May 2019.

⁷⁶ The Africa Report, *Ethiopia opposition leader Berhanu Nega leads new party*, 14 May 2019.

⁷⁷ Borkena, *Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party elected leaders*, 13 May 2019; The Reporter, *Blue ceases its existence In a bid*, 5 January 2019.

⁷⁸ Confidential source, 17 September 2020.

⁷⁹ Both *Ethiopian Socialist Democratic Party* and *Ethiopian Social Democratic Party* occur in open sources. On the official website, the party calls itself *Ethiopian Social Democratic Party*: **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (consulted on 22 September 2020).

⁸⁰ Arena is also called *Union of Tigrians for Democracy and Sovereignty (UTDS)*.

⁸¹ The Reporter, *Medrek calls for the establishment of national unity gov't*, 12 January 2019.

⁸² Anadolu Agency, *Ethiopia: Merger, election and popular apprehension*, 6 December 2019.

⁸³ Confidential source, 21 September 2020.

On 11 September 2018, the OFC and the leadership of the OLF, who had just returned from exile, entered into an agreement to work together. The parties agreed to work together as the *Coalition for Democratic Federalism*.⁸⁴ *Ethiopia Insight* wrote that Merera Gudina, leader of the OFC, said in an interview that it would do the parties no good to compete against each other in the elections.⁸⁵ In order to form a united front against the ruling party in the 2020 elections, the OFC, the OLF and the *Oromo Nationalist Party* (ONP) formed a coalition in early 2020, again called the *Coalition for Democratic Federalism*.⁸⁶ The ONP is headed by General Kemal Gelchu, who had previously broken away from the OLF of (the then) party chairman Dawud Ibsa. With prominent Oromo personalities such as Jawar Mohammed and Bekele Gerba, this coalition was a 'force to be reckoned with', according to *Africa News*.⁸⁷

Ethiopia Insight emphasised that it was a coalition and not an amalgamation of parties.⁸⁸ In the end, the alliance never came to fruition. According to a confidential source, the OLF wielded too much influence in the alliance, which met with resistance from the OFC.⁸⁹ In late 2020, the OFC stated that it would be difficult for the party to participate in the elections planned for 2021, as some members were still in prison (for the position of opposition parties, see section 3.3.9).⁹⁰ The leaders of the OFC, Jawar Mohammed and Bekele Gerba, were still in detention at the end of the reporting period of this country of origin information report because of their alleged involvement in the riots that followed the murder of singer Hachalu in late June 2020 (see section 1.4.1).⁹¹

1.2.2 Separate parties

OLF

The OLF is not a homogeneous group. Previously, the name *Oromo Liberation Front* had been claimed by the factions of both Dawud Ibsa's and Gellassa Dilbo, another veteran in the OLF ranks. Dawud Ibsa's party was ultimately registered under that name by the Ethiopian Electoral Council (NEBE).⁹² In principle, it is no longer possible to regard it as one OLF because this opposition group has broken up into different wings, according to various sources.⁹³

During the reporting period, tensions rose between the OLF and the government. The OLF accused the Ethiopian Air Force of carrying out air strikes on targets in western Oromia in early 2019. The air strikes had resulted in civilian casualties. The Ethiopian army had also reportedly burned and looted houses in the region. Amnesty International wrote in May 2020 that suspicion of membership in or support of the OLA could incite federal forces, the Oromia police or local militias to set fire to the homes of these alleged members or supporters. In their turn, the Ethiopian authorities accused the OLF of using brute force against the local population.⁹⁴

⁸⁴ Africa News, *Major Oromia parties agree merger for Ethiopia's 2020 polls*, 11 September 2018.

⁸⁵ Ethiopia Insight, *OLF integration underway yet tensions remain*, 1 March 2019.

⁸⁶ Africa News, *Ethiopia's opposition parties merge as election fever rises*, 3 January 2020; Addis Standard, *OFC, OLF and ONP agree to form "Coalition for Democratic Federalism"*, 4 January 2020.

⁸⁷ Africa News, *Ethiopia's opposition parties merge as election fever rises*, 3 January 2020; ICG, *Defusing Ethiopia's Latest Perilous Crisis*, 3 July 2020.

⁸⁸ Ethiopia Insight, *Preaching unity but flying solo, Abiy's ambition may stall Ethiopia's transition*, 25 February 2020.

⁸⁹ Confidential source, 23 September 2020.

⁹⁰ Addis Standard, *NEWS: OPPOSITION PARTY OROMO FEDERALIST CONGRESS SAYS IT WILL FIND IT "EXTREMELY HARD" TO TAKE PART IN COMING ELECTIONS UNDER EXISTING CONDITIONS*, 9 December 2020.

⁹¹ Arise News, *Ethiopia Drops Gun Charges Against Media Mogul Jawar Mohammed*, 22 January 2021.

⁹² Addis Standard, @addisstandard, 19 November 2019: twitter.com/addisstandard/status/1195315489976795136

⁹³ Confidential source, 12 July 2020; confidential source, 21 September 2020.

⁹⁴ AP News, *Ethiopian rebel group accuses government of airstrikes*, 18 January 2019; The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020; AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

In October 2018, approximately 1,500 of the approximately four thousand OLF fighters had reportedly surrendered their weapons.⁹⁵ Over time, more fighters surrendered their weapons, but not all of them.⁹⁶ The armed wing of the OLF, the *Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)*⁹⁷ pledged to disarm after the return of the OLF top to Ethiopia but, contrary to the wishes of the government, this has not yet been done entirely.⁹⁸ The OLF accused the government of failing to keep its promise to integrate the fighters into the security forces.⁹⁹ According to various sources, tensions between the OLF and the authorities have actually increased in recent times, with allegations of violence by both sides against the civilian population (see also section 1.4).¹⁰⁰

According to *The Economist*, in late 2018 OLF members withdrew to the forests, from where they carried out attacks on military targets.¹⁰¹ The OLF leadership under Dawud Ibsa officially distanced itself from the armed wing, but both public and confidential sources believe that the two sides are still maintaining covert contact.¹⁰² In August 2020, the OLF reportedly relieved Dawud Ibsa from his post as chairman of the party, in part due to his alleged links to the dissident armed wing of the party.¹⁰³

ONLF

In November 2019, Abdirahman Mohamed Sheikh Madey was elected president of the ONLF. That same month, the Ethiopian Electoral Council registered the ONLF as an official political party.¹⁰⁴ A senior ONLF official stated that 70% of all Somalis supported the ONLF.¹⁰⁵ Other sources claim that this percentage is much lower.¹⁰⁶ The disarmament and integration of armed members of the ONLF, as with the aforementioned PG7, seemed to go well on the whole. This is in contrast to the disarmament and integration of the armed members of the OLF.¹⁰⁷ Members of the ONLF also joined the regional security forces and are reported to be integrating well. This integration seems to have prevented violent confrontations such as those in the west and south of Oromia, where dissident members of the OLF continue the armed struggle.¹⁰⁸ However, in July 2020 the UK Home Office wrote that the reintegration of ONLF fighters had come to a halt and there were fears that in the long run this

⁹⁵ BBC Monitoring, *OLF*, 16 September 2020.

⁹⁶ A New Business Ethiopia, *Ethiopia To Rehabilitate 1,000 Oromo Liberation Front Soldiers*, 13 February 2019; Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020: Initially, Kemal Gelchu, the leader of a rival OLF faction, was responsible for the disarmament of OLF fighters, but this met with considerable resistance from the fighters. Gelchu was eventually relieved of his duties.

⁹⁷ The number of OLF fighters is estimated to be around five thousand.

⁹⁸ *The Economist*, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020; AP News, *Ethiopian rebel group accuses government of airstrikes*, 18 January 2019.

⁹⁹ Africa News, *OLF rebels in Ethiopia give up arms: Oromo officials*, 16 February 2019.

¹⁰⁰ Al Jazeera, *Dozens killed in 'brutal' western Ethiopia attack*, 2 November 2020; confidential source, 21 October 2020; Ezega News, *Members of OLF Shene Charged with Terrorism; 12 Farmers Reportedly Killed by Government in Southern*, 27 January 2020.

¹⁰¹ *The Economist*, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

¹⁰² *The Economist*, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020; Confidential source, 21 September 2020; AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

¹⁰³ Ezega News, *Dawud Ibsa Dismissed as Chairperson of OLF*, 14 September 2020; *The Reporter*, *OLF suspends longtime chair Dawud Ibsa*, 15 August 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Harun Maruf, @HarunMaruf, 11 November 2019:

twitter.com/harunmaruf/status/1194009550212521985?lang=en; ONLF, @ONLFOfficial:

twitter.com/ONLFOfficial?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** On the party's official Twitter account, the ONLF wrote that it is fighting for the right to self-determination of all Somali in the Ogaden region.

¹⁰⁵ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 69, July 2020.

¹⁰⁶ Confidential source, 6 August 2020.

¹⁰⁷ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 25, July 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Conciliation Resources, *One year on: moving from war to peace in Ethiopia*, October 2019

could lead to disappointment and resumption of armed conflict because the ideology of the fighters had not changed.¹⁰⁹

NaMA

In June 2018 the *National Movement of Amhara* (NaMA) was founded, with Dessalegn Chanie Dagneu as its chairman. The chairman pledged that the party would champion Amhara nationalism and 'Amhara issues'. One of the aims of the party was to reclaim territory that the party believed had been unjustly annexed by Tigray.¹¹⁰ According to *Ethiopia Insight*, the establishment of this party was a break with the traditional opposition parties in Amhara, which were often associated with the pan-Ethiopian approach.¹¹¹ The alleged coup plotters who murdered the president of the regional state of Amhara, amongst others, in June 2019 have been linked to the party (see also section 1.8). According to a confidential source, since the events of June 2019 the party has matured and has adopted a less radical policy.¹¹²

Balderas

In early 2020, the Ethiopian Electoral Council registered the new political party *Balderas* as an official party. The party is led by former human rights activist and journalist Eskinder Nega. Balderas was initially established as a social platform to protect the political and economic rights of the residents of the capital, Addis Ababa. Balderas supporters believe that the PP is still not protecting the interests of the non-Oromo residents of Addis Ababa.¹¹³ On 7 March 2020, *The Ethiopian Monitor* reported that Balderas would form a coalition with the *All Ethiopian Unity Party* (AEUP) with the aim of jointly participating in the 2020 elections.¹¹⁴ It is not known whether this actually took place. Eskinder Nega and several party members have been in detention since the summer of 2020 (see also section 1.8.2).¹¹⁵

TPLF

The TPLF, which decided in November 2019 not to be part of the *Prosperity Party*, was de facto the only opposition in the federal parliament until the Ethiopian House of Lords, *the House of Federation*, decided to cut all communication with the Tigray regional government on 6 October 2020. The regional government then withdrew all representatives of the TPLF from parliament.¹¹⁶ Until the crisis in late 2020, the TPLF held sway in the regional state of Tigray and had held elections in September 2020 in which it won 189 seats out of 190. According to *Eritrea Hub*, before the outbreak of the armed conflict in November 2020 the TPLF was no longer a homogeneous block. While most members of the TPLF advocated a federal Ethiopia, there was a group, albeit in the minority, that wanted complete independence from Ethiopia.¹¹⁷

Following the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray (see section 1.1.2.1), the Ethiopian authorities declared on 24 November 2020 that the leaders of the TPLF would be charged with high treason and terrorism, among other things.¹¹⁸ Since then, arrest warrants based on charges of terrorism and high treason have been issued against

¹⁰⁹ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 71, July 2020.

¹¹⁰ Addis Standard, *Ethiopia: NAMA Is Expected to Be the Guardian of a Fully Fledged Amhara Nationalism: Dr. Dessalegn Chanie*, 19 June 2018; Africa Confidential, *The politics behind the putsch*, 28 June 2019.

¹¹¹ Ethiopia Insight, *Violent Qemant dispute fueling explosive Amhara-Tigray divide*, 16 December 2018.

¹¹² Confidential source, 23 September 2020.

¹¹³ New Business Ethiopia, *Ethiopia recognizes Balderas as political party*, 22 January 2020.

¹¹⁴ Ethiopian Monitor, *Balderas Forms Coalition with All Ethiopian Unity Party*, 7 March 2020.

¹¹⁵ Borkena, *Eskinder Nega to appear in court again on April 7 in 2021*, 25 December 2020.

¹¹⁶ Ethical Monitor, *Ethiopian parliament votes to cut ties with Tigray region leaders*, 7 October 2020; confidential source, 7 October 2020.

¹¹⁷ Eritrea Hub, *Tigray: Towards a de-facto state?*, 14 May 2020; ICG, *Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North*, 12 June 2020.

¹¹⁸ Anadolu Agency, *Ethiopia to indict Tigray rebel leaders for terrorism*, 24 November 2020.

TPLF leaders.¹¹⁹ At the end of the reporting period for this country of origin information report, the federal government had arrested or killed a number of leaders of the TPLF, while the former president of Tigray, Debretsion Gebremichael, was still on the run.¹²⁰

Tigrayan opposition parties (in Tigray and at federal level)

During the September 2020 elections in Tigray, the Tigray Independence Party was the only party to have full secession in its election manifesto. Two other parties running in the early September 2020 elections, Salsay Woyane and Baitona, have secession as an optional alternative strategy. Kidane Amame, chairman of Baitona, declared that most Tigrayans are not secessionists and want to remain part of Ethiopia. However, the chairman of the party has said that the situation could change if the instability and persecution do not stop.¹²¹

Two opposition parties that have their origins in Tigray, *Arena* and *Tigrayan Alliance for National Democracy* (TAND), did not participate in the Tigray elections. Firstly, the parties did not support the regional state's decision to hold elections of its own. Secondly, neither side had room for manoeuvre in the region, while in Addis Ababa they have relative freedom of movement. Confidential sources reported that members of both parties were at risk of arrest and prosecution should they go to Tigray.¹²² The party leader of TAND, Aregawi Berhe, was attacked by a group of young men during a funeral in the capital of Tigray, Mekelle. The local police arrested Berhe and detained him at the police station for one night. According to a statement by the chairman of TAND, while visiting Berhe in prison, another member was attacked and poisoned by regional security forces. The party member survived the poisoning after hospital treatment.¹²³ At the end of November 2020, federal forces occupied the capital of Tigray, Mekelle, and the TPLF lost its power base in the region.¹²⁴

1.2.3

Qeerroo

Borkena, an Ethiopian news and opinion website, described the Qeerroo ('single young men' in Afaan Oromo) as a clandestine youth organisation.¹²⁵ The Qeerroo, who had taken to the streets in Oromia en masse from 2015 onward, were partly responsible for Oromo Abiy's appointment as Prime Minister in 2018. A confidential source says that the activities of the Qeerroo may be illegal (see section 1.4.1), but that the organisation itself cannot be 'illegal' because no official organisation exists.¹²⁶

There is no consensus among the sources about the degree of organisation of the Qeerroo. According to Ethiopia expert William Davison, there is a low degree of organisation and some caution should be exercised in using the term 'Qeerroo' as it is often misused or used for the sake of convenience.¹²⁷ However, sources in the OLF who spoke with the UK Foreign Office said that the OLF was responsible for

¹¹⁹ New Business Ethiopia, *ETHIOPIAN ARMY KILLS THREE TOP TPLF LEADERS*, 13 January 2021.

¹²⁰ The Economist, *After two months of war, Tigray faces starvation; Ethiopia*, 21 January 2021.

¹²¹ Eritrea Hub, *Tigray: Towards a de-facto state?*, 14 May 2020; ICG, *Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North*, 12 June 2020.

¹²² Confidential source, 15 September 2020; confidential source, 21 September 2020.

¹²³ United States Department of State, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 20, 11 March 2020; Ezega News, *Dr Aregawi Berhe Says He Was Attacked and Detained in Mekelle*, 2 July 2020.

¹²⁴ BBC Monitoring (Tigray Television), *Tigrayan forces explain 'withdrawal' from regional capital*, 3 December 2020; Addis Standard, *NEWS: MEKELLE CITY INTERIM MAYOR ADMITS PRESENCE AND PARTICIPATION OR ERITREAN FORCES IN TIGRAY CONFLICT*, 4 January 2021.

¹²⁵ Borkena, *Oromo regional state added 6,000 forces to its security apparatus*, 4 November 2018.

¹²⁶ Confidential source, 17 August 2020.

¹²⁷ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 81, July 2020.

training, directing and organising the Qeerroo.¹²⁸ There is also a youth organisation, *Oromo National Youth Movement for Freedom and Democracy*, or in Afaan Oromo *Qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromoo*, which sources say does indeed have a hierarchy and structure.¹²⁹ It is not known to which extent this organisation represents the Qeerroo as a whole.

The BBC describes Jawar Mohammed as a person who has played an important role in organising the Qeerroo.¹³⁰ There may be different opinions about the (degree of) organisation of the Qeerroo, but almost all sources agree that OFC leader Jawar Mohammed, before his arrest in July 2020, had the power to mobilise the Oromo youth. He is also said to be closely associated with the Qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromoo.¹³¹

1.3 Illegal opposition movements

Terrorist organisations

After the OLF, the ONLF and PG7 had been removed from the list of terrorist organisations in the summer of 2018, there were no more opposition movements that were officially classified as illegal. Only terrorist organisations Al Qaida and Al Shabaab, which the international community have also labelled as terrorist, are regarded as such by Ethiopia. PG7 merged with the new E-ZEMA party and the OLF and the ONLF officially registered as a political party in Ethiopia. Various sources say that there is no such thing as one OLF because of the different splinter factions (see also 1.2.2). However, the removal of the organisations from the list of terrorist organisations did not signal an end to the subversive and illegal activities of certain organisations. According to *The Economist*, dissident OLF members who did not support the policy of the political faction withdrew to the forests at the end of 2018, from where they carried out attacks on military targets, among other things.¹³²

OLF/OLA/Shene

A confidential source reported that most of the OLF fighters who had arrived from Eritrea had surrendered their weapons. OLF fighters who had never left Ethiopia and had continued fighting on Ethiopian soil had more difficulty giving up their weapons, the source said.¹³³ Amnesty International writes that the armed struggle in Oromia is being continued by a faction that has separated from the military wing of the OLF. This splinter movement, which according to Amnesty International calls itself the *Oromo Liberation Army* (OLA), is critical of Prime Minister Abiy's reforms, which it believes run counter to the interests of the ethnic Oromo. The military branch rejected the peace treaty¹³⁴ that was signed by the government and the OLF and refused to disarm.¹³⁵

¹²⁸ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 81, July 2020.

¹²⁹ BBC News, *How did US and Ethiopia become so close?*, 8 April 2019; Eritrea Hub, *Qeerroo: from 'revolt against subjugation' to 'popular uprising against tyranny'*, 3 September 2020.

¹³⁰ BBC News, *How did US and Ethiopia become so close?*, 8 April 2019.

¹³¹ Confidential source, 17 August 2020; confidential source, 21 September 2020; BBC News, *How did US and Ethiopia become so close?*, 8 April 2019

¹³² *The Economist*, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

¹³³ Confidential source, 6 August 2020.

¹³⁴ However, after a treaty to cease all hostilities was signed in August 2018, violence in Oromia persisted. In January 2019, Milkesa Mideksa of Oromia state and OLF Chairman Dawud Ibsa agreed on a ceasefire after months of fighting in the region: AfricaNews, *Ethiopia's Oromia state signs ceasefire deal with OLF*, 25 January 2019.

¹³⁵ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

According to *The Reporter*, the army of the OLF, the OLA, or in Afaan Oromo *Waraana Bilisummaa Oromoo* (WBO), declared in an official statement in April 2019 that they no longer have a relationship with the party or the leadership in Addis Ababa. The statement said that despite OLA's desire to join a ceasefire and discuss disputes with the government, the government continued to fight OLA and arrest its fighters.¹³⁶ As mentioned above, in section 1.2.2 the government accused OLA of not having fully disarmed itself, contrary to the agreements (see section 3.2.4).¹³⁷

ACLED (*Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*) wrote after OLA's statement that the split between the political and military factions could lead to more violence in different parts of Ethiopia.¹³⁸ In May 2019, Dawud Ibsa, the then chairman of political party OLF,¹³⁹ openly distanced himself from all groups that were continuing the armed struggle in the name of the OLF and also stated that his party would work with the government to bring about peace.¹⁴⁰

An employee of a human rights organisation has said that the *Oromo Liberation Army* (OLA) can be regarded as an illegal group because this armed branch of the OLF separated from the opposition party after the group had returned to Ethiopia to participate in politics without violence. They are still fighting an armed struggle against the Ethiopian authorities.¹⁴¹ The dissident OLF members who are still fighting an armed struggle are also known by the name 'Shene'.¹⁴² According to the above source, Shene is traditionally the name for the executive body of the OLF, but the Ethiopian government uses the name for those who are still continuing the armed struggle.¹⁴³

Several sources agree that there is a lack of clarity about the exact names of the groups that are affiliated with the OLF in one way or another.¹⁴⁴ An analyst told the UK Home Office investigation team, which was on a fact-finding mission in Ethiopia in September 2019, that the terms OLF and OLA are used interchangeably. However, he said that OLA refers more to the fighters and OLF to the political branch that previously exercised control over the OLA in the diaspora. The extent to which the OLF had control over the OLA was a matter for debate, according to the analyst.¹⁴⁵ A confidential source says that the OLF and the OLA are in fact the same and that Shene is the group of dissident members of the armed branch of the OLF that is continuing the armed struggle.¹⁴⁶ ACLED calls Shene the breakaway faction of the OLF that is continuing the armed struggle.¹⁴⁷

To illustrate how difficult it is to give the different factions a precise name, a confidential source cites the example that the federal government uses the term Shene to describe the political arm of the OLF. The government actually uses Shene as a pejorative term for the group. The OLF leaders will never use this term

¹³⁶ The Reporter, *OLF politics, military splits*, 6 April 2019.

¹³⁷ The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020; AP News, *Ethiopian rebel group accuses government of airstrikes*, 18 January 2019.

¹³⁸ ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa 24-30 November 2019*, 3 December 2019.

¹³⁹ *Adda Bilisummaa Oromoo* (ABO) is Afaan Oromo for the OLF.

¹⁴⁰ Addis Standard, *OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups, agrees to support government peace efforts*, 29 May 2019. However, several sources believe that there is still contact between the political faction and those continuing the armed struggle (see section 1.2 and later in this section).

¹⁴¹ Confidential source, 6 August 2020.

¹⁴² Ezega News, *Armed Men Kill At Least 8 People in Benishangul-Gumuz Region*, 9 April 2020.

¹⁴³ Confidential source, 6 August 2020.

¹⁴⁴ DIS, *Country of Origin Information: Ethiopia Opposition groups – recent developments*, page 11, March 2020

¹⁴⁵ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 83, July 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Confidential source, 23 August 2020.

¹⁴⁷ ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa 24-30 November 2019*, 3 December 2019.

themselves, according to the source.¹⁴⁸ Both open and confidential sources question the separation between the political faction and the armed dissident branch and believe that clandestine links are still being maintained (see Sections 3.2.4 and 3.2.5 on the treatment of those people that are/have been associated with the OLF or OLA/Shene).¹⁴⁹

It is not known how many fighters the OLA/Shene has. There are estimates ranging from 1,500 to several thousand fighters.¹⁵⁰ This also raises the question of whether this involves an orchestrated rebellion or of a mishmash of groups.¹⁵¹

In the remainder of this country of origin information report, the term OLF will be used for the political faction and OLA/Shene when reference is made to the breakaway groups that are still continuing the armed struggle. It should be noted here that, as described above, there are no unambiguous names for the various factions.

TAND and Arena: special position in Tigray

Political parties that originally have a Tigrayan character, such as TAND and Arena, can function at the federal level and organise activities in the capital Addis Ababa, for example. However, in their home region of Tigray they were barred from participating in the September 2020 elections, all the more so as both sides denounced the legitimacy of the election.¹⁵² A confidential source associated with TAND said that he was able to pursue activities for the party in Addis Ababa but that in Tigray he would at the very least be hampered by the authorities and also run the risk of being arrested.¹⁵³ This report already touched on the arrest of Aregawi Berhe of the TAND in Tigray and the alleged poisoning of one of his employees.¹⁵⁴ As already mentioned, the TPLF lost its power base in Tigray in late November 2020. At the end of the reporting period of this country of origin information report, elements of the TPLF were still in hiding and fighting was still taking place in parts of Tigray (see also sections 1.1.2.1 and 1.2.2).

1.4 Violent methods by illegal opposition parties

By Shene/OLA

The dissident OLA/Shene has not accepted the peace deal with the government and is waging an armed struggle against the government, which includes carrying out targeted operations against government officials. ACLED wrote in December 2019 that in the previous twelve months, Shene was reportedly responsible for the deaths of at least eight Oromia state government officials.¹⁵⁵ The *United States Department of State* (USDoS) also reported two kidnappings by Shene/OLA, where one of the hostages was eventually killed.¹⁵⁶

Confidential sources confirm the violence by Shene/OLA against government officials, but also mention violence and operations by this organisation against the

¹⁴⁸ Confidential source, 21 August 2020; The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

¹⁴⁹ The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

¹⁵⁰ New Business Ethiopia, *Ethiopia To Rehabilitate 1,000 Oromo Liberation Front Soldiers*, 13 February 2019.

¹⁵¹ The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020; confidential source, 17 September 2020.

¹⁵² USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 20, 11 March 2020.

¹⁵³ Confidential source, 15 September 2020.

¹⁵⁴ Ezega News, *Dr Aregawi Berhe Says He Was Attacked and Detained in Mekelle*, 2 July 2020.

¹⁵⁵ ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa 24-30 November 2019*, 3 December 2019

¹⁵⁶ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 3, 11 March 2020.

local population. For example, members of Shene have looted local farms to find food, according to a confidential source.¹⁵⁷ In an article on 29 May 2019, *Addis Standard* reported six fatalities in a skirmish between members of the OLA and federal security forces. The newspaper wrote that 'as usual' the real reason for the victims' deaths could not be determined. Local authorities are alleged to have said that the victims ended up in a shoot-out between federal troops and members of the OLA after the latter had thrown a hand grenade. However, members of the local community said the fatalities were caused by a counter-attack by federal forces against OLA.¹⁵⁸

Due to the Tigray conflict, OLA/Shene was said to be using the withdrawal of federal troops from Western Oromia and the resulting power vacuum as a pretext for 'ethnic cleansing' in the area.¹⁵⁹ An adviser to the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said that since November 2020, more than fifty ethnic Amhara in western Oromia had been killed in an attempt by OLA/Shene to expel them from the region (see also section 1.8.2).¹⁶⁰

By Shifta/Abbaa Torbee/Yadeessa Negassa

According to a confidential source, Shene and *Shifta* (a term meaning bandit, thug, criminal) are often confused and the federal government also attributes purely criminal operations by members of the Shifta to Shene.¹⁶¹ *Ethiopia Insight* quoted a spokesman for the Oromia regional government, who used the term Shifta when referring to the OLF in general.¹⁶² *Abbaa Torbee*, a phrase in Afan Oromo that means 'Whose turn is it this week?', is associated by some sources with Shene, which is said to act as a covert death squad for the dissident OLF faction. Other sources, such as Amnesty International, differentiate between Shene and Abbaa Torbee, citing the latter as a clandestine organisation that was accused by the federal government of bank robberies, targeted assassinations and kidnappings. OLA/Shene is also accused of carrying out such practices.¹⁶³ *Ezega News* also called the group *Yadeessa Negassa*, which means the 'group of murderers'. According to the news outlet, this is another Oromo ethnic rebel group suspected of murdering government officials in the western Shoa zone.¹⁶⁴

Alleged TPLF involvement

Various sources believe that the Ethiopian authorities regularly refer to the TPLF, with no hard evidence, as an instigator of the (ethnic) violence and other events in Ethiopia since the party lost its position of power in Ethiopia.¹⁶⁵ For example, the federal government accused the TPLF of being responsible, together with the 'OLA/Shene', for the murder of the popular Oromo singer Hachalu at the end of June 2020 and the riots that followed his murder (see also section 1.8). The arrested suspects are said to have spoken to each other in Tigrinya. A spokesman for the

¹⁵⁷ Confidential source, 23 September 2020.

¹⁵⁸ *Addis Standard*, *OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups, agrees to support government peace efforts*, 29 May 2019.

¹⁵⁹ Al Jazeera, *Dozens killed in 'brutal' western Ethiopia attack*, 2 November 2020; UN News, *Ethiopia: 'Halt the violence', resolve grievances peacefully – UN rights chief*, 6 November 2020.

¹⁶⁰ BBC, *Ethiopia's Oromia conflict: Why a teacher was killed 'execution-style'*, 16 January 2021.

¹⁶¹ Confidential source, 21 September 2020.

¹⁶² Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020.

¹⁶³ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, page 16, 29 May 2020; Global Voices, *How the murder of musician Hachalu Hundessa incited violence in Ethiopia: Part II*, 8 August 2020. Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020.

¹⁶⁴ *Ezega News*, *Members of OLF Shene Charged with Terrorism; 12 Farmers Reportedly Killed by Government in Southern*, 27 January 2020.

¹⁶⁵ Confidential source, 30 September 2020; confidential source, 23 September 2020; confidential source, 12 July 2020.

TPLF denied all allegations, saying that the TPLF did not believe in assassinations for political gain.¹⁶⁶

A confidential source associated with the federal government also referred to the regions of Afar and Benishangul-Gumuz as regions where the TPLF would support opposition movements against the Ethiopian authorities.¹⁶⁷ Violence in the Benishangul-Gumuz region was attributed by a government official in an *Addis Standard* article to unspecified opposition groups and possibly discharged army officers, probably referring to officers of the TPLF. More than one hundred people were reportedly killed in 2020, including soldiers of the federal army.¹⁶⁸ Also in November 2020, government media pointed to TPLF involvement in a massacre of bus passengers in the Benishangul-Gumuz region.¹⁶⁹ However, no evidence of the party's involvement in these incidents has been produced. After a particularly bloody incident in western Oromia in late October 2020 in which more than fifty ethnic Amhara were allegedly killed, parliament called on Abiy to designate the TPLF as a terrorist organisation. The TPLF allegedly supported the perpetrators of the massacre.¹⁷⁰ The TPLF's alleged support of armed groups such as OLA/Shene is said to be one of the reasons why Abiy decided to deploy the military against the region in early November 2020.¹⁷¹

1.4.1

By Qeerroo

Although the Qeerroo are not an illegal opposition movement, this section takes a closer look at their alleged violent activities. Following the murder of singer Hachalu Hundessa at the end of June 2020, both confidential and open sources say that groups of Oromo, particularly the Qeerroo, carried out orchestrated attacks on non-Oromo ethnic groups, such as ethnic Amhara and Guraghe. Also, the Qeerroo, who are predominantly Muslim, are said to have¹⁷² attacked Christian Oromo.¹⁷³

The figures on the number of deaths vary. According to official figures from the Ethiopian government, more than 150 people died in Oromia in these attacks, particularly in the city of Shashemene. In an article on 3 July 2020, ICG cited an Oromia Police Commissioner as saying that 83 civilians and four police officers had been killed in the attacks. Reporting on the events, the Ethiopian State-related *Ethiopian Human Rights Commission* (EHRC) writes that during the crisis that lasted from 29 June to 3 July 2020, 123 deaths occurred, including 35 victims killed by individuals or groups that participated in the so-called orchestrated attacks on civilians and 76 killed by security forces in the crackdown on the riots.¹⁷⁴

It is not known whether there was a preconceived plan for the alleged orchestrated attacks or whether they occurred spontaneously after the murder. One source questions the degree of organisation behind the violence following Hachalu's death

¹⁶⁶ Ezega News, *TPLF Dismisses Allegations of Killing, Instigating Violence*, 18 July 2020.

¹⁶⁷ Confidential source, 15 September 2020.

¹⁶⁸ Addis Standard, *Ethiopian officials blame opposition groups for attacks*, 16 September 2020.

¹⁶⁹ Addis Standard, *Ethiopian forces kill 20 gunmen in western region*, 16 November 2020.

¹⁷⁰ Confidential source, 17 November 2020.

¹⁷¹ Statecraft, *Ethiopian PM Launches Full-Scale Military Offensive Against TPLF in Tigray*, 5 November 2020.

¹⁷² A confidential source is of the opinion that not all Qeerroo are Muslim and that there are also Christian Qeerroo. The east of Oromia, where most of the violence took place, is mainly Islamic, which means that the Qeerroo there are predominantly Muslim, according to the source: Confidential source, 14 January 2021.

¹⁷³ ICG, *Defusing Ethiopia's Latest Perilous Crisis*, 3 July 2020; Confidential source, 15 August 2020; Confidential source, 12 July 2020; Borkena, *Ethiopia, Oromo region: police confirm death toll from attack reached 166*, 5 July 2020; Ezega News, *At Least Eight Members of Insurgent Group Killed in Western Ethiopia*, 9 August 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Borkena, *Ethiopia, Oromo region: police confirm death toll from attack reached 166*, 5 July 2020; EHRC, <<IT DID NOT FEEL LIKE WE HAD A GOVERNMENT>> *Violence & Human Rights Violations following Musician Hachalu Hundessa's Assassination*, 1 January 2021: According to Borkena's website, Ethiopian authorities also reportedly held OLA/Shene responsible for the ethnic violence.

(see also sections 1.8.2 and 3.1.1).¹⁷⁵ The federal government arrested the leaders of the OFC, Jawar Mohammed and Bekele Gerba, in response to the disturbances and charged them with incitement and (complicity in) murder.¹⁷⁶ Confidential sources agree that Jawar Mohammed has the capacity to mobilise the Oromo youth but there are wide discrepancies in their assessments of his involvement in the violence following the murder of Hachalu. Whereas one source believes that he incited the young people through social media, another believes that there is no evidence whatsoever for this.¹⁷⁷

1.5 Area of operation of illegal opposition movements

Oromia is said to be the hotbed of most of the problems in Ethiopia, particularly the west and south of this region.¹⁷⁸ Following the violence by OLA/Shene, the federal government declared a state of emergency in 2019 in the zones of Wollega (also known as Wellega) and Guji in the regional state of Oromia. This meant that the army became responsible for the security of the zones.¹⁷⁹

Previously illegal opposition movements such as OLF, ONLF, BPLM, and PG7 returned to Ethiopia from Eritrea after Ahmed Abiy took office.¹⁸⁰ According to Ezega News, the OLA/Shene were trained in Kenya after 2018.¹⁸¹ After his arrest, OFC politician Jawar Mohammed was charged with sending OLA/Shene fighters to Egypt via Kenya to be trained there.¹⁸² However, this charge is called into question by several sources.¹⁸³

The Ethiopian authorities accused unidentified armed groups operating from Sudanese territory of carrying out massacres in the Benishangul-Gumuz region. The groups involved were unknown, but the Ethiopian authorities alluded to the involvement of the TPLF. The TPLF is alleged to have provided the groups with equipment and training.¹⁸⁴ A confidential source notes that the power of the TPLF outside its own Tigray region is overestimated in open sources.¹⁸⁵

1.6 Role of and developments surrounding the OLF

In a move to increase political space, the government under Abiy Ahmed allowed the OLF to return to Ethiopia along with other political parties in exile. The legalisation of the OLF made it possible for individuals to identify openly as OLF adherents. However, it is difficult to say exactly who and what the OLF is, according to William Davison of ICG in an interview with the investigation team at the UK Foreign Office. Davison also believes that while the organisation is legal, it is still seen as a threat by the Ethiopian authorities.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁵ Confidential source, 21 October 2020.

¹⁷⁶ Confidential source, 6 August 2020.

¹⁷⁷ Confidential source, 17 August 2020; confidential source, 30 September 2020.

¹⁷⁸ Ezega News, *Members of OLF Shene Charged with Terrorism; 12 Farmers Reportedly Killed by Government in Southern*, 27 January 2020; New Business Ethiopia, *Ethiopia To Rehabilitate 1,000 Oromo Liberation Front Soldiers*, 13 February 2019.

¹⁷⁹ The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

¹⁸⁰ EastAfro.com, *Ethiopia: Gambella People's Liberation Movement Returns Home From Eritrea*, 22 April 2019.

¹⁸¹ Ezega News, *Members of OLF Shene Charged with Terrorism; 12 Farmers Reportedly Killed by Government in Southern*, 27 January 2020

¹⁸² Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopian prosecutors charge Jawar with training terror group in Egypt*, 25 September 2020.

¹⁸³ Confidential source, 30 September 2020; confidential source, 23 September 2020.

¹⁸⁴ Addis Standard, *Ethiopian forces kill 20 gunmen in western region*, 16 November 2020.

¹⁸⁵ Confidential source, 17 September 2020.

¹⁸⁶ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 97, July 2020.

According to various sources, it is difficult to speak of the OLF as a single entity. The OLF consists of multiple factions and divisions.¹⁸⁷ The OLF of former chairman Dawud Ibsa is registered with the Ethiopian electoral council as a political party under this name.¹⁸⁸ In addition, there are the *Oromo Democratic Front* (ODF) founded by veterans of the OLF leadership, the *Oromo National Party* (ONP) of General Kemal Gelchu, who fled to Eritrea to join the OLF and later leave it again, and the OLF factions headed, respectively, by the former OLF Chairman Galasa Diblo and by General Hailu Gonfa.¹⁸⁹

In May 2019, Dawud Ibsa openly distanced himself from all the parties that are still continuing the armed struggle in Ethiopia on behalf of the OLF.¹⁹⁰ According to *The Economist*, the details of the peace treaty were never disclosed, making it easy for either side to accuse each other of not respecting the treaty.¹⁹¹ A confidential source believes that the OLF, OLA and Shene should not be compartmentalised, because they all overlap very fluidly and some factions are fighting each other while others are seeking each other out again in order to work together. The source says that everything is decided very locally.¹⁹²

According to a confidential source, the political faction of the OLF is not united. One faction in the party would prefer a rapprochement with Prime Minister Abiy's PP, while another is opposed to Abiy's pan-Ethiopian policy and primarily wants to focus on the interests of the ethnic Oromo in Ethiopia.¹⁹³ In addition, a number of confidential sources wonder about the extent to which the OLF can be regarded a structured party or more of an ideology or idea.¹⁹⁴ 'In 2018, Lemma Megersa and Abiy Ahmed embodied the OLF for many,' said a confidential source. According to the same source, not much of that idea is left in 2020. The OFC is better organised than the OLF and is also said to have a larger support base.¹⁹⁵

1.7 Relations with neighbouring countries Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan

1.7.1 Eritrea¹⁹⁶

The first signs were hopeful after the peace agreement between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Eritrean President Isaias. Telephone lines were restored, flights between Addis Ababa and Asmara resumed and goods were exchanged intensively between the two countries. Diplomatic ties between the two countries were strengthened again in July 2018. After the peace agreement with Ethiopia, there seemed to be a

¹⁸⁷ It is not clear exactly how many factions there are and by which names these factions are known. This report is mainly based on the doctoral thesis written by Mr Tessema. This is not to say that the list is exhaustive: Tessema, Y.N., *Political discourses and the securitization of democracy in post-1991 Ethiopia*, page 129, 7 May 2020.

¹⁸⁸ Addis Standard, @addisstandard, 19 November 2019: twitter.com/addisstandard/status/1195315489976795136

¹⁸⁹ Tessema, Y.N., *Political discourses and the securitization of democracy in post-1991 Ethiopia*, page 129, 7 May 2020.

¹⁹⁰ Addis Standard, *OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups, agrees to support government peace efforts*, 29 May 2019

¹⁹¹ The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

¹⁹² Confidential source, 17 September 2020.

¹⁹³ Confidential source, 21 September 2020.

¹⁹⁴ Confidential source, 30 September 2020.

¹⁹⁵ Confidential source, 30 September 2020.

¹⁹⁶ Much of the information in this section has been taken literally from the *General Country of Origin Information Report Eritrea November 2020*, pages 8-10.

slight thaw in the international political isolation in which Eritrea had lived for a long time.¹⁹⁷

President Isaias of Eritrea visited the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt during the reporting period. The Eritrean Ministry of Information did not reveal much more about these visits other than that they were aimed at improving bilateral relations and regional cooperation between these countries.¹⁹⁸ According to the *Eritrea Hub* news medium, the common aspect of the three countries that were visited would be the Nile and the impasse over the *Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam* (GERD)¹⁹⁹ in Ethiopia. President Isaias likes to see himself as a mediator, according to this source. He has always ascribed a regional role to Eritrea. President Isaias also spoke with the Somali president. Some sources saw this as an attempt by the Eritrean president, together with Ethiopia and Somalia, to form a bloc (the so-called 'Cushitic Alliance') against the increasing power of the Gulf states in the Horn of Africa.²⁰⁰

On 19 July 2020, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy visited the SAWA military camp in Eritrea. SAWA is where recruits of the Eritrean Armed Forces (EDF) and national service conscripts are sent for basic military training. Once sent to SAWA, the youngsters continue to do their national service indefinitely, which is the main reason why young Eritreans have been fleeing from Eritrea for the past two decades. Paradoxically, the majority of young Eritreans who have sought shelter in Ethiopia are 'SAWA graduates.'²⁰¹ From an Ethiopian perspective, the Eritrea-Ethiopia rapprochement is primarily intended to isolate the TPLF and make centralisation possible, according to a confidential source. It is not about better cooperation between Ethiopia and Eritrea on all levels.²⁰²

Immediately after the peace agreement in the summer of 2018, four border crossings were opened, allowing trade between the two countries to be resumed. However, the border crossings were closed again after several months after government officials from the Tigray region, among others, reportedly expressed their concerns.²⁰³ The brief opening of the border engendered a feeling of insecurity among Eritrean refugees in the refugee camps in Northern Ethiopia. The end of the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia did not improve the human rights situation in Eritrea. Eritrean refugees feared that Eritrean government officials would take advantage of the opening of the border and mingle with the refugees.²⁰⁴ A

¹⁹⁷ VOA News, *Since Ethiopia-Eritrea Peace Deal, Little to Show: Analysts*, 16 September 2020; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Eritrea Country Report*, page 10, 2020; Ethiopian News Agency, *Eritrea, Sudan Agree to Bolster Bilateral Ties Including Regional Security*, 8 September 2020; VOA News, *Through Regional Diplomacy, Eritrea Normalizes Ties with Djibouti*, 9 September 2018.

¹⁹⁸ Shabait.com, *President Isaias returns home concluding two-day visit to Ethiopia*, 5 May 2020; Shabait.com, *President Isaias Afwerki returned home concluding working visit to Sudan*, 27 June 2020; Shabait.com, *President Isaias Afwerki on working visit to Egypt*, 5 July 2020.

¹⁹⁹ Since Ethiopia started construction activities ten years ago, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in the Blue Nile has been controversial. The reservoir behind the dam can absorb all the supply of the Blue Nile for more than a year while it is being filled. This gives Ethiopia control over the water supply to Sudan and Egypt during the initial filling period and during refilling after extreme drought. That is precisely why Egypt sees the dam as a threat to the Nile as the country's lifeline. For Ethiopia, the dam is a national prestige project to which the population has contributed financially. For Sudan, the dam could increase the country's irrigation potential, but that is another threat to Egypt. The dam is therefore a source of great regional division.

²⁰⁰ Eritrea Hub, *What's behind President Isaias's travels?* 6 July 2020; AfricaNews, *Ethiopia - Eritrea peace deal reviewed as Abiy visits Afwerki*, 19 July 2020; United States Institute of Peace, *Amid Red Sea Rivalries, Eritrea Plays for Independence President Isaias proposes a regional bloc to balance the rising influence of Gulf states*, 11 March 2020; Cushitic:based on the languages predominantly spoken in the three countries. Daily Nation, *Once a pariah, Eritrean president comes up with regional bloc idea*, 2 February 2020.

²⁰¹ Asmarino Independent Media, *Eritrea what are the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea up to?*, 21 July 2020.

²⁰² Confidential source, 13 October 2020.

²⁰³ VOA News, *Since Ethiopia-Eritrea Peace Deal, Little to Show: Analysts*, 16 September 2020.

²⁰⁴ Swiss Peace Foundation, *Peace for whom? The situation of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia*, 1 April 2020.

confidential source reported that Tigray academics returned to Tigray for fear of the presence of the Eritrean intelligence agency in Addis Ababa.²⁰⁵

Abiy and Isaias may have reached out to each other, but the TPLF still saw Eritrea as an enemy. From 1998 to 2000, Eritrea and Ethiopia, which at the time was ruled by the EPRDF/TPLF, fought a bloody war which particularly affected the Tigray region bordering Eritrea. According to a senior researcher from the University of London in an interview with VOA News, the problems between Tigray and Eritrea go back much further and are often of a personal nature between the leaders of both parties.²⁰⁶ The rapprochement between Abiy and Isaias was therefore viewed with suspicion by the leadership of the TPLF.²⁰⁷ Partly due to opposition from the Tigrayans, no progress was made in the demarcation of controversial border areas, particularly the area around Badme town. In 2002, the *Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission* (EEBC), which was established to settle the border dispute, decided that this area belonged to Eritrea.²⁰⁸

In early November 2020, fighting broke out between the Ethiopian Federal Army and the rebel regional forces of the TPLF in Tigray state. The conflict would cause thousands of deaths. Sources spoke of the risk that the conflict could escalate into a cross-border regional conflict. As the tension increased, TPLF leaders also accused their sworn enemy Eritrea of meddling in Ethiopia's internal affairs in an attempt to drive Tigray into a corner. The risk of cross-border conflict increased after the TPLF launched a missile strike on the capital Asmara.²⁰⁹ Sources, including diplomats stationed in Ethiopia and UN staff, reported that the Eritrean army, which included conscripts, had been sent to Tigray to join the fighting against the TPLF forces alongside the Ethiopian federal forces (see also sections 1.1.2.1 and 1.8.7).²¹⁰ A source from *The Guardian* is said to have seen how Eritrean soldiers took charge of Ethiopian federal forces in the early days of the conflict. The source said that the Ethiopians later took over control.²¹¹

During a meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Abiy declared that there were no Eritrean troops on Ethiopian territory.²¹² After the outbreak of the conflict, Abiy told the Ethiopian parliament that the Eritrean people were not only the brothers of the Ethiopians, but that they had shown themselves to be true friends by supporting the Ethiopians in difficult times.²¹³ According to *The Guardian*, Eritrean state television did not report on the conflict in Ethiopia. Even the missile attack on the capital Asmara was not publicly referred to by the Eritrean authorities.²¹⁴ On 4 January 2021, Ataklti Haileselassie, who was appointed acting mayor after the capture of Mekelle, admitted in a television appearance that Eritrean

²⁰⁵ Confidential source, 21 September 2020.

²⁰⁶ VOA News, *Since Ethiopia-Eritrea Peace Deal, Little to Show: Analysts*, 16 September 2020.

²⁰⁷ BBC News, *Why there are fears that Ethiopia could break up*, 4 September 2020.

²⁰⁸ VOA News, *Since Ethiopia-Eritrea Peace Deal, Little to Show: Analysts*, 16 September 2020; BBC News, *Why there are fears that Ethiopia could break up*, 4 September 2020.

²⁰⁹ Al Jazeera, *Eritrea, Tigray and Ethiopia's brewing civil war*, 8 November 2020; NOS, *Verdere escalatie in Ethiopië: rebellen voeren aanvallen uit op Eritrea (Further escalation in Ethiopia: rebels attack Eritrea)*, 15 November 2020.

²¹⁰ Human Rights Concern-Eritrea, *Eritrean Armed Forces Fighting Inside Tigray*, 24 November 2020; The Guardian, *'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses*, 21 December 2020; Xinhuanet, *No proof of Eritrean troops fighting in Ethiopia: UN chief*, 10 December 2020; Bloomberg, *Possible Eritrea Troop Sightings Signal Wider Ethiopia Fight*, 8 December 2020; confidential source, 10 December 2020.

²¹¹ The Guardian, *'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses*, 21 December 2020.

²¹² Xinhuanet, *No proof of Eritrean troops fighting in Ethiopia: UN chief*, 10 December 2020.

²¹³ The Guardian, *'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses*, 21 December 2020.

²¹⁴ The Guardian, *'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses*, 21 December 2020.

troops had participated in the armed conflict in Tigray.²¹⁵ On 20 January 2021, the spokesman for the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the reporting of Eritrean involvement in the Tigray conflict was unfounded and false.²¹⁶

Ethiopia has sheltered Eritrean opposition groups for decades. Since the rapprochement between the two countries after Abiy took office and the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray, members of these opposition groups have reportedly been subjected to, among other things, intimidation and arrest by the Ethiopian authorities (see also section 3.2.1).²¹⁷

1.7.2

Sudan

Sudan and Ethiopia share a common border of approximately 1,600 kilometres. The border was established on the basis of treaties between Ethiopia and the then colonial powers, the United Kingdom and Italy. To date, the border has no clear lines of demarcation. The Al Fashaqa region in the Sudanese state of Al-Qadarif is a rich and fertile area where Ethiopian farmers have cultivated their crops for decades with the tacit approval of the Ethiopian government.²¹⁸

In mid-December 2020, the Sudanese authorities accused the Ethiopian army and militias associated with it of infiltrating Sudanese territory, killing four people, including an army officer. In reference to this incident, the Sudanese news station *Radio Dabanga* reported that 'shifita' – armed gangs (see also section 1.4) – supported by hundreds of Ethiopian federal troops were responsible for the fatalities. Earlier that month, an Ethiopian parliamentary committee had allegedly accused the Sudanese military of carrying out attacks on civilians at the instigation of the TPLF. The Ethiopian army and Amhara militias had had several violent clashes with the Sudanese army during the year. The Ethiopian authorities had previously indicated that such attacks would no longer occur.²¹⁹

In December 2020, the Sudanese army declared that it had regained control of parts of eastern Sudan's state of Al-Qadarif. According to Sudanese radio station *Radio Dabanga*, the 'shifita' had ravaged the region for more than 25 years, with violent raids during which they stole livestock or kidnapped people for ransom. However, whereas *Radio Dabanga* had referred to shifita, the *Sudan Tribune* reported that Amhara militias were ravaging the region.²²⁰

In response to the above incidents, Abiy tweeted that his government was closely following events on the Ethiopian-Sudanese border. He stated that such incidents would not break the bond between the two countries because they always used dialogue to settle disputes.²²¹ Ethiopian television reported on 20 December 2020 that the Ethiopian and Sudanese leaders had agreed to engage in a dialogue to resolve the border dispute.²²²

²¹⁵ Addis Standard, *NEWS: MEKELLE CITY INTERIM MAYOR ADMITS PRESENCE AND PARTICIPATION OF ERITREAN FORCES IN TIGRAY CONFLICT*, 4 January 2021.

²¹⁶ Fana Broadcasting Corporate, *Reports On Involvement Of Eritrean, Somalian Solders In Law Enforcement Operation Are False, Unfounded: MoFA*, 20 January 2021.

²¹⁷ Confidential source, 21 September 2020.

²¹⁸ DW, *What's behind the Ethiopia-Sudan border row?*, 4 June 2020; BBC Monitoring (Al-Mashhad Al Sudani Website), *Sudanese army 'enters last border point with Ethiopia'*, 22 December 2020.

²¹⁹ Sudan Tribune, *Sudan accuses Ethiopian army of border attacks*, 16 December 2020; The Reporter, *Board accuses Sudanese forces of conspiring with TPLF to kill civilians*, 12 December 2020; Radio Dabanga, *At least 5,000 people displaced after Sudan-Ethiopia border violence*, 2 June 2020.

²²⁰ Radio Dabanga, *Ethiopian forces ambush Sudanese soldiers in El Gedaref*, 17 December 2020.

²²¹ Abiy Ahmed Ali, @AbiyAhmedAli, 17 December 2020: twitter.com/AbiyAhmedAli/status/1339608026383323138.

²²² BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopian and Sudanese leaders agree to solve border row*, 20 December 2020.

According to Ethiopian members of the *Ethiopia-Sudan Boundary Commission*, Sudan has violated the treaty that the two countries signed in 1972 to find a solution to the border dispute. They claim that the treaty stipulates that the status quo in the disputed area will be maintained as long as the countries have not found a solution. An Ethiopian committee member said that Sudan had violated the treaty by crossing the Ethiopian border and occupying land.²²³ The spokesman for the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Ethiopia wanted to seek dialogue to find a solution. He claimed that Sudan had not only illegally entered the disputed area but that Sudanese dignitaries had said that they would not return the 'reclaimed' territory.²²⁴ Speaking to the Sudanese people, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, chairman of Sudan's transition council, said that Sudanese troops respected Ethiopia's sovereignty and had not crossed the border. He also said that he wanted to find a solution through dialogue.²²⁵

The talks that both countries held in Khartoum in December 2020 to resolve the conflict did not lead to an agreement. The violence continued in early 2021: on 11 January 2021, Sudanese authorities sentenced Ethiopian militias ('shifita') for killing six Sudanese civilians in eastern Sudan, reportedly five women and one child. According to local sources of the *Sudan Tribune*, snipers from the Ethiopian Federal Army were responsible for the deaths. Ethiopia is also alleged to have violated Sudanese airspace, according to the Sudanese authorities. On the other hand, on 12 January 2021 the Ethiopian Foreign Minister accused the Sudanese armed forces of reinforcing and dispersing inside Ethiopian territory.²²⁶ A few days later, the Sudanese government ruled out further talks with Ethiopia about the Al-Fashaqa region. According to reports on the website of private news channel Baj News, Sudan was of the opinion that the previous agreements between the two countries were sufficient to define the border. The statement came after Sudan accused the Ethiopian Air Force of violating Sudanese airspace.²²⁷

In addition to the Al Fashaqa issue, Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt are still negotiating the GERD in the Benishangul Gumuz region (see also the section on Eritrea and section 1.8.4).²²⁸ Sudan, like Egypt, is concerned about the country's water supply due to its heavy dependence on Nile water after the dam has been commissioned and Ethiopia can regulate the supply of Nile water to countries downstream. Egypt and Sudan are advocating a strict treaty with binding conditions for the dam, while Ethiopia wants to draw up a less stringent and more flexible agreement between the countries that includes guidelines rather than firm commitments.²²⁹ In early September 2020, the US suspended some of its financial aid to Ethiopia because the country had unilaterally decided to start filling the dam.²³⁰ On 15 December 2020, the relevant ministers of both countries discussed reopening negotiations between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia about the dam.²³¹

²²³ BBC Monitoring (ENA), *Ethiopian official says Sudan 'violated' border agreement*, 6 January 2021.

²²⁴ BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopia urges Sudan to withdraw from disputed region, then resume talks*, 5 January 2021.

²²⁵ BBC Monitoring (Suna News Agency), *Sudanese leader says army has not attacked Ethiopia*, 31 December 2020.

²²⁶ BBC Monitoring (Baj News Website), *Sudan warns Ethiopia of 'dangerous consequences' amid tension*, 13 January 2021; BBC Monitoring (SUNA News Agency), *Sudan condemns 'brutal' aggression by Ethiopian militias*, 12 January 2021; Xinhua, *Sudan says 6 civilians killed by Ethiopian militias on border*, 12 January 2021; Sudan Tribune, *Five women, child killed by Ethiopian force as border tensions escalate*, 12 January 2021.

²²⁷ BBC Monitoring (Baj News Website), *Sudan rules out talks with Ethiopia over disputed region*, 14 January 2021.

²²⁸ Confidential source, 17 November 2020.

²²⁹ The Africa Report, *Ethiopia/Egypt/Sudan: Trust, linkage, and cooperation can end dam dispute*, 3 October 2020.

²³⁰ The Africa Report, *US decision to halt aid to Ethiopia over GERD risks complicating talks*, 7 September 2020.

²³¹ BBC Monitoring (Suna News Agency Website), *Sudan and Ethiopia agree to continue talks on Nile dam*, 15 December 2020.

In a statement in October 2020, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed attributed violence in Ethiopia's Benigshangul-Gumuz region to fighters who were receiving training and logistical assistance in Sudan. He did not mention any specific groups that might be responsible for the violence (see section 1.5). According to *Al Jazeera*, unnamed opposition members believed that violence in the region ran along ethnic lines and that militias from Gumuz were targeting the Amhara and Agaw (also known as Agew) minorities in the region.²³²

Since the outbreak of the armed conflict between the federal government of Ethiopia and the Tigray region in early November 2020, tens of thousands of people have fled from Tigray to Sudan in a short time.²³³ The Sudanese authorities stated on 20 November 2020 that the number of refugees had exceeded 54,000 since the start of the conflict.²³⁴ Sudan had offered to act as a mediator in the conflict. Sudan, a close neighbour of Ethiopia and the Tigray region, had much to gain from its role as a mediator and from a swift settlement of the conflict, according to a confidential source. In its role as a mediator, it could show the outside world that it is a stable country in the region and that it advocates a democratic transformation, the source said.²³⁵ Prime Minister Abiy was not willing to accept Sudan's offer because he believed in a swift resolution of the conflict.²³⁶ On 1 December 2020, after the capital of Tigray Mekelle had been taken by federal forces, Abiy appeared on Ethiopian state television to thank the Sudanese people and the Sudanese government and those of the other neighbouring countries of Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya and South Sudan for their support during the operation against the TPLF.²³⁷

1.7.3

South Sudan

The previous country of origin information report referred to the Abyei issue. The oil-rich region of Abyei, which lies between North and South Sudan, is claimed by both countries. This has led to excessive violence, causing more than 100,000 residents to flee the region.²³⁸ The *United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei* (UNISFA), which consists mainly of Ethiopian military personnel, is charged with maintaining peace and tranquillity in the Abyei region. In a letter dated 15 October 2020, the UN stated that despite continuous rapprochement efforts between Sudan and South Sudan, little progress had been made with regard to the eventual status of Abyei and the security situation in the region remained tense.²³⁹ The same letter states that the planned reduction in troops in accordance with Security Council resolution 2469 (2019) is still ongoing and would be achieved in the foreseeable future. The resolution envisaged a maximum of 3,550 authorised UNISFA troops²⁴⁰

Ethiopia is also supplying around 2,000 troops to the *United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan* (UNMISS) in order to maintain peace and security in South

²³² *Al Jazeera*, *Dozens killed in 'gruesome' bus attack in western Ethiopia*, 15 November 2020.

²³³ *Al Jazeera*, *Concern grows for safety of Eritrean refugees as Tigray war rages*, 21 November 2020: On 21 November, around 40,000 persons had fled from Ethiopia to Sudan, according to *Al Jazeera*.

²³⁴ *Sudan Tribune*, *Sudan deploys troops in two additional border areas with Ethiopia*, 20 December 2020.

²³⁵ Confidential source, 17 November 2020.

²³⁶ Confidential source, 17 November 2020; confidential source, 17 November 2020.

²³⁷ *BBC Monitoring*, *ETV, Ethiopia PM thanks neighbouring countries for 'cooperation'*, 1 December 2020; *Sudan Tribune*, *Sudan accuses Ethiopian army of border attacks*, 16 December 2020; *The Reporter*, *Board accuses Sudanese forces of conspiring with TPLF to kill civilians*, 12 December 2020: The Sudanese army reportedly arrested Ethiopian soldiers who had deserted and fled to Sudan and then handed them over to the Ethiopian authorities.

²³⁸ *Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken*, *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Ethiopië 2018*, page 25, July 2018.

²³⁹ *Security Council Report*, *UN Interim Security Force for Abyei Mandate Renewal*, 11 November 2020; *United Nations Security Council*, *Situation in Abyei*, S/2020/1019, page 1, 15 October 2020; *BBC Monitoring* (Daily Nation), *Ethiopia peacekeepers withdrawn from South Sudan – UN*, 26 November 2020.

²⁴⁰ *United Nations Security Council*, *Situation in Abyei*, S/2020/1019, page 4, 15 October 2020: By 2017, the number had already decreased from 5,326 to 4,791.

Sudan and create conditions for the country's development.²⁴¹ After the outbreak of the conflict between the federal government and the regional state of Tigray, Ethiopia reportedly withdrew three Tigrayan soldiers from this mission (see also section 3.2.1).²⁴²

Ethiopia played a mediating role between President Salva Kiir of South Sudan and his arch rival Riek Machar, who fought each other for supremacy in a civil war. In December 2013, Kiir's government army clashed with armed supporters of Machar, then vice president. The civil war ran along ethnic lines in the country. The bloody conflict in South Sudan claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and created a large flow of refugees, especially to the neighbouring countries of Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan.²⁴³ In early 2020, Kiir and Machar agreed to form a coalition government, with Machar again becoming the country's vice president.²⁴⁴

In September 2020, in the South Sudanese capital Juba President Kiir said in an interview with former President of Ethiopia Dr. Mulatu Teshome, who was acting as special envoy for the Ethiopian Prime Minister, that it was time to strengthen the relationship between the two countries. The talks between Kiir and Teshome focused on types of cooperation that would benefit both countries, such as infrastructure projects and the construction of roads between the two countries.²⁴⁵

1.7.4

Somalia

Ethiopia is closely involved in the conflict in Somalia politically as well as militarily because it itself has a large group of Somali residents in the *Somali Regional State* (SRS).²⁴⁶ Ethiopia, with its large Christian population, is concerned about the risks of Islamist terrorism in Somalia. Ethiopia has a large Islamic minority and is afraid that the ideology of the terrorist group Al-Shabaab could become popular.²⁴⁷

On 14 November 2020, Ethiopian intelligence and security agency NISS announced the arrest of 14 alleged members of Islamic State terrorist organisations *Al-Shabaab* of the *Islamic State*. According to the intelligence and security agency, the persons arrested had intended to carry out attacks in Addis Ababa and other parts of the country. A press statement issued by the agency stated that the suspects had been recruited and trained by the two terrorist organisations. It also stated that the terrorists had wanted to take advantage of the fact that Ethiopian security forces are focused on the campaign against the TPLF.²⁴⁸ On a pro-Al-Shabaab website, the movement denied that Al-Shabaab fighters had been arrested by the Ethiopian authorities.²⁴⁹

Ethiopia is committed to fighting Al Shabaab and other terrorist organisations in Somalia. In 2007, the *African Union Mission in Somalia* (AMISOM) was established with the aim of fighting Al-Shabaab and keeping the peace in the country. On 29 May 2020, the UN Security Council decided to deploy the AMISOM forces until the end of February 2021 with the aim of maintaining security in the run-up to the

²⁴¹ United Nations Peacekeeping, *UNMISS FACT SHEET*, no date (consulted on 3 December 2020).

²⁴² Deutsche Welle, *Ethiopia: 'People in Tigray are terrified'*, 25 November 2020.

²⁴³ NOS, *Rivalen Zuid-Sudan ontmoeten elkaar in Ethiopië*, 19 June 2018.

²⁴⁴ The New York Times, *South Sudan Leader Appoints Ex-Rebel Leader as His Deputy*, 22 February 2020.

²⁴⁵ All Africa, *Ethiopia: South Sudan, Ethiopia Need to Deepen Bilateral Ties - President Kiir*, 8 September 2020; Anadolu Agency, *Turkish foreign minister hosts Ethiopian representative*, 17 July 2020.

²⁴⁶ This region – also known as Ogaden – itself sparked a war between Somalia and Ethiopia from 1977 to 1978 and has remained a source of tension between the two countries ever since.

²⁴⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018*, July 2018.

²⁴⁸ BBC Monitoring (Fana Broadcasting Cooperatie), *Ethiopia arrests suspected al-Shabab, Islamic State militants*, 14 November 2020.

²⁴⁹ BBC Monitoring (Somali Memo Website), *Al-Shabab denies reported capture of fighters by Ethiopia*, 15 November 2020.

elections and preparing to gradually hand over responsibilities to the Somali security forces.²⁵⁰ The head of AMISOM, Mozambican Ambassador Francisco Madeira, said on 7 December 2020 that the withdrawal of AMISOM forces would start in 2021. According to the ambassador, all African Union troops would have left Somalia by 2022.²⁵¹

At the time of writing the country of origin information report, there were approximately 20,000 AMISOM troops in Somalia, including more than 4,500 Ethiopian soldiers.²⁵² Besides participating in AMISOM, Ethiopia has bilateral troops operating in Somalia outside the mandate of AMISOM. A confidential source estimates the total number at 5,000, while Reuters in an article refers to 15,000 bilateral Ethiopian soldiers in Somalia.²⁵³

After the outbreak of the conflict between the federal government of Ethiopia and the TPLF, Somali radio station *Radio Dalsan* reported that the Ethiopian army had decided to withdraw at least 3,000 AMISOM troops stationed in Somalia. It added that the troops were being recalled in order to take part in the conflict in Northern Ethiopia. The website also stated that the recall of the Ethiopian military could have a negative effect on the security situation in Somalia.²⁵⁴

Both the Ethiopian Minister of Defence and the Ethiopian Ambassador to Somalia are said to have given an assurance that Ethiopia would not withdraw troops from AMISOM. However, bilateral Ethiopian troops are said to have been withdrawn from Somalia as reinforcements for the federal troops. A substantial part of the bilateral forces is said to have been withdrawn, but the exact number is unknown. On 20 November 2020, the media reported that around 600 soldiers were said to have been withdrawn after the start of the conflict.²⁵⁵ It is not clear how many troops were withdrawn to be deployed in the conflict or were relieved of their post because of their Tigrayan descent (see also section 3.2.1).²⁵⁶ Somali media reported that clashes had allegedly taken place on bases where Ethiopian troops are stationed. It was suspected that the fighting had started after Tigrayan officers and soldiers opposed attempts to disarm them.²⁵⁷

According to a confidential source, the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Somalia had already begun on 3 November, before the outbreak of the conflict. Desertion among these soldiers is said to be high. Specific numbers were not mentioned by the source.²⁵⁸

In January 2021, a private radio station and social media reported the alleged death of hundreds of Somali soldiers in fighting in Tigray in late 2020. The soldiers are said to have been part of the approximately 4,000 soldiers trained by the Eritrean army. Following the report, protesters, especially women and children, took to the streets

²⁵⁰ UN Security Council, *SC/14198, Security Council Reauthorizes Deployment of African Union Mission in Somalia, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2520 (2020)*, 29 May 2020.

²⁵¹ BBC Monitoring, *AU to begin withdrawing troops from Somalia in 2021*, 8 December 2020.

²⁵² AMISOM website: **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (consulted on 18 November 2020); Confidential source, 27 November 2020.

²⁵³ Confidential source, 27 November 2020; BBC Monitoring (VOA Somali), *Ethiopia denies recalling troops in Somalia over Tigray operation*, 25 November 2020.

²⁵⁴ BBC Monitoring (Radio Dalsan Website), *Ethiopia to reportedly withdraw 3,000 troops from Somalia*, 14 November 2020.

²⁵⁵ Confidential source, 27 November 2020; The Africa Report, *Will Ethiopia's Tigray conflict spillover into Eritrea, Egypt and Sudan?*, 20 November 2020; Reuters, *Exclusive: Ethiopia says disarms Tigrayan peacekeepers in Somalia over security*, 18 November 2020.

²⁵⁶ Reuters, *Exclusive: Ethiopia says disarms Tigrayan peacekeepers in Somalia over security*, 18 November 2020.

²⁵⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Local media report infighting among Ethiopian forces in Somalia*, 6 December 2020.

²⁵⁸ Confidential source, 6 November 2020.

in the Somali town of Galkayo and demanded that the Somali government withdraw the Somali soldiers from Eritrea. On 20 January 2021, a spokesman for the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that reports about the involvement of Eritrean and Somali forces in the conflict were unfounded and false. The Somali government also denied that Somali soldiers trained in Eritrea were killed in the fighting in Northern Ethiopia, but according to *Garow Online* did concede that Somali cadets had been sent to Eritrea.²⁵⁹

1.8 Security situation

1.8.1 *Changes in the security situation in Ethiopia*

As stated earlier in this country of origin information report, the optimism of 2018 has disappeared and there is division in Ethiopia. A confidential source describes it as a country with political and ethnic conflict everywhere. According to this source, the Abiy government no longer has the monopoly on violence in a number of regions. It is often unclear who is fighting who and who is responsible for the violence.²⁶⁰ *Amnesty International* writes that the period after Abiy took office as Prime Minister was marked by political and ethnic tensions, resulting in armed insurrection and inter-ethnic violence in Amhara, Oromia, Harar, Dire Dawa, Benishangul, and SNNPR.²⁶¹ In response to the armed violence, the government set up command posts²⁶² in the west (Wollega) and south (Guji) of Oromia at the end of 2018.²⁶³ The aim of these command posts was to coordinate the operations of the regional and federal security forces against OLA/Shene in the region. In addition, command posts in parts of Amhara, Harar, Benishangul-Gumuz and SNNPR were set up to combat inter-ethnic violence in those regions and guarantee security in the regions.²⁶⁴

Long-standing feuds over land access, the demarcation of inter-regional borders and complex identity issues have led to inter-ethnic violence, massacres and the large-scale internal displacement of refugees.²⁶⁵ Although more political space was created after Abiy's takeover of power in 2018, Abiy and his party have not managed to retain control of the territory previously held by the EPRDF/TPLF. Several confidential sources believe that inter-ethnic violence has increased because the federal security forces are no longer able to bring certain parts of Ethiopia under their control (see also sections 3.1 and 3.1.1). According to some sources, since the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray the Ethiopian authorities have withdrawn federal troops from other parts of Ethiopia and deployed them against TPLF forces. This has

²⁵⁹ BBC Monitoring (Radio Kulmiye), *Ex-official claims Somali soldiers killed in Tigray conflict*, 17 January 2021; Fana Broadcasting Corporate, *Reports On Involvement Of Eritrean, Somalian Soldiers In Law Enforcement Operation Are False, Unfounded: MoFA*, 20 January 2021; BBC Monitoring (Radio Dalsan), *Protests in Somali town over soldiers' deaths in Ethiopia*, 20 January 2021; BBC Monitoring (Somali National TV), *Somalia denies involvement in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict*, 18 January 2021; Garowe Online, *Somalia admits sending cadets to Eritrea, denies involving in Tigray war*, 28 January 2021.

²⁶⁰ Confidential source, 28 August 2020.

²⁶¹ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

²⁶² A command post is a committee of military personnel that actually holds power in an area under a state of emergency. In addition to command posts, the army also controls areas on many interregional borders. According to *Ethiopia Insight*, more than half of Ethiopia is de facto under the control of the federal army.

²⁶³ The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

²⁶⁴ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020; Ethiopia Insight, *Preaching unity but flying solo, Abiy's ambition may stall Ethiopia's transition*, 25 February 2020.

²⁶⁵ HRW, *World Report 2020*, page 207, 2020; International Crisis Group, *Defusing Ethiopia's Latest Perilous Crisis*, 3 July 2020.

created a power vacuum in other areas, notably Oromia, Benigshangul Gumuz and SNNPR, as a result of which violence has flared up in those areas.²⁶⁶

Other sources argue that it is more a question of intent and that the federal troops do not have the will to act in the event of inter-ethnic violence or act only after the damage has already been done.²⁶⁷ USDoS reports that the civil authorities had no control over the local police or militias, which sometimes acted independently and outside of the law.²⁶⁸ In addition, due to widespread arms smuggling in the country there is an abundance of weapons, and this is adversely affecting the security situation.²⁶⁹

The security situation in Ethiopia is discussed below. Certain regions that were particularly prone to violent incidents during the reporting period are highlighted in detail:

1.8.2 Oromia

During the reporting period of the previous country of origin information report, the regional state of Oromia was the scene of massive demonstrations and disturbances that ultimately led to the power transition in the country. Since the transition, Oromia has not been spared disturbances, demonstrations and armed violence. As referred to above in section 1.1.4, Oromia is also described as a hotbed of (ethnic) tensions, and command posts were set up to restore order. ICG wrote at the end of 2019 that the conflict in Oromia was still going on despite the euphoria after Abiy took office. The think-tank linked this to the return of the OLF leadership. In the week when the OLF leadership returned in September 2018, the Qeerroo took to the streets of the capital and surrounding areas in Oromia, in some cases attacking individuals from other ethnic groups.²⁷⁰ During protests by Oromo students against the command posts in the west and south of Oromia, amongst others, dozens of students were arrested for vandalism. According to *Ethiopia Insight*, security forces shot dead a protester and injured ten people during protests at Bule Hora University in West Guji.²⁷¹ The *Ethiopian Human Rights Commission* (EHRC) said that security forces were responsible for the alleged deaths of at least twelve civilians in the conflict in Oromia in November 2020.²⁷²

OLA/Shene

Sections 1.3 and 1.4 already mentioned that parts of Oromia, in particular Guji to the south and Wollega to the west, were the scene of the armed struggle between dissident members of the OLF, hereinafter OLA/Shene, and federal and regional security forces. The question always arises about the extent to which this is an organised conflict and to which extent the official OLF branch is in contact with the fighters in 'the bush'.²⁷³ *The Economist* wrote that shortly after the OLF returned from exile to Ethiopia, the OLF – the OLF and OLA had not yet publicly distanced themselves from each other – worked with the local authorities to maintain order in Wollega and Guji. However, the parties quickly came into conflict with each other

²⁶⁶ Addis Standard, *News: Dozens of Civilians killed in sustained Konso Zone violence, more than 94, 000 displaced*, 23 November 2020; BBC Monitoring (The Reporter), *Ethiopian rights body alarmed by military 'abuses' in Oromia*, 6 January 2021.

²⁶⁷ Confidential source, 23 September 2020; confidential source, 17 September 2020; confidential source, 21 October 2020.

²⁶⁸ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 1, 11 March 2020.

²⁶⁹ BBC Monitoring (ENA Website), *Ethiopian police seize arms cache in eastern region*, 11 October 2020

²⁷⁰ International Crisis Group, *Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails*, 16 December 2019.

²⁷¹ Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020.

²⁷² BBC, *Ethiopia's Oromia conflict: Why a teacher was killed 'execution-style'*, 16 January 2021.

²⁷³ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 87, July 2020.

because the OLF accused the Ethiopian government of not abiding by the commitments in the peace agreement.²⁷⁴

Since early 2019, the warring parties have now and again held control over the area around Qellem Wollega in West Oromia. According to the *Addis Standard*, this conflict has resulted in the death of large numbers of civilians and the destruction of the living environment and infrastructure.²⁷⁵ Arrests and summary executions are said to have become commonplace in the outskirts of Oromia, according to *The Economist*. The magazine also states that Ethiopian security forces are at war with the OLA/Shene 'separatists', where civilians are also victims of the crackdown by the authorities (see also section 3.2.5).²⁷⁶

In the fight against OLA/Shene, the federal army carried out air strikes in western Oromia in early 2019 that also reportedly hit civilian targets, and residents of the area fled into the forest. The OLF of then chairman Dawud Ibsa condemned the attacks.²⁷⁷ In early 2020, dozens of civilian casualties were also said to have occurred in operations by the federal army in the Qellem Wollega zone. The army hit back hard after federal soldiers were ambushed, an unaffiliated Oromo activist said in an article in *Ethiopia Insight*. According to *Addis Standard*, the victims were mostly young men suspected of supporting OLA/Shene. The Ethiopian authorities said the federal army had taken action to restore order in the region and that the allegations of massacres of the civilian population were 'propaganda' by the opposing party. According to *Ethiopia Insight*, in early 2020 there were also reports of renewed fighting in Guji and in the Borena zone. These zones are located in the south of Oromia.²⁷⁸

Sources also reported acts of violence on the part of OLA/Shene against the civilian population. For example, the organisation reportedly killed three civilians, including two members of the *Great Commission Ministry Ethiopia* religious organisation, in Genji in Oromia in April 2020 (see also section 1.4).²⁷⁹

The President of Oromia, Shimeles Abdissa, said after a visit to western Oromia in the spring of 2020 that peace had been restored in the region. *Ezega News* wrote that the security situation in the region remained fragile, however, as the OLA/Shene insurgents continued to kill government officials, with the news agency citing the recent death of the city of Nekeme's security chief.²⁸⁰ In early November 2020, the Ethiopian authorities withdrew forces from other parts of the country, including Oromia, to fight against the Tigray regional state, and sent them to the insurgent region. This movement of troops has caused ethnic violence to flare up in other parts of Ethiopia, particularly in western Oromia, and there are fears it will only increase in the case of protracted conflict.²⁸¹

The Oromia special security forces reportedly killed 142 OLA/Shene militants in the West Wollega zone in November 2020. More than one hundred members of the

²⁷⁴ The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

²⁷⁵ Addis Standard, *Failed Politics and Deception: Behind the Crisis in western and southern Oromia*, 20 March 2020.

²⁷⁶ The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

²⁷⁷ Bloomberg, *Returned Ethiopia Rebels Say Army Targets Them With Gunships*, 14 January 2019.

²⁷⁸ Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020; Bloomberg, *Returned Ethiopia Rebels Say Army Targets Them With Gunships*, 14 January 2019; Addis Standard, *Failed Politics and Deception: Behind the Crisis in western and southern Oromia*, 20 March 2020.

²⁷⁹ Ezega News, *Armed Men Kill At Least 8 People in Benishangul-Gumuz Region*, 9 April 2020; confidential source, 21 October 2020.

²⁸⁰ Ezega News, *Armed Men Kill At Least 8 People in Benishangul-Gumuz Region*, 9 April 2020

²⁸¹ Confidential source, 16 November 2020; The Guardian, *Secret UN report reveals fears of long and bitter war in Ethiopia*, 21 November 2020.

group were also reportedly arrested. According to the Ethiopian authorities, more than 1,300 people suspected of supporting OLA/Shene had been arrested after the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray. They included 104 members of the TPLF, according to a police officer from the regional state of Oromia.²⁸²

Inter-ethnic violence

In the months of November and December 2019, at least twelve students died during outbreaks of violence between various ethnic groups at universities in Amhara and Oromia. The death of an Oromo student in Weldia in Amhara provoked a backlash, and Amhara students in Dire Dawa, Dembi Dolo and Gondar were murdered in revenge. In December 2019, around twenty students from Amhara were kidnapped by an unidentifiable armed group. The students from Dembi Dolo University were on their way home to Amhara.²⁸³ The BBC wrote in March 2020 that the fate of the students remained a mystery. According to the BBC, one of the students had managed to escape. She reportedly said that the kidnappers spoke to Afaan Oromo and that when asked they said their problem was not with the students but with the Ethiopian government.²⁸⁴

On 23 October 2019, protests erupted in Addis Ababa when OFC leader Jawar Mohammed reported on social media that the Ethiopian authorities had taken his bodyguard away from him. The disturbances eventually spread over large areas of Oromia, and Harari from non-Oromo were specifically targeted.²⁸⁵ The government said the riots had resulted in 86 deaths, where 10 people had died in clashes with security forces. *Human Rights Watch* (HRW) reported that excessive lethal force had been used by the security forces, especially in the city of Ambo.²⁸⁶

An adviser to the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, EHRC, said that since November 2020, more than 50 ethnic Amhara in western Oromia had been killed in an attempt by OLA/Shene to expel them from the region (see also section 1.4).²⁸⁷

Murder of singer Hachalu Hundessa

On 29 June 2020, popular singer Hachalu Hundessa was murdered in a suburb of the Ethiopian capital. The singer and activist belonged to Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, the Oromo. His musical protests had made him a hero among young Oromo. After his death, violent protests erupted in Addis Ababa and large parts of Oromia state. Dozens of people died when armed gangs – mostly Qeerroo, according to various sources – moved through mixed-ethnic neighbourhoods, leaving a trail of violence and destruction. Police operations to combat this violence also caused many deaths.²⁸⁸ Government sources reported that around 200 people were killed during the riots, mainly in the town of Shashemene.²⁸⁹ By early July, federal troops had regained control of the situation and seemed to have restored calm.²⁹⁰

²⁸² BBC Monitoring (Fana Broadcasting Corporate), *Over 100 arrested in Ethiopia's Oromia for links to Tigray*, 18 November 2020.

²⁸³ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020; AP, *Clashes on Ethiopian campuses kill 3 university students*, 13 November 2020; Addis Standard, *ANALYSIS: MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS AS NEWS OF KIDNAPPED UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TURNS INTO POLITICAL PING-PONG*, 13 January 2020.

²⁸⁴ BBC News, *Ethiopia's missing students: Families' pain and the unsolved mystery*, 16 March 2020.

²⁸⁵ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020.

²⁸⁶ HRW, *World Report 2020*, page 206, 2020.

²⁸⁷ BBC, *Ethiopia's Oromia conflict: Why a teacher was killed 'execution-style'*, 16 January 2021.

²⁸⁸ ICG, *Defusing Ethiopia's Latest Perilous Crisis*, 3 July 2020; Confidential source, 15 August 2020; Confidential source, 2 July 2020; The New York Times, *Ethiopia Announces Arrests in Prominent Singer's Killing*, 11 July 2020; Ezega News, *At Least Eight Members of Insurgent Group Killed in Western Ethiopia*, 9 August 2020.

²⁸⁹ The New York Times, *Ethiopia Announces Arrests in Prominent Singer's Killing*, 11 July 2020; Borkena, *Ethiopia, Oromo region: police confirm death toll from attack reached 166*, 5 July 2020.

²⁹⁰ ICG, *Defusing Ethiopia's Latest Perilous Crisis*, 3 July 2020.

On 1 January 2021, the EHRC published a report on the violence that had followed the singer's death. The report states that Ethiopian security forces were responsible for at least 76 of the more than 120 fatalities during the crackdown on the riots. Individuals or groups who participated in the so-called orchestrated attacks on civilians were responsible for 35 fatalities. More than 500 people were said to have been injured, 200 of whom were injured during acts of violence by the security forces. The report also mentions the excessive use of force during the inter-ethnic conflicts in which victims were beheaded, tortured and dragged through the streets (see also section 1.4.1).²⁹¹

According to Borkena's website, the victims included 11 members of the Oromia Regional Special Police, who had been killed in the clashes following Hachalu's death. It is not clear who was responsible for the deaths of the police officers. Ten fatalities were reported in Addis Ababa, including two federal police officers. In one of the skirmishes, one of the two federal police officers is said to have been shot dead by a bodyguard of Jawar Mohammed.²⁹²

Following the riots, the government shut down the Internet and arrested thousands of people, including journalists and activists as well as a politician and a prominent opponent of the Jawar Mohammed government.²⁹³ Shortly after the attack, the website of *Oromo Media Network* (OMN) – set up in the American city of Minnesota by Jawar Mohamed, among others – is said to have called on Oromo Youth to flock to Addis Ababa. The Oromo news station is also said to have called on the army, police and special forces to take action against the federal government.²⁹⁴ OMN has always denied that it is stirring up ethnic hatred or inciting Oromo young people to violence.²⁹⁵ In response to the arrests of the opposition members and journalists, HRW wrote that such arrests were often carried out without charges being pressed or with no thorough preliminary investigation.²⁹⁶

The violence after the singer's murder looked like a preconceived plan, according to various sources, without specifying who might be behind the plan. Shortly after the murder, lists of specific targets were circulated in Oromia, most notably involving Amhara, people of mixed race and Christian Oromo.²⁹⁷ On the other hand, one confidential source questions the degree of organisation of the riots after the singer's murder. It was indeed the case that particularly Amhara and Christian Oromo had been victims of the violence, but according to this source there was no so-called master plan behind it. It is easy to find out who lives where and the young people responsible for the violence would also have questioned people about which language they spoke. Anyone who did not speak Afaan Oromo, the language of the Oromo, was a potential target, the source said.²⁹⁸

²⁹¹ EHRC, <<IT DID NOT FEEL LIKE WE HAD A GOVERNMENT>> *Violence & Human Rights Violations following Musician Hachalu Hundessa's Assassination*, 1 January 2021.

²⁹² Borkena, *Ethiopia, Oromo region: police confirm death toll from attack reached 166*, 5 July 2020; EHRC, <<IT DID NOT FEEL LIKE WE HAD A GOVERNMENT>> *Violence & Human Rights Violations following Musician Hachalu Hundessa's Assassination*, 1 January 2021.

²⁹³ The New York Times, *Ethiopia Announces Arrests in Prominent Singer's Killing*, 11 July 2020; Sahan Journal, *Minnesota's Oromo community demands justice after musician and activist Hachalu Hundessa is killed in Ethiopia*, 30 June 2020.

²⁹⁴ Confidential source, 12 July 2020; Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopian prosecutors charge Jawar with training terror group in Egypt*, 25 September 2020.

²⁹⁵ Skjerdal, Terje en Mulatu Alemayehu Moges, *The ethnification of the Ethiopian media*, page 20, November 2020.

²⁹⁶ HRW, *Ethiopia: Opposition Figures Held Without Charge*, 15 August 2020.

²⁹⁷ Confidential source, 15 August 2020; confidential source, 12 July 2020; Ezega News, *At Least Eight Members of Insurgent Group Killed in Western Ethiopia*, 9 August 2020.

²⁹⁸ Confidential source, 21 October 2020.

It is unclear who was behind Hachalu's death. After the murder, all kinds of allegations and counter-allegations were made by the various parties. The Ethiopian authorities, including Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, insinuated that the TPLF and OLA/Shene were behind the murder. The TPLF rejected the allegations.²⁹⁹ Some also believed that the government itself was behind the murder with the aim of weakening the regional government of Oromia or sowing division among the Oromo.³⁰⁰ Arrests were made in connection with the murder of Hachalu, but the motive behind the murder is still unknown.

Several sources reported calls for justice and violence on social media, particularly from the Oromo diaspora.³⁰¹ The Ethiopian public prosecutor's office sued Jawar Mohammad for using the news channel OMN – over which Muhammad was said to still have indirect control – to accuse ethnic Amhara of the murder and thus foment violence against Amhara and Christians.³⁰² A number of counter-movements arose as a result of the violence of the Qeerroo against Amhara and also against Oromo who wanted to protect Amhara. These counter-movements deployed by journalist and politician Eskinder Nega attacked Oromo in Addis Ababa.³⁰³ Eskinder Nega, who is very popular among the Amhara youth, was also arrested by the Ethiopian authorities in early July 2020.³⁰⁴

In response to the events surrounding Hachalu's death, the website *AfricaIsACountry* wrote that two prominent theories were circulating about them. One theory attributes the killings to state violence aimed at quelling the post-murder riots; the other theory held the Qeerroo responsible for targeting ethnic and religious minorities. The website wrote that both theories probably had some truth to them and that both should be taken seriously.³⁰⁵

1.8.3 Amhara

Foiled 'coup' in Amhara

On 22 June 2019, members of a recently formed regional militia of the regional state of Amhara shot dead the president of that state, Ambachew Mekonnen, and two other regional leaders. The murders took place in Bahir Dar, the capital of Amhara. Hours later, General Seare Mekonnen, the military commander of the Ethiopian army, was murdered by his own bodyguard in Addis Ababa. According to government sources, the murders were instigated by Tsige Asaminew. Federal security forces shot Asaminew after a manhunt.³⁰⁶

Asaminew was one of the political prisoners released by the federal authorities in February 2018 in response to the mass protests in the country. This happened before Abiy took office as Prime Minister. Brigadier General Asaminew Tsige was serving a life sentence for involvement in a 2009 coup attempt against the then EPRDF/TPLF government. Asaminew was an Amhara nationalist who advocated the annexation of territory that in his opinion was Amhara and had been unfairly annexed by the Tigrayans of the TPLF. One year after his release, the ruling party in Amhara appointed Asaminew as regional security chief. He hired Brigadier General

²⁹⁹ Ezega News, *TPLF Dismisses Allegations of Killing, Instigating Violence*, 18 July 2020.

³⁰⁰ Confidential source, 30 September 2020.

³⁰¹ Confidential source, 12 July 2020; Sahan Journal, *Minnesota's Oromo community demands justice after musician and activist Hachalu Hundessa is killed in Ethiopia*, 30 June 2020.

³⁰² Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopian prosecutors charge Jawar with training terror group in Egypt*, 25 September 2020.

³⁰³ Confidential source, 6 August 2020.

³⁰⁴ Confidential source, 12 July 2020.

³⁰⁵ AfricaIsACountry, *The violence in Ethiopia*, 14 September 2020.

³⁰⁶ Africa Confidential, *The politics behind the putsch*, 28 June 2019; VOA News, *Ethiopia's Chief of Staff, 3 Others Killed in Amhara Coup Attempt*, 23 June 2019.

Tefera Mamo,³⁰⁷ with whom he had been in prison and who was released on the same day, as the head of Amhara's special security forces.³⁰⁸

A federal government investigation following the June 2019 massacre concluded that Asaminew had intended to launch a regional coup.³⁰⁹ However, a confidential source said it is still not clear who actually masterminded the thwarted 'coup'.³¹⁰ Two confidential sources claimed not to know the motives for the murders, but they say the perpetrators of the alleged coup were all linked to the NaMA political party.³¹¹ Some Amhara politicians accused the TPLF of being behind the murders. ICG noted in this respect that a federal minister from Amhara had always pointed to the TPLF as the master brain behind every conflict in Ethiopia.³¹²

Inter-ethnic violence

In the regional state of Amhara, particularly the Gondar region has been the scene of acts of violence. Qemant activists regularly reported attacks by groups of Amhara against their communities. In the past, the Qemant, also called Qimant or Kimant, had been widely distributed throughout Ethiopia, but nowadays the community mainly resides in the Gondar region.³¹³ The Qemant want (more) autonomy in the regional state of Amhara, where they are a minority.³¹⁴

According to Amnesty International, regional security forces and Amhara civilian militias, including a gang of Amhara youths known as Fanno, killed at least 42 Qemant in Western Gondar in late 2018 before the military regained control of the situation.³¹⁵ General Asaminew Tsige (see above), then Amhara's chief of security, said that the Qemant had first themselves carried out attacks that killed almost 70 people. He blamed the violence on the Qemant community.³¹⁶ ICG spoke of hundreds of deaths among the Qemant community following violent incidents in northwestern Amhara in late 2018.³¹⁷

Amnesty International wrote in May 2020 that at least 130 people were killed in inter-ethnic violence in the regional state of Amhara from January to October 2019.³¹⁸ According to Amnesty International, during an attack carried out by local Amhara militias, government officials and young people of the Fanno on a neighbourhood in the city of Metema where predominantly Qemant live, 58 ethnic Qimant were killed within 24 hours on 10 and 11 January 2019. In describing this attack, Amnesty International wrote that federal forces in the city took no action to stop the violence because they had allegedly not been ordered to intervene.³¹⁹

³⁰⁷ Mamo was ultimately one of the people responsible for tracking down former 'comrade-in-arms' Asaminew Tsige.

³⁰⁸ Africa Confidential, *The politics behind the putsch*, 28 June 2019; Borkena, *General Asaminew Tsige and General Tefera Mamo released from prison*, 23 February 2020; USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 3, 11 March 2020.

³⁰⁹ Africa Confidential, *The politics behind the putsch*, 28 June 2019

³¹⁰ Confidential source, 12 July 2020.

³¹¹ Confidential source, 17 August 2020; confidential source, 23 September 2020.

³¹² *Idem*.

³¹³ Ethiopia Insight, *As Southern Nations break free, pressure mounts on EPRDF*, 28 November 2018.

³¹⁴ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020: The battle is mainly about which kebeles can be controlled by the Qemant. Some kebeles have a Qemant majority but no Qemant self-government.

³¹⁵ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020: Amnesty International reports that there is evidence that regional security forces and local militia were complicit in the violence between the Amhara and Qemant in Western and Central Gondar.

³¹⁶ Ethiopia Insight, *Violent Qemant dispute fueling explosive Amhara-Tigray divide*, 16 December 2018.

³¹⁷ ICG, *Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North*, 12 June 2020.

³¹⁸ Both in the annual report and in the article by Amnesty International on which this section is based, Amnesty International is not totally clear about the number of victims: the organisation first reports that ethnic violence led to 130 victims but then also reports on hundreds victims of inter-communal violence in Amhara in the same time frame. It is not known how Amnesty International arrived at these divergent figures.

³¹⁹ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020; AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020.

USDoS reported attacks by around 300 armed Qemant on various villages in the vicinity of the city of Gondar. These attacks, which took place in early February 2019, killed around 30 people and displaced around 50,000, according to USDoS.³²⁰ In September of that year, around 30 people were killed in fighting between armed members of the Qemant community and regional security forces in the districts of Chilga and Arbaba, populated mainly by Qemant. The reason for this fighting is unknown. In the weeks thereafter, more than 400 hundred people were killed in retaliatory operations against the Qemant community in Gondar and the surrounding area, with Amnesty International referring specifically to the Fanno as the perpetrators.³²¹ According to Amnesty International, regional and local security forces did not intervene when the Fanno gangs went from house to house targeting Qemant residents.³²²

Ethnic Amhara told Amnesty International that in retaliation for these attacks, members of the Qemant community attacked ethnic Amhara from 14 to 16 October 2019. One person is said to have died.³²³ The Ethiopian authorities accused the TPLF of supplying the Qemant with both equipment and training. In 2020, violence in Amhara against the Qemant community appears to have diminished, but the situation remains tense, according to ICG.³²⁴

In response to an Amnesty International report on 29 May 2020 accusing regional and federal forces of providing little or no protection to ethnic groups, including the Qemant, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote on its website that the efforts of both the regional and federal security forces had created political space for communities to discuss and resolve their differences. The Ministry further emphasised that peace initiatives taken by the communities themselves have been successful in preventing violence and increasing the political space in the region (see also section 3.1.1).³²⁵ A day after the State Department statement, the *Amhara Association of America* (AAA) accused Amnesty International of failing to mention several fatal attacks against the Qemant community in 2019. These attacks reportedly resulted in reprisals from Amhara, according to the AAA.³²⁶

In its 2019 annual report on events, Amnesty International reported the deaths of at least 100 Gumuz and Shinasha in the Awi Zone of the Amhara region. The organisation wrote about armed persons but did not specify any further details.³²⁷ As mentioned above, an Oromo student studying at Weldia University in Amhara was murdered in late 2019. This resulted in retaliation against universities in both Amhara and Oromia, during which more than ten students died.³²⁸

1.8.4 *Benishangul-Gumuz*

The regional state of Benishangul-Gumuz was also the scene of inter-ethnic violence during the reporting period. *Ethiopia Insight* reported dozens of deaths during violent incidents between Oromo and Gumuz, especially in the border area near the Kamashi zone in the months before November 2018.³²⁹ Describing this violence, USDoS wrote that ethnic Gumuz carried out attacks on ethnic Oromo and Amhara.

³²⁰ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 31, 11 March 2020.

³²¹ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020; AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020: No other information has been found to confirm these figures.

³²² AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

³²³ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

³²⁴ ICG, *Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North*, 12 June 2020.

³²⁵ Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Response to AI's report on Ethiopia*, 29 May 2020.

³²⁶ Amhara Association of America, *Statement on the Gaps and Omissions in the Latest AI Report*, 30 May 2020.

³²⁷ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020.

³²⁸ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020.

³²⁹ Ethiopia Insight, *As Southern Nations break free, pressure mounts on EPRDF*, 28 November 2018.

Both ethnic groups make up a minority in the regional state. The attacks were reportedly triggered by the deaths of four security officials in the Benishangul-Gumuz region. The attacks killed around 70 people and displaced hundreds of thousands, according to USDoS. Security officials were reportedly killed by people carrying OLF flags. Representatives of the OLF denied any involvement in the attack.³³⁰

According to Amnesty International, 21 members of the Amhara minority in Behnishangul-Gumuz were killed in April 2019.³³¹ *Ezega News* reported at least eight deaths in the town of Gilgel Beles in the same month due to inter-ethnic violence but did not identify the ethnicity of the victims. The perpetrators are said to belong to a group of heavily armed youths.³³² At the time of the alleged 'coup attempt' in Amhara in late June 2019, more than 50 people in the Metekel zone of the region were killed and more than 23 injured by men in camouflage uniforms. An Ethiopian government official said that the investigation was still ongoing, but it was suspected that the events were linked.³³³

In late July 2020, at least 14 people from the Amhara community were killed in an ambush in Benishangul Gumuz. The victims were originally from Sekela in the Amhara region but had moved to Benishangul Gumuz for work. According to a government official, the perpetrators were intent on starting an inter-ethnic conflict. The perpetrators fled into the dense forest and no arrests were made. *Ezega News* wrote that two years earlier, thousands of ethnic Amhara had been forced to leave their homes in Benishangul Gumuz because armed men had set their homes on fire.³³⁴

Al Jazeera quoted EHR head Daniel Bekele who, following deadly acts of violence in the border region with Sudan, said that civilians had been victims of repeated attacks accompanied by excessive violence in Benishangul-Gumuz. Bekele said, among other things, that in early September 2020 more than 15 people had been killed and more than 300 people displaced as a result of acts of violence. Bekele did not mention a group of perpetrators or motive for the violence.³³⁵ In October 2020, fourteen people were killed in an attack, including one Chinese citizen. Fourteen militiamen, of whom it is not known which militia is involved, were killed in a counter-operation carried out by security forces. A local resident told *The Associated Press* that ethnic minorities in the region, Amhara and Agaws, were targeted and that he feared the attacks would continue in the future.³³⁶

Also in November 2020, a violent incident took place in which armed men killed dozens of bus passengers. Whereas government media pointed to the involvement of the TPLF, others believed that the incident involved inter-ethnic violence against the Amhara and Agaw minorities in the Benishangul-Gumuz region.³³⁷ More than 100 people were killed in inter-ethnic violence in the Metekel zone of Benigshangul Gumuz in late December 2020. Survivors of the attack reportedly stated that the homes of ethnic Amhara, Oromo and Shinasha had been attacked by ethnic Gumuz. The Gumuz are said to have set fire to homes and stabbed or shot the residents. Amnesty International said the Gumuz regarded the minorities as 'settlers.'³³⁸

³³⁰ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, pages 29-30, 11 March 2020.

³³¹ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020.

³³² *Ezega News*, *Armed Men Kill At Least 8 People in Benishangul-Gumuz Region*, 9 April 2020.

³³³ *France24*, *Dozens killed in foiled Ethiopia coup attempt, authorities say*, 26 June 2019.

³³⁴ *Ezega News*, *At Least 14 People Killed in Ambush in Western Ethiopia*, 29 July 2020.

³³⁵ *Al Jazeera*, *Attackers kill at least 15 people in western Ethiopia*, 26 September 2020.

³³⁶ *AP New*, *Latest militia attack in Ethiopia kills 14 civilian*, 9 October 2020.

³³⁷ *Addis Standard*, *Ethiopian forces kill 20 gunmen in western region*, 16 November 2020.

³³⁸ *Euronews*, *More than 100 killed in latest ethnic massacre in Ethiopia*, 23 December 2020.

Following the December 2020 ethnic violence in the regional state of Benishangul Gumuz, Prime Minister Abiy set up a task force charged with taking security measures in the region. However, this did not signify the end of the violence. At least 100 civilians, including women and children, were killed in ethnic violence in the Dibate district (Metekel Zone) on 11 and 12 January 2021. The armed gangs of ethnic Gumuz allegedly only targeted the houses of Amhara and Agaw. According to witnesses on ETV, residents had asked the small contingent of security forces in the area for protection, but were denied.³³⁹ The death toll from ethnic attacks in the Metekel zone of Benishangul-Gumuz rose to 173, with more than 80,000 people displaced. This was announced by the satellite channel ESAT TV on 13 January 2021.³⁴⁰

1.8.5

SNNPRS

The SNNPRS is home to various ethnic groups that live in areas with indistinct territorial boundaries. This is the main reason for inter-ethnic violence in the region, according to *Ethiopia Insight*.³⁴¹ At the end of the reporting period of the previous country of origin information report, the Gedeo and the Guji, who are ethnic Oromo and also reside in the SNNPR, clashed with large numbers of fatalities and almost one million displaced people as a result.³⁴²

In July 2019, more than fifty people died in inter-ethnic violence and in operations by security forces to combat this violence. Ethnic Sidama had taken to the streets to demonstrate for statehood and secession from SNNPRS. Security forces then tried to use force to counter the demonstrations. According to an eyewitness, the army shot at random at people who had gathered together to discuss the referendum. Due to the operations of the security forces and the announcement that the referendum on secession would be postponed, radicalised groups of Sidama young people, also known as Ejeto, took to the streets to attack members of other ethnic groups.³⁴³ The final death toll was probably higher than official government figures, according to USDoS. Following the incident, a command post was set up by the SNNPRS regional authorities, giving federal forces control of the security situation in the region.³⁴⁴

In early 2020, the Ethiopian army reportedly killed twelve farmers in the village of Beneya in the SNNPRS. Ezega News writes that, according to the local *Gamo Media Network* (GMN) news station, the military had wrongly assumed that the farmers were members of OLA/Shene. The farmers reportedly had absolutely no links with this group.³⁴⁵

In August 2020, demonstrations were held in the Wolayta Zone after Wolayta community leaders were arrested. They were charged with plotting to undermine the constitution. Like the Sidama, the Wolayta want to separate from the SNNPRS and establish their own state. During the riots, security forces killed at least 17 people. According to *Oxford Analytica*, despite the violence in August 2020 the

³³⁹ BBC (ESAT), *Gunmen kill 130 civilians in western Ethiopia*, 12 January 2021; BBC Monitoring (ESAT TV), 'Over 100 killed' in Ethiopia's Benishangul-Gumuz region, 12 January 2021; BBC (ETV), *Witnesses say over 100 killed in Ethiopia attack*, 13 January 2021.

³⁴⁰ BBC Monitoring (ESAT TV), *Death toll in western Ethiopia attacks rises to 173*, January 2021.

³⁴¹ Ethiopia Insight, *As Southern Nations break free, pressure mounts on EPRDF*, 28 November 2018.

³⁴² Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018*, page 36, July 2018.

³⁴³ Borkena, *Daughter talks about how radical ethnic Sidama nationalists (Ejeto) ended her 83 years' old father life*, 19 August 2019; AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020; HRW, *World Report 2020*, page 205, 2020; Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia: At least 17 killed in violence over Sidama autonomy*, 20 July 2019.

³⁴⁴ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 3, 11 March 2020.

³⁴⁵ Ezega News, *Members of OLF Shene Charged with Terrorism; 12 Farmers Reportedly Killed by Government in Southern*, 27 January 2020.

demonstrations by the Wolayta are generally non-violent and, as far as is known, do not pose a threat to other ethnic groups living in the region.³⁴⁶

In late November 2020, dozens of people were reportedly killed in violent incidents in the Konso zone of the SNNPRS. The violence also affected more than 130,000 internally displaced persons. *Addis Standard* stated that armed groups that disagree with the division of the Konso zone two years ago were responsible for the violence. Violence was said to have flared up in the affected area from time to time over the past two years.³⁴⁷

1.8.6

Somali Regional State

In the previous country of origin information report, particularly the *Liyu police*, a special police unit of the SRS, was held responsible for human rights violations. These violations included excessive force, torture and summary executions, both in the border dispute between Oromia and the SRS and in the struggle against the ONLF. The special unit is said to have cracked down on members of the Oromo community in the SRS, but also to have crossed the border into Oromia to carry out raids in that state. Furthermore, the Liyu Police allegedly used excessive force in the struggle against the ONLF. According to the founder of the ONLF, the crackdown by the Liyu Police led to a humanitarian crisis in the entire Ogaden region. The unit allegedly had close ties with then SRS president Abdi Iley and was used by the president as a private unit.³⁴⁸

In early August 2018, the Liyu Police invaded Dire Dawa, a federal city outside the jurisdiction of the SRS. In response, the federal army confronted the Liyu Police, both inside and outside the SRS, and dozens were killed.³⁴⁹ Since the arrest of SRS President Abdi Iley by the federal government in late August 2018, the activities of the Liyu Police have diminished significantly.³⁵⁰

The integration and rehabilitation of ONLF fighters in the SRS appears to be progressing better than that of OLF fighters in Oromia. The NGO *Conciliation Resources* reported that the ONLF demobilised its fighters and that a number of them joined the security apparatus. This pragmatic approach and the support of the regional government have spared the region from the violence seen in other parts of Ethiopia, such as in western Oromia. The NGO believes that the SRS still has a long way to go and that more needs to be done to successfully reintegrate the demobilised combatants into society.³⁵¹ One confidential source says that the reintegration of ex-combatants in the SRS has been more successful than in Oromia because the OLF has a broader power base than the ONLF and therefore dares to impose more requirements and conditions.³⁵²

The new SRS president Mustafa Muhumed Omer, whose brother was murdered by agents of the previous president in 2016, has embarked on a course of action since taking office to deal with the old structures of human rights violations in the region. However, few people suspected of these violations have yet appeared in court. In

³⁴⁶ Oxford Analytica Daily, *Wolayta may frustrate restructuring of south Ethiopia*, 20 August 2020.

³⁴⁷ *Addis Standard, News: Dozens of Civilians Killed in Sustained Konso Zone violence, more than 94, 000 displaced*, 23 November 2020; *Addis Standard, NEWS: NUMBER OF CIVILIANS KILLED IN RECENT VIOLENCE IN KONSO REACHES 66; 39 INJURED AND MORE THAN 130, 000 DISPLACED*, 2 December 2020.

³⁴⁸ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018*, July 2018.

³⁴⁹ VOA News, *Upheaval in Somali Region Tests Ethiopian PM's Ability to Unify*, 10 August 2018.

³⁵⁰ ACLED, *Change and Continuity in Protests and Political Violence in PM Abiy's Ethiopia*, 13 October 2018; Home Office, page 55, 2020.

³⁵¹ Conciliation Resources, *One year on: moving from war to peace in Ethiopia*, October 2019.

³⁵² Confidential source, 6 August 2020.

reaction to this, Mustafa Omer has said that he will establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission once elections have taken place.³⁵³

Although the new regional president has earned much praise for his efforts and the SRS has been identified as one of the more stable regions within Ethiopia, people have died due to the alleged use of excessive force by the *Liyu Police* during demonstrations. On 3 September 2020, according to witnesses seven people were killed³⁵⁴ and dozens injured by the operations of the *Liyu Police* at demonstrations against the regional government in Raaso, Afdheer zone. In an interview with *Addis Standard*, the responsible security chief Dr Hussien Kassim contradicted these allegations, saying that it involved a violent conflict over territorial claims between two subclans.³⁵⁵

At the end of October 2020, at least 27 people were killed in violence between population groups from Afar and the SRS at the border between the two states. Both sides accused each other of starting the violence. As with many conflicts in Ethiopia, this conflict also involved territory claimed by both states. Human rights activists from Afar reported that Somali regional special security forces were involved in the attacks. According to *Addis Standard*, this was denied by SRS government officials. An SRS government official claimed that Afar militias were responsible for the deaths. In an exclusive interview with *Addis Standard* in May 2019, the president of the SRS reportedly said that almost 75 people in the SRS and perhaps the same number in Afar had been killed in violence in the previous six months.³⁵⁶

1.8.7

Tigray

There are also disputes about the current borders between Amhara and Tigray. The Amhara accuse the TPLF of annexing the area that they claim historically belongs to the Amhara since the overthrow of the Derg regime in 1991. Amongst others, the Welkait and Raya districts in Tigray are claimed by the Amhara as their legitimate territory.³⁵⁷ After the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray, federal troops and militias from Amhara occupied these areas. According to a confidential source, the Amhara government allegedly declared that the capture of Welkait, Humera and Raya Valley meant that these areas were returned 'to the homeland'.³⁵⁸

In October 2018, Tigrayan special security forces were responsible for the deaths of five ethnic Raya who protested against the regional division of the Raya minority in Tigray (see section 3.2.2).³⁵⁹ ICG reported alleged acts of violence committed by Colonel Demeke Zewdu, a Welkait leader, in the border region between the two states. Whereas an Amhara activist described the colonel as a resistance fighter against the government of Abiy, Oromo nationalists and the TPLF, according to the Tigrayan news medium *Tigray Online* he is nothing more than a stooge used by the Amhara to distract the attention of the Agaw and Qemant in their own state.³⁶⁰ *Tigray Online* also quoted Zewdu's father as claiming that he was 100% Tigrayan and that his son was falsely posing as Amhara.³⁶¹

³⁵³ Reuters, *Ethiopian who demanded justice now has half a year to deliver it*, 28 January 2020

³⁵⁴ Other witnesses said that nine people had been killed.

³⁵⁵ Addis Standard, *Amidst conflicting accounts Somali Region sees increasing civilian casualties*, 19 October 2020.

³⁵⁶ Addis Standard (BBC Monitoring), *At least 27 people killed in ethnic clashes in Ethiopia*, 29 October 2020; Addis Standard, *Displacement crisis not a precursor for a very bad future but residue for a very bad past: Mustefa Omer*, 15 May 2019; Reuters, *Clashes between Ethiopian states kill 27 amid border dispute*, 29 October 2020.

³⁵⁷ Ethiopia Insight, *As Southern Nations break free, pressure mounts on EPRDF*, 28 November 2018.

³⁵⁸ Confidential source, 16 December 2020.

³⁵⁹ ACLED DATA Tool: 13 October 2018 (consulted on 3 December 2020); ESAT News, *Over 200 detained amid continued deadly protest in Northern Ethiopia*, 24 October 2020.

³⁶⁰ ICG, *Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North*, 12 June 2020; Tigray Online, *Father of Colonel Demeke Zewdu speaks out about his Tigray heritage*, 4 January 2020.

³⁶¹ Tigray Online, *Father of Colonel Demeke Zewdu speaks out about his Tigray heritage*, 4 January 2020.

ICG also reported a violent incident in October 2019 in which a group of Amhara dressed as shepherds crossed the border into Tigray and killed members of a Tigrayan militia on the other side of the border. This was an isolated incident, according to ICG.³⁶² Despite the above violence, various sources described Tigray as a relatively safe place where the security apparatus was functioning properly.³⁶³

Armed conflict between TPLF and the federal government

The security situation has changed since 4 November 2020, when an armed struggle between the federal government and its allies on the one hand and Tigrayan security forces on the other hand resulted in hundreds of deaths on both sides in a short time. News sources reported that militias from Amhara and Afar were fighting alongside the government forces against the Tigrayan troops. On 5 November, Prime Minister Abiy thanked the Amhara militias and special security forces for their support for the campaign in the region.³⁶⁴ The warring parties accused each other of violating human rights, including carrying out targeted attacks on civilian targets, extrajudicial killings and looting. Prime Minister Abiy declared that the army had not killed 'one civilian' during the three-week military operation in Tigray to restore order there.³⁶⁵ According to a confidential source, Amhara militias looted, destroyed and committed potentially serious crimes in Tigray.³⁶⁶

Tigrayan refugees in Sudan told the *New York Times* about atrocities committed by Amhara militias and the Amhara youth group Fano. They alleged that Tigrayan civilians were being murdered, raped and robbed.³⁶⁷ On Monday, 9 November 2020, hundreds of workers were murdered with knives and machetes in the Tigrayan town of May Cadera (also called Mai-Kadra or Moya Khadra). This time the victims were reportedly Amhara, an ethnic minority in Tigray. The victims were seasonal workers who had nothing to do with the conflict, according to Amnesty International.³⁶⁸ The human rights group had no solid evidence to identify the perpetrators, but had learned from local interviews that pro-TPLF militiamen allegedly attacked the village as government forces were approaching. The TPLF denied the allegations and accused the government forces of the massacre.³⁶⁹

Ethiopian Human Rights Commissioner Daniel Bekele tweeted that the massacre in May Cadera on 9 November was allegedly perpetrated by an informal Tigrayan youth group called *Samri*. Local militias and police are said to have helped the *Samri* with door-to-door attacks in which ethnic Amhara and Welkait were killed with sticks, knives and machetes. The Commissioner estimated that the number of victims was at least 600 people, referring to 'serious human rights violations' and possibly 'crimes against humanity and war crimes'.³⁷⁰ In an article on 13 November, Reuters cited a resident from May Cadera who claimed to have fled after militias from Amhara had entered the village and killed anyone who claimed to be Tigrayan.³⁷¹ Amnesty International researcher Fisseha Tekle said in an interview

³⁶² ICG, *Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North*, 12 June 2020.

³⁶³ Confidential source, 15 September 2020; confidential source, 17 September 2020.

³⁶⁴ Fana Broadcasting Company, *Attempted Attacks From TPLF Successfully Suppressed At All Fronts: PM Abiy*, 5 November 2020; confidential source, 9 November 2020; BBC Sounds, *Tigray: aid delayed amid reports fighting continues*, 4 December 2020.

³⁶⁵ BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopian PM says army 'did not kill a single person' in Tigray*, 1 December 2020.

³⁶⁶ Confidential source, 18 December 2020; <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard> (consulted on 23 December 2020).

³⁶⁷ The New York Times, *Fleeing Ethiopians Tell of Ethnic Massacres in Tigray War*, 9 December 2020.

³⁶⁸ AI, *Ethiopia: Investigation confirms scores of civilians killed in Tigray state massacre*, 12 November 2020.

³⁶⁹ The New York Times, *They Once Ruled Ethiopia. Now They Revolt*, 16 November 2020; BBC News, *Ethiopia Tigray crisis: Rights commission to investigate 'mass killings'*, 14 November 2020.

³⁷⁰ EHRC, *Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings*, 24 November 2020; Daniel Bekele, @DanielBekele, 24 November 2020: **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

³⁷¹ Reuters, *Ethiopians fleeing to Sudan describe air strikes and machete killings in Tigray*, 13 November 2020.

with AFP that it was quite possible that there was some truth to both stories. He reasoned that the killing of one party would have provoked a reaction from the other.³⁷²

According to a confidential source, the Ethiopian federal army was assisted in the fight against the TPLF by both the *Amhara Special Forces* and Amhara militias and the *Afar Special Forces* and Afar militias. The source notes that the *Special Forces* are well trained and organised along normal military lines. As far as is known, the Special Forces returned to their own regional states. The militias³⁷³ are essentially armed civilians, usually under the command of a retired officer or former rebel. They are not organically organised military units and do not normally have heavy weapons at their disposal. The federal army has no formal authority over the militias. These militias are an instrument of the individual regional states. The federal authority does, however, have ultimate sovereignty in this matter. At the start of the offensive, the militias were led by the federal army. The federal army was responsible for the heavier fighting, and once cities or areas were secured, they were turned over to the militias. As soon as the militias had gained control over the occupied terrain, federal control diminished, according to the source.³⁷⁴

Eritrean forces are also reported to have been involved in abuses during the fighting in Tigray. The fighting was still ongoing at the end of the reporting period of this country of origin information report. Tigray's former president, Debretsion Gebremichael, accused Eritrean troops of mass looting. Ethiopian refugees in Sudan spoke of artillery attacks on cities in Western Tigray from Eritrea. According to *The Guardian*, it is difficult to confirm this information due to the limited access to the region and the lack of communication capabilities. Telephone connections were said to have been restored in parts of Tigray by early December 2020, but the Internet was still out of action.³⁷⁵

A prominent member of the TPLF said on Tigray TV in early December 2020 that the TPLF had withdrawn its troops from Mekelle to save the city from destruction by Ethiopian federal forces. On 28 November 2020, the federal government announced that it had taken the capital of the Tigray region. Since the fall of the city, Tigray TV – which is linked to TPLF – has continued to broadcast from an unknown location.³⁷⁶ The UN organisation OCHA announced on 6 January 2021 that local fighting was still going on and that particularly rural areas in Tigray were still unsafe. The report of 6 January 2021 stated that access to most of the northwest, east and central parts of Tigray was limited due to the poor security situation and bureaucratic restrictions imposed by the Ethiopian authorities. According to OCHA, two of the four refugee camps, Hitsats and Shimelba, were still inaccessible.³⁷⁷

The Ethiopian government has admitted that federal forces fired at six UN employees in early December 2020 and detained them for two days. According to the government, the UN tried to reach areas in Tigray where they were not

³⁷² AFP, *Questions linger among the corpses of an Ethiopian massacre*, 25 November 2020.

³⁷³ In addition, 'militia' have been in the villages for many years. These are actually locals with a weapon who are responsible for order and protection in rural areas. According to a confidential source, the extent to which they are equipped and trained for these tasks is unclear; confidential source, 26 January 2021.

³⁷⁴ Confidential source, 26 January 2021.

³⁷⁵ The Guardian, 'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses, 21 December 2020.

³⁷⁶ BBC Monitoring (Tigray Television), *Tigrayan forces explain 'withdrawal' from regional capital*, 3 December 2020; Addis Standard, *NEWS: MEKELLE CITY INTERIM MAYOR ADMITS PRESENCE AND PARTICIPATION OF ERITREAN FORCES IN TIGRAY CONFLICT*, 4 January 2021: According to *Addis Standard*, Tigray TV was under the control of the federal government in early January 2021.

³⁷⁷ OCHA, *ETHIOPIA - TIGRAY REGION HUMANITARIAN UPDATE*, 6 January 2021; The Reporter, *As fighting continues in Rural Tigray, humanitarian access constrained*, 9 January 2021.

permitted to go.³⁷⁸ In November 2020, four employees of NGOs in Tigray were allegedly killed before the capture of Mekelle. The *Danish Refugee Council* (DRC) confirmed the deaths of three employees in Tigray in November 2020. The *International Rescue Committee* (IRC) reported the death of an employee in the Hitsats camp.³⁷⁹ The organisations did not mention possible perpetrators. A UN employee is said to have told *The Guardian* that three guards at the Hitsats camp were murdered while trying to prevent the kidnapping and forced recruitment of Eritrean refugees into the Eritrean army (see also section 3.2.1).³⁸⁰ In addition to the deaths of the four humanitarian employees, an employee of the international NGO ZOA was reportedly killed after federal troops took Mekelle on 28 November 2020. An unknown group of armed men is said to have murdered the employee in the Hitsats refugee camp.³⁸¹

1.8.8 Afar

In an online article on 14 October 2019, *Garda World* reported a violent incident in which a group of gunmen killed at least 16 people in an attack on Obno village in Afar. In the same article, the news channel wrote that Ethiopia is prone to ethnic violence but made no direct link between the incident and the country's inter-ethnic conflicts.³⁸² In September 2020, regional special security forces killed three youths during riots in Abala town. The riots had broken out after action was taken against youths who had failed to comply with corona measures.³⁸³

(See the section on the SRS regarding the border conflicts between population groups from Afar and the SRS.)

1.8.9 Gambela

During the reporting period, there were very few reports of security incidents in the Gambela region. In September 2020, the NGO *Action Against Hunger* called on the Ethiopian authorities to reopen the investigation into the death of two of its employees. A year earlier, Khat Top Gatluack and Alebachew Yemam Muhuye were killed in an ambush by unknown assailants wearing paramilitary uniforms, according to *Action Against Hunger*.³⁸⁴

1.9 Background to violent incidents: increase or decrease? Arbitrary or targeted?

1.9.1 Developments

Figures from ACLED show a general increase in violence in Ethiopia in the first months after Abiy took office. However, from the summer of 2018 to the summer of 2019, the violence curves show a downward trend. After this, the curves go up again, but at the end of the reporting period they have not yet reached the figures

³⁷⁸ Al Jazeera, 'Overwhelming' reports of killings of Eritreans in Tigray: UN, 11 December 2020; Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia conflict 'spiralling out of control'*: UN, 9 December 2020.

³⁷⁹ DRC, *Ethiopia Statement: The Danish Refugee Council is deeply saddened to confirm the death of three colleagues in Tigray Region, Ethiopia last month*, 11 December 2020; European Commission, *Statement by Commissioner Lenarčič on the killing of Danish Refugee Council and International Rescue Committee aid workers in Tigray*, Ethiopia, 11 December 2020.

³⁸⁰ The Guardian, 'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses, 21 December 2020.

³⁸¹ OCHA, *ETHIOPIA - TIGRAY REGION HUMANITARIAN UPDATE*, 6 January 2021; The Reporter, *As fighting continues in Rural Tigray, humanitarian access constrained*, 9 January 2021.

³⁸² Garda World, *Armed men attack village in Afar region October 12*, 16 October 2019.

³⁸³ Garda World, *Security forces kill youths during clashes in Abala (Afar region) September 15*, 15 September 2020.

³⁸⁴ Action Against Hunger, *One Year After Gambella Murders, Action Against Hunger Renews Call for Justice*, 5 September 2020.

exhibited at the start of the reporting period.³⁸⁵ ACLED, when referring to the alleged June 2019 coup attempt in the Amhara region and the violence that followed, wrote that these events contrasted sharply with the decline in political violence and demonstrations since Abiy had taken office in April 2018. The government's response to these events was also atypical for the Abiy government, according to ACLED. The Internet was shut down for days and mass arrests followed (see also section 1.8.3).³⁸⁶

In order to present a clearer picture, it is important to explain the specific curves in more detail. The way that 'state violence against civilians', 'violence among civilians' and 'violence during riots' developed during the reporting period of this country of origin information report are described below.

State violence against civilians

Figures from ACLED also show a decrease in violence against civilians by government forces since Abiy took office. This applies to both the number of events and the number of fatalities. In the second quarter of 2018, 63 events of violence by government forces were recorded, with 61 victims. For the third quarter of that year, 44 events with 150 victims were recorded. In 2019 the figures dropped, with two events and one regrettable fatality in the fourth quarter of that year. Since the end of 2019, there has been a slight increase in state violence against civilians: ACLED recorded 16 cases of violence against civilians for the third quarter of 2020, with 25 deaths.³⁸⁷

Prime Minister Abiy declared that the federal army did not cause any civilian casualties during the Tigray conflict in late 2020. However, this statement is contradicted by those who believe that civilian casualties were indeed caused by violence on the part of the federal army. Eritrean soldiers and Amhara militias are also accused of serious violence in Tigray. At the end of the reporting period, there were no precise figures for civilian casualties as a result of violence by government forces (see also section 1.8.7).³⁸⁸

Violence among citizens

In its 2019 report, Amnesty International wrote that the violence between ethnic groups had resulted in the deaths of thousands of people.³⁸⁹ The figures from ACLED do not display such numbers. Since the third quarter of 2018, when there were 253 fatalities,³⁹⁰ the number of deaths due to violence between civilians has decreased on the whole, with 27 fatalities in the fourth quarter of 2019. However, the second quarter of 2019 peaked with 152 fatalities. This mainly involved inter-ethnic violence in the Benishangul-Gumuz region between the ethnic Gumuz and the ethnic Amhara who are a minority in the region.³⁹¹ Since the beginning of 2020, the number of victims has increased from 47 in the first quarter to 84 in the third quarter. With the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray, the number of civilian casualties rocketed to 762 in the fourth quarter, with ACLED classifying the massacre in May Kadera as

³⁸⁵ <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard> (consulted on 3 December 2020).

³⁸⁶ ACLED, *BAD BLOOD: VIOLENCE IN ETHIOPIA REVEALS THE STRAIN OF ETHNO-FEDERALISM UNDER PRIME MINISTER ABIY*, 15 July 2020.

³⁸⁷ <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard> (consulted on 3 December 2020): In the fourth quarter of 2020, ACLED recorded a significant increase in fatalities in 'battles'. This involves victims of the conflict between the federal troops and Tigray, mainly military personnel.

³⁸⁸ The Guardian, 'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses, 21 December 2020.

³⁸⁹ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 2020.

³⁹⁰ This involved 68 incidents recorded by ACLED that took place in almost all parts of Ethiopia.

³⁹¹ <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard> (geraadpleegd op 3 december 2020); ACLED, Data Export Tool (consulted on 3 December 2020).

violence between civilians.³⁹² It cites the *Samri Youth Militia* (Ethiopia) affiliated with the TPLF as the 'actor' of the violence, while other sources also indicate other actors as 'perpetrators' (see also section 1.8.7).³⁹³ According to a confidential source, violent riots in which dozens of people have been killed, particularly in Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz, have increased due to the conflict in Tigray.³⁹⁴

Violence during riots

In the case of fatalities during riots, it is difficult to speak of a decrease or an increase because the past few years were characterised by particular peaks during which a relatively high number of people were killed in riots. For example, there was a peak in the third quarter of 2019 (30 victims), one in the fourth quarter (85 victims) and one in the third quarter of 2020 (132 victims). The first half of 2020 was characterised by relatively few victims (11 victims in six months). The peaks correspond to certain events: the failed 'coup' in Amhara, the riots following the disarmament of Jawar Mohammed's bodyguard and the riots following the death of the singer Hachalu, respectively.³⁹⁵

1.9.2

Targeted or random

The information in section 1.8 and its subsections points to a particular orientation towards specific groups in the violent incidents that took place during the reporting period. This often involves violence between different ethnic groups. Two sources believe that in the past the violence was mainly vertical but has become increasingly horizontal in nature since Abiy took office. In other words, most of the incidents of violence used to be between government security forces and Ethiopian civilians, but now most of them are between civilians, especially between different ethnic groups.³⁹⁶ In July 2020, Deutsche Welle (DW) described the inter-ethnic violence as the biggest blot on the reputation of Abiy, who likes to profile himself as a reformer and as open to new ideas.³⁹⁷

³⁹² <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard> (geraadpleegd op 3 december 2020); ACLED, Data Export Tool (consulted on 3 December 2020).

³⁹³ ACLED, Data Export Tool (consulted on 3 December 2020).

³⁹⁴ Confidential source, 16 December 2020

³⁹⁵ The aim of this section is to express the violence in numbers. It should be noted that it is difficult to place specific perpetrators in clear frameworks. Are the victims of the violence after the murder of the singer Hachalu the result of riots or the result of ethnic violence or a combination of both? The context must be sought in the various subsections of section 1.8.

³⁹⁶ Confidential source, 17 September 2020; confidential source, 19 November 2020.

³⁹⁷ Deutsche Welle, *Ethiopia's ethnic violence shows Abiy's vulnerability*, 1 July 2020.

2 Identity, nationality and documents

2.1 Identity, nationality and documents

2.1.1 INVEA

In accordance with the law under the current government, the *Main Department for Immigration and Nationality Affairs* (MDINA) and the *Vital Events Registration Agency* (VERA) have merged into one organisation, called the *Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency* (INVEA).³⁹⁸ The INVEA was established following *Proclamation No.1097/2018*. This legislation was aimed at further specifying the powers and tasks of the executive organisations of the Ethiopian Federal Republic.³⁹⁹ The Council of Ministers later enacted regulations establishing the powers and duties of the INVEA.⁴⁰⁰

The INVEA is part of the Ministry of Peace that was established in 2019 but is under the control of the Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). The NISS also comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Peace.⁴⁰¹ The INVEA oversees all documentation and registration in Ethiopia. The aim of the merger of MDINA and VERA was to improve the process and quality of registration and documentation. However, a confidential source notes that the current system of documentation and registration is not designed for a country of this size and population and with such a decentralised structure. As a result, many people still go through life unregistered and various documents are susceptible to fraud, such as the kebele card and the passport (see below).⁴⁰²

2.1.2 Kebele card

Ethiopia uses the kebele card⁴⁰³ as an identity card.⁴⁰⁴ According to a confidential source, kebele cards are still being requested at the kebele level. These requests are not handled by employees of INVEA but by employees of the kebele. Since the kebele card is obtainable by means of witness statements⁴⁰⁵ and is no more than a piece of paper with no biometric or other fraud-prevention features, the risk of forgery and fraud is high.⁴⁰⁶ There are also differences between the kebele cards. For example, different materials are used. Most cards are made of paper, but the capital Addis Ababa is said to issue a kebele card in credit card format. The different regional languages can be used on the kebele card. There are also differences in

³⁹⁸ Confidential source, 10 November 2020; Confidential source, 15 October 2020.

³⁹⁹ Federal Negarit Gazette of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *Proclamation No.1097/2018*, article 12, 29 November 2018.

⁴⁰⁰ Fassil, Zacharias, *Report on Citizenship Law: Ethiopia*, Global Citizenship Observatory (GLOBALCIT) Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies in collaboration with Edinburgh University Law School, page 14, April 2020.

⁴⁰¹ UNICEF, *Formative evaluation of UNICEF Ethiopia Country Programme Evaluation report*, page 19, 6 December 2019; Confidential source, 15 October 2020.

⁴⁰² Confidential source, 15 October 2020.

⁴⁰³ The kebele (neighbourhood or community) is the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia. Several kebeles together form a woreda, which can be translated as a district.

⁴⁰⁴ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018*, page 38, July 2018.

⁴⁰⁵ According to the USDoS Bureau of Consular Affairs, the applicant's parents must present their ID cards when acting as witnesses for their child.

⁴⁰⁶ The World Bank, *ID4D Country Diagnostic: Ethiopia*, page 9, 2016: According to the World Bank, kebele cards are said to be easy to counterfeit and are also widely available on the black market. There is a suspicion that kebele cards are only accepted on the basis of face recognition (based on the analogue photograph), without the kebele data being checked, according to the World Bank.

terms of the colour and the data specified on the card.⁴⁰⁷ According to the Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the bearer's ethnicity was no longer being listed on new kebele cards at the end of 2019.⁴⁰⁸ When asked, a confidential source could not confirm this and indicated that there may still be kebeles that still record such data on the card.⁴⁰⁹

It is not clear which percentage of the Ethiopian population has an ID card. The World Bank estimated in 2016 that less than 5% of the adult population in Ethiopia did not have a kebele card. On an infographic from the same organisation based on the same source as in 2016, Ethiopia is displayed as a country in which less than half of the population has an ID card or a proof of identity that people can use to vote in elections. It should be noted that no ages are specified in the infographic and that in all probability the World Bank was referring not just to the adult population but to the entire Ethiopian population.⁴¹⁰

A confidential source says it is difficult to estimate which percentages apply to 2020. There are no official figures and an assessment that was planned nationally this year has not yet taken place due to the corona measures. It is also difficult to conduct research in certain regions because of the security situation.⁴¹¹

Ethiopians are eligible for the kebele card from the age of eighteen.⁴¹² Although some sources refer to the kebele card as a national identity card, the card is not subject to a national standard and can differ in each kebele (see also section 2.1).⁴¹³ The *Danish National ID Centre* states that although the kebele card is considered the most important proof of identity in Ethiopia, it cannot be called a national identity card.⁴¹⁴

The previous country of origin information report stated that an Ethiopian citizen can use a kebele card to register as a voter, apply for a driving licence, open a bank account, buy a SIM card, apply for a passport in Ethiopia,⁴¹⁵ apply for a tax number and register property.⁴¹⁶ The Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs writes in its August 2020 report that the kebele card is required, among other things, when applying for a passport and a driving licence⁴¹⁷ According to the World Bank, the kebele card is not officially required by national law, but some regions make it

⁴⁰⁷ Confidential source, 15 October 2020; The World Bank, *ID4D Country Diagnostic: Ethiopia*, page 9, 2016; EASO, *Assessment of credibility of Ethiopian Identity cards – query no. 67*, pages 1 and 6, 22 August 2018; DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, pages 50-51, 12 August 2020.

⁴⁰⁸ DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, pages 50-51, 12 August 2020.

⁴⁰⁹ Confidential source, 15 October 2020.

⁴¹⁰ Manby, Bronwen, *Practical realities of national identification systems in Africa: When is an undocumented person stateless?*, 1 June 2017; The World Bank, *ID4D Country Diagnostic: Ethiopia*, page 10, 2016; IOM, *ETHIOPIA NATIONAL DISPLACEMENT REPORT 5, Site Assessment Round 22 & Village Assessment Survey Round 5: June – July 2020*, 10 September 2020: Of the 1,300 sites with IDPs surveyed by the IOM in the summer of 2020, less than 25% of female IDPs in 622 sites had an ID card compared to 417 sites for male IDPs. More than 75% of male and female IDPs had an identity card in 325 and 188 sites, respectively.

⁴¹¹ Confidential source, 14 October 2020.

⁴¹² USDoS, Bureau of Consular Affairs, *visa reciprocity and civil documents, Ethiopia*, **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (website consulted on 15 October 2020); DFAT, *Country Information Report – Ethiopia*, page 31, 28 September 2017: Kebeles in Oromia and Somali sometimes issue kebele cards to individuals who have reached the age of sixteen.

⁴¹³ DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, page 50-51, 12 August 2020.

⁴¹⁴ Danish National ID Centre, *Ethiopian Kebele Cards*, 2 October 2018.

⁴¹⁵ Ethiopian diplomatic missions do not accept the kebele card as a passport application document.

⁴¹⁶ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018*, July 2018.

⁴¹⁷ DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, page 50-51, 12 August 2020.

compulsory to have a valid kebele card.⁴¹⁸ A confidential source notes that without a kebele card it is difficult to access basic services.⁴¹⁹

Particularly in the rural areas of Ethiopia, the kebele cards are still handwritten and the information provided is usually kept in paper files.⁴²⁰ These cards do not contain any type of biometric data.⁴²¹ The Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported in September 2017 that new identity cards are being issued in Addis Ababa. These cards are computer-generated and have a credit card format.⁴²² The extent to which these cards contain biometric data is not known.

The reliability of the kebele card is debatable because there is insufficient access to a national register to verify the applicant's identity.⁴²³ As mentioned above, the Ethiopian government intends to modernise the national identification system. The Ministry of Peace has been put in charge of setting up an identity programme. The new system will be nationally accessible and must have access to the unique identification data of individuals. In an article, the Ethiopian government's news agency ENA quoted Peace Minister Muferiat Kamil as saying that besides modernising the ID card system, the programme would play an essential role in providing digital services, achieving online authentication and preventing crime, among other things.⁴²⁴ As far as is known, such a system has not yet been realised.

2.1.3 *National identity card*

The previous country of origin information report referred to a 2012 law that stipulated that there would be one national identity card that would be mandatory for everyone over the age of eighteen.⁴²⁵ It is now 2021, however, and that card has not yet been realised. A June 2020 article by the *Ethiopian News Agency* (ENA) news medium referred to the initiative for a unique national identity card. ENA wrote that the Ethiopian government is looking for ways to modernise the current system of identification using the kebele card. According to the article, the new identity system had to be not only nationwide and uniform, but it also had to be possible to digitally exchange the stored data throughout Ethiopia.⁴²⁶ There is still a long way to go before Ethiopia has a standardised national identity card, according to a confidential source.⁴²⁷

A confidential source says that ID cards issued by schools to their pupils are used as identification documents, particularly in urban areas.⁴²⁸

2.1.4 *Passport*

According to the *Danish National ID Centre* (DNIC), Ethiopian passports are generally considered reliable. During a mission to Addis Ababa, DNIC employees were unable to find any evidence of forged passports. A Danish diplomatic source said there was no need to forge passports because official passports were easy to

⁴¹⁸ The World Bank, *ID4D Country Diagnostic: Ethiopia*, page 10, 2016: With regard to the identification requirement in Ethiopia, no information has come to light that deviates from the previous country of origin information report or that offers new insights.

⁴¹⁹ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁴²⁰ Confidential source, 14 September 2020; DFAT, *Country Information Report – Ethiopia*, page 31, 28 September 2017.

⁴²¹ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁴²² DFAT, *Country Information Report – Ethiopia*, page 31, 28 September 2017.

⁴²³ EASO, *Assessment of credibility of Ethiopian Identity cards – query no. 67*, page 6, 22 August 2018.

⁴²⁴ ENA, *Ministry Launches National ID Pilot Project*, 19 June 2020.

⁴²⁵ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Ethiopië 2018*, page 42, July 2018.

⁴²⁶ ENA, *Ministry Launches National ID Pilot Project*, 19 June 2020.

⁴²⁷ Confidential source, 15 October 2020.

⁴²⁸ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

purchase.⁴²⁹ The Australian Department of State further stated that 'fraudulent' passports are rare and authentic passports are difficult to forge due to their security features. However, authentic passports have regularly been issued on the basis of fraudulent underlying documents.⁴³⁰ In early 2021, the NISS announced that it had arrested 21 people for illegally issuing passports. The suspects, most of whom worked for INVEA, privately issued passports – after receiving bribes – to people who did not meet the legal requirements.⁴³¹

In the past, people just needed to show a kebele card in order to obtain a passport.⁴³² This meant that people, including Eritreans and Somalis, were able to obtain an Ethiopian passport under false pretences. For this reason, since 2019 people must also submit a birth certificate when applying for a passport, according to a confidential source.⁴³³ The USDoS website already reported in May 2018 that in addition to the kebele card, it was mandatory to submit a birth certificate when applying for a passport.⁴³⁴ For children under eighteen, a birth certificate was already required to obtain a passport.⁴³⁵ It should be noted that a large part of the Ethiopian population goes through life unregistered and without a birth certificate (see below).⁴³⁶ A confidential source says that only a small percentage of the Ethiopian population has a passport. No further explanation of this percentage was provided by the source.⁴³⁷

Passports are issued by INVEA for a period of five years. This was previously the task of MDINA.⁴³⁸ To apply for a passport, an Ethiopian must travel to Addis Ababa or to one of INVEA's regional branches in the country.⁴³⁹ The offices of INVEA have been closed due to COVID-19, but *Addis Standard* tweeted on 7 October 2020 that they would reopen in the weeks thereafter for passport renewals and applications.⁴⁴⁰ A passport application must be made in person because the applicant must provide fingerprints.⁴⁴¹ Children under the age of fourteen are exempt from fingerprinting.⁴⁴²

The DNIC writes that although passports can be applied for at a local level, the issue of Ethiopian passports has been centralised. To prevent individuals from applying for more than one passport, the authorities in charge of immigration (INVEA) maintain a digital database containing the details of all issued passports. A confidential source affirms that there is a central digital database that is managed by INVEA.⁴⁴³ Biometric data stored in national databases can be checked at official points of entry and exit in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) is

⁴²⁹ Danish National ID Centre, *The Ethiopian E-series passports*, page 8, 2 October 2018

⁴³⁰ DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, page 51, 12 August 2020; Confidential source, 24 December 2020.

⁴³¹ Fana Broadcasting Corporate, *Police Arrest 21 Individuals For Issuing Travel Documents Illegally*, 5 January 2021.

⁴³² The World Bank, *ID4D Country Diagnostic: Ethiopia*, page 9, 2016: In this context, the World Bank notes that only kebele cards in Amharic are accepted when applying for a passport. People with a kebele card in another language must first submit a second card on which at least the data is also displayed in Amharic.

⁴³³ Confidential source, 15 October 2020.

⁴³⁴ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018*, page 37, July 2018.

⁴³⁵ DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, page 32, 28 September 2017.

⁴³⁶ DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, pages 50-51, 12 August 2020.

⁴³⁷ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁴³⁸ USDoS, Bureau of Consular Affairs, *visa reciprocity and civil documents, Ethiopia*, **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (website consulted on 15 October 2020).

⁴³⁹ Confidential source, 14 October 2020; Addis Standard, @addisstandard, 7 October 2020 (twitter.com/addisstandard/status/1313747148257755141); Danish National ID Centre, *The Ethiopian E-series passports*, 2 October 2018.

⁴⁴⁰ Addis Standard, @addisstandard, 7 October 2020 (twitter.com/addisstandard/status/1313747148257755141).

⁴⁴¹ DFAT, *Country Information Report – Ethiopia*, page 51, 12 August 2020.

⁴⁴² Website of the Ethiopian Embassy in Australia: <http://www.ethiopianembassy.net/passportservices/> (consulted on 19 October 2020).

⁴⁴³ Danish National ID Centre, *The Ethiopian E-series passports*, page 7, 2 October 2018; Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

primarily responsible for intelligence and border security processes, the Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs writes in its August 2020 report.⁴⁴⁴

Current Ethiopian passports have a digital photo of the holder. The page with the biometric data in the passport has a code that can only be read with a decoder that contains both the biometric data of the holder and a copy of the relevant passport.⁴⁴⁵ It is not known where this data will be stored.

2.1.5 *Birth registration and birth certificate*

In order to obtain a birth certificate, the birth of an Ethiopian citizen must be registered.⁴⁴⁶ The 2018 country of origin information report states that a law passed in 2012 prescribes that all births must be registered. An amendment to the law confirmed this in 2017 and, like the 2012 law, obliges a child to be registered within ninety days of its birth.⁴⁴⁷ Events such as births, marriages and deaths that are not registered legally or in accordance with customary practices can be registered if supporting evidence is provided, the amendment states.⁴⁴⁸ As in the reporting period of the previous country of origin information report, in this reporting period reference was also made to registrations after the fact, because they took place at least one year after the vital event, such as the birth of a child. UNICEF wrote in 2018 that despite this, a large number of children, especially in rural areas, go through life unregistered and will ultimately never be registered.⁴⁴⁹

USDoS reported that children born in hospitals were always registered. Most of the children born outside hospitals – which make up the vast majority, according to USDoS – were not registered.⁴⁵⁰ However, UNICEF wrote at the end of 2019 that this was not an established fact. Only 13.7 percent of all birth records originated from an automatic referral from the health sector to the *Civil Registration and Vital Statistics* (CRVS) system.⁴⁵¹ In 2019, Ethiopia had nationwide coverage of 87% for the number of families that have access to institutions where they can register their newborn child.⁴⁵²

In August 2019, UNICEF announced that the country had made progress in registering births.⁴⁵³ However, the organisation stated in December 2019 that despite all the efforts the number of registrations was still relatively low. Only 15.5% of the more than three million children born were said to have been registered.⁴⁵⁴ In 2016, on the other hand, only 3 percent of all children under the

⁴⁴⁴ DFAT, *Country Information Report – Ethiopia*, page 48, 12 August 2020.

⁴⁴⁵ DFAT, *Country Information Report – Ethiopia*, pages 51-52, 12 August 2020.

⁴⁴⁶ UNICEF, **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**, no date (consulted on 30 December 2020): Registration is free, but the birth certificate must be paid for in most regional states. Refugees do not have to pay for the birth certificate.

⁴⁴⁷ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018*, July 2018; Federal Negarit Gazette, *Vital Events Registration and National Identity Card Proclamation (Amendment No 1049/2017)*, 7 August 2017; UNICEF, **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**, no date (consulted on 30 December 2020); UNICEF, *Formative evaluation of UNICEF Ethiopia Country Programme Evaluation report*, 6 December 2019.: Late registration by the parents is punishable with a prison sentence of up to six months or a fine of up to 5000 Ethiopian Birr (about 100 euros: daily rate 30 December 2020).

⁴⁴⁸ Federal Negarit Gazette, *Vital Events Registration and National Identity Card Proclamation (Amendment No 1049/2017)*, 7 August 2017.

⁴⁴⁹ Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems, *Snapshot of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems of Ethiopia*, 2019; UNICEF, *Child Notice Ethiopia*, 2018.

⁴⁵⁰ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 26, 11 March 2020.

⁴⁵¹ UNICEF, *Formative evaluation of UNICEF Ethiopia Country Programme Evaluation report*, 6 December 2019: The situation was different for Woredas supported by the UNICEF programme. Automatic referrals of birth registrations by health institutions were 74.3% in Afar, 90.3% in Amhara and 81.8% in Tigray.

⁴⁵² UNICEF, *Formative evaluation of UNICEF Ethiopia Country Programme Evaluation report*, 6 December 2019: The SRS is an outlier in this respect with only a seven percent coverage ratio.

⁴⁵³ ENA, *Ethiopia Registering Incredible Progress towards Universal Registration of Children at Birth: UNICEF*, 11 August 2019.

⁴⁵⁴ UNICEF, *Formative evaluation of UNICEF Ethiopia Country Programme Evaluation report*, 6 December 2019.

age of five were registered with the civil authorities. The registration of births is important, according to UNICEF, because it guarantees the legal and human rights of individuals and also provides access to basic social services.⁴⁵⁵ In early 2019, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its concern about the low percentage of registered children in the rural areas of Ethiopia, which was 5 percent at the time.⁴⁵⁶

Besides the fact that few births are registered, most kebeles, especially in the outlying areas, lack the essential infrastructure such as computers, to properly register vital events. Much is still written down and kept in paper files.⁴⁵⁷ UNICEF said the quality of the officials responsible for birth registration was still a problem.⁴⁵⁸

According to a confidential source, it used to be possible to obtain a birth certificate, for example, by submitting a document from the Church in relation to the baptismal ceremony. Nowadays that was no longer one of the official possibilities, according to the source. The source was unable to say whether this was previously possible using a document from the mosque.⁴⁵⁹ UNICEF said it had made a case for making it compulsory by law to have both parents present when the child is registered (or a guardian if the parents are absent).⁴⁶⁰ As a result, the procedure for obtaining a birth certificate has been further formalised.

2.1.6 *Refugee document(s) and registration*

UNHCR has made progress with regard to the individual identity document for refugees. According to a confidential source, more than 70% of refugees now have an identity document, compared to only 2% in the past. The document is for refugees aged fourteen and older. Beside this document, all refugee households have received a document that shows that they are registered, according to the source.⁴⁶¹ In 2019, UNHCR said that 79% of refugees aged fourteen and older had been issued an individual identity card.⁴⁶²

The following documents are issued to refugees: transit permits, residence/work permits, driving licences, nationality screening forms and birth, marriage, divorce and death certificates. UNHCR, in close collaboration with the Ethiopian refugee agency, *Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs* (ARRA), has perfected the digitisation of most of these documents.⁴⁶³

However, due to COVID-19 measures ARRA stopped registering vital events and refugees in May 2020. ARRA indicated in November 2020 that it would soon restart the registration (see section 3.4.5).⁴⁶⁴

Refugees and asylum seekers must have an identity card in order to live outside a refugee camp and to access government services. These cards are jointly issued by ARRA and UNHCR. ARRA issues identity cards to registered refugees, according to

⁴⁵⁵ ENA, *Ethiopia Registering Incredible Progress towards Universal Registration of Children at Birth: UNICEF*, 11 August 2019.

⁴⁵⁶ UN Human Rights Council, *Compilation on Ethiopia; Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/WG.6/33/ETH/2]*, page 9, 1 March 2019.

⁴⁵⁷ Confidential source, 15 October 2020; DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, page 47, 12 August 2020.

⁴⁵⁸ UNICEF, *Formative evaluation of UNICEF Ethiopia Country Programme Evaluation report*, 6 December 2019.

⁴⁵⁹ Confidential source, 24 December 2020.

⁴⁶⁰ UNICEF, *Formative evaluation of UNICEF Ethiopia Country Programme Evaluation report*, 6 December 2019.

⁴⁶¹ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁴⁶² UNHCR, *ETHIOPIA 2019 Summary Pledge Progress Report*, page 19, July 2020.

⁴⁶³ Confidential source, 26 October 2020; UNHCR, *UNHCR welcomes Ethiopia law granting more rights to refugees*, 18 January 2019.

⁴⁶⁴ Confidential source, 26 October 2020; Confidential source, 24 December 2020.

the Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see also 2.1 and 4.3.5).⁴⁶⁵ Asylum seekers who do not yet have refugee status are issued an identity card for asylum seekers. This is valid for one year and, according to a confidential source, gives asylum seekers the same right to services as refugees.⁴⁶⁶

In 2010, UNHCR announced a new digital identification system for refugees. The new programme, the *Biometric Identity Management System* (BIMS), was introduced in dozens of countries, including Ethiopia, in 2017. The system enables refugees to obtain a digital ID that gives them access to a range of emergency services and were entitled to certain rights.⁴⁶⁷ The collection of biometric data from individuals, iris scan and fingerprints from persons aged five and older has enabled all refugees aged 14 and older to have individual identification documentation, UNHCR wrote in January 2020. Among other things, the new documentation facilitated the pilot for the issue of SIM cards and the opening of bank accounts for refugees.⁴⁶⁸ BIMS was implemented in all 26 refugee camps in Ethiopia as well as in urban and other centres in which refugees are housed.⁴⁶⁹ In a July 2020 report, UNHCR wrote that in 2019 96% of the refugee population was registered in BIMS.⁴⁷⁰ The UN Human Rights Council wrote in March 2019 that the UN Children's Rights Committee had expressed concerns about the fact that children of refugees were not registered at birth. The council did not mention any percentages or numbers.⁴⁷¹

Global Voices believed that while the system had potential benefits, its use could also violate refugee privacy and exclude refugees who had refused to provide their data from certain benefits. In addition, Ethiopia had no specific legislation for the protection of privacy and data, according to *Global Voices*. During a meeting with *Global Voices*, the UNHCR spokesperson in Ethiopia denied that his organisation would share biometric and personal data with third parties. According to the employee, the policy actually ensures that this data is protected.⁴⁷²

2.2 Possibility for refugees residing legally in Ethiopia to obtain Ethiopian nationality

Ethiopian nationality law stipulates that the Ethiopian nationality can be obtained by birth (at least one of the parents must have Ethiopian nationality), through naturalisation and through marriage. It is not permitted by law to have dual nationality.⁴⁷³ The Ethiopian constitution also states that foreigners can obtain Ethiopian citizenship.⁴⁷⁴

Article 42 of the *Refugee Proclamation* of February 2019 stipulates that any recognised refugee or asylum seeker who meets all the necessary requirements for

⁴⁶⁵ DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, page 37, 12 August 2020.

⁴⁶⁶ Confidential source, 10 November 2020.

⁴⁶⁷ Global Voices, *Refugees in Ethiopia's camps raise privacy and exclusion concerns over UNHCR's new digital registration*, 19 March 2020.

⁴⁶⁸ UNHCR, *Ethiopia Refugee Response Plan 2020 – 2021*, January 2020.

⁴⁶⁹ Global Voices, *Refugees in Ethiopia's camps raise privacy and exclusion concerns over UNHCR's new digital registration*, 19 March 2020.

⁴⁷⁰ UNHCR, *ETHIOPIA 2019 Summary Pledge Progress Report*, page 19, July 2020.

⁴⁷¹ UN Human Rights Council, *Compilation on Ethiopia; Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/WG.6/33/ETH/2]*, page 9, 1 March 2019.

⁴⁷² Global Voices, *Refugees in Ethiopia's camps raise privacy and exclusion concerns over UNHCR's new digital registration*, 19 March 2020.

⁴⁷³ Federal Negarit Gazette of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *Ethiopian Nationality Law Proclamation*, No. 378/2003, 23 December 2003.

⁴⁷⁴ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, section 3 and 33, 21 August 1995.

naturalisation by Ethiopian nationality law may apply for Ethiopian nationality by operation of law. The proclamation stipulates the following requirements:

1. The applicant must be of legal age. Likewise, the applicant must be legally competent before Ethiopian law.
2. The applicant must have resided legally in Ethiopia for at least four years.
3. The applicant must be able to speak one of the languages of the nations/nationalities.
4. The applicant must be financially independent by lawful means.⁴⁷⁵
5. The applicant must be of impeccable behaviour.
6. The applicant must not have a criminal record.
7. The applicant must be able to demonstrate that he or she does not have any other nationality or that he or she can give up his or her nationality once the Ethiopian nationality has been granted.
8. The applicant must take an oath of allegiance to the Ethiopian state.⁴⁷⁶

The *Refugee Proclamation* does not distinguish between nationalities and enables any refugee/asylum seeker to apply for Ethiopian nationality. According to confidential sources, this is more difficult in reality and it is not easy to obtain Ethiopian nationality. It is not only a prerequisite that all the requirements are fulfilled; there is also a committee that makes the final decision about whether or not to grant Ethiopian nationality.⁴⁷⁷ It is not known what happens in practice with people who come from a country that does not permit nationals to renounce their nationality. Eritrea does not permit Eritrean citizens to renounce their Eritrean nationality.⁴⁷⁸ When asked, a confidential source said that it did not know of any case histories of refugees who have been naturalised as Ethiopians.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁵ It is not specified in detail what is meant by 'financially independent'.

⁴⁷⁶ Federal Negarit Gazette of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *Refugee Proclamation*, Part 4/42, 27 February 2019.

⁴⁷⁷ Confidential source, 14 October 2020; Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁴⁷⁸ Website IND: **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** Website IND: **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (consulted on 19 November 2020).

⁴⁷⁹ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

3 Human rights

3.1 Position of specific groups

3.1.1 *Protection of citizens by authorities or other actors*

USDoS wrote in its 2019 report on the human rights situation in Ethiopia that each of the nine regions⁴⁸⁰ had its own regional, or special, police unit that reported to the local civil authorities. In addition, each region has its own local militias that operate in loose and always different alliances with the regional police. These militias were primarily responsible for standard security measures in their own communities. According to USDoS, the civil authorities were not always in control of regional security forces and local police and militias acted independently and extrajudicially.⁴⁸¹

Command posts, where the federal army took control of certain zones, were set up when the local or regional authorities failed to guarantee the security situation (see also section 1.2). In Tigray, the federal government's role in the field of security was almost completely played out. There were still federal forces in the region, but Tigray regional security forces and militias, which some sources say are the best trained and the most experienced, ruled the line.⁴⁸² As indicated in several sections in Chapter 1, in early November 2020 federal forces and militias from other regions invaded Tigray after militias from the TPLF attacked Northern Command army bases in Tigray. A large number of federal soldiers were reportedly killed in the process. After weeks of fighting, the capital of Tigray, Mekelle, was captured by federal forces on 28 November 2020. This was not the end of the conflict, as the TPLF was still fighting in certain areas of Tigray at the end of the reporting period of this country of origin information report.⁴⁸³

During the reporting period of this country of origin information report, there were reports of acts of violence, particularly between different ethnic groups, where the federal army did not intervene or took several days to intervene.⁴⁸⁴ A confidential source argues that it is often not a question of willingness but simply due to the fact that the federal military is unable to intervene. Many experienced TPLF members were discharged from the military or left of their own accord after Abiy took office. The army has lost its effectiveness as a result. Furthermore, the clear hierarchy in the federal forces has disappeared; the well-defined command structures that existed under the EPRDF/TPLF have become blurred.⁴⁸⁵ Other confidential sources believe that since Abiy took office the security apparatus has functioned less effectively and that the security forces are not always equipped for the task.⁴⁸⁶ For example, in December 2020 the regional police of the Amhara region urged the federal authorities to protect ethnic Amhara and other ethnic groups in the ethnic conflict-ridden region of Benishangul Gumuz. In an interview with *The Reporter*, the Amhara Regional Police Chief said that the federal government was too busy in other regions and was unable to ensure the safety of ethnic minorities in the neighbouring

⁴⁸⁰ Since the summer of 2020, Ethiopia has had ten regions; this was after Sidama separated from the SNNPR and became a region of its own.

⁴⁸¹ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 1, 11 March 2020.

⁴⁸² Eritrea Hub, *Tigray: Towards a de-facto state?*, 14 May 2020; Confidential source, 6 August 2020.

⁴⁸³ Africanews, *Profile: Who is Tigray's fugitive leader Debretsion Gebremichael?*, 18 december 2020; AI, *Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state*, 12 November 2020.

⁴⁸⁴ Ezega News, *Armed Men Kill At Least 8 People in Benishangul-Gumuz Region*, 9 April 2020.

⁴⁸⁵ Confidential source, 17 September 2020.

⁴⁸⁶ Confidential source, 23 September 2020; confidential source, 9 November 2020.

region.⁴⁸⁷ In response to the riots after the death of the singer Hachulu, the EHRC released a report entitled 'It felt as if we had no government' in response to the perceived lack of volition and decisiveness of some security forces to intervene during the riots (see section 1.8.2).⁴⁸⁸

Amnesty International reports that thousands have been killed since ethnic violence increased in the country. However, figures from ACLED indicate a smaller number of deaths (see also section 1.9.1). According to Amnesty International, security forces had failed in their duty to guarantee civilian safety and stability. On the other hand, security forces – especially members of regional and local units – actively joined their own ethnic group in carrying out acts of violence against other ethnic groups, according to the human rights organisation.⁴⁸⁹ A confidential source said that people can count on protection from the authorities as long as they belong to the ethnic majority of a particular region.⁴⁹⁰ In cases where the authorities intervened in inter-ethnic violence, this was sometimes accompanied by excessive violence. Amnesty International wrote in its report on the events of 2019 that at least 50 people had been killed in inter-ethnic riots in Sidama. Some of the victims were killed by security forces as they tried to prevent the riots (see section 1.8.5).⁴⁹¹

As referred to in section 1.8.2, in response to Amnesty International's report of 29 May 2020, in which both regional and federal troops were accused of providing little or no protection to ethnic groups, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote that the efforts of regional and federal security forces have ensured that political space was created for communities to discuss and resolve their differences. The Ministry further emphasised that community-led peace initiatives have been successful in preventing violence and increasing political space in the region.⁴⁹²

Two journalists who reported on alleged demolitions of houses and forced evictions in the suburbs of Addis Ababa in February 2019 were briefly detained by the Oromia regional police. After their release, the two journalists were attacked by a group of men while the police were watching and one of the journalists was beaten with sticks. None of the attackers were arrested by the police, HRW wrote.⁴⁹³ According to various sources, just as in the reporting period of the previous country of origin information report, there is still a high degree of immunity from prosecution in Ethiopia. Some people that are guilty of human rights violations, such as employees of the infamous Ogaden prison, which was closed in 2018 and where torture, rape and executions were common, have been convicted for their crimes.⁴⁹⁴ Members of the NISS, such as former head Getachew Assefa, have also been charged with human rights violations by the Ethiopian prosecution service but they could not be located by the police as they were presumably being protected by the Tigray regional authorities.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁸⁷ The Reporter, *Amhara Police asks federal government for authorization to go into Benishangul region*, 19 december 2020.

⁴⁸⁸ EHRC, <<IT DID NOT FEEL LIKE WE HAD A GOVERNMENT>> *Violence & Human Rights Violations following Musician Hachalu Hundessa's Assassination*, 1 January 2021.

⁴⁸⁹ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020; <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard> (geraadpleegd op 3 december 2020).

⁴⁹⁰ Confidential source, 17 September 2020.

⁴⁹¹ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020.

⁴⁹² Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Response to AI's report on Ethiopia*, 29 May 2020.

⁴⁹³ HRW, *World Report 2020*, page 206, 2020.

⁴⁹⁴ HRW, *World Report 2020*, page 207, 2020.

⁴⁹⁵ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 2, 11 March 2020.

In addition to the charges and convictions, many people who are suspected of human rights violations still remain at large.⁴⁹⁶ One confidential source says that with the disintegration of the EPRDF, the power of government institutions responsible for ensuring law enforcement, order and security has diminished. The strict party discipline of the EPRDF resulted in oppression and a lack of political space, but it did guarantee a certain degree of stability.⁴⁹⁷

3.1.2 *Exclusion of certain (social) groups from protection or conditions imposed in order to receive protection*

It is not known whether conditions are imposed on certain (social) groups so that they can enjoy protection.

3.2 **Ethnic groups**

3.2.1 *Position and Treatment of Various Ethnic Groups*

Ethiopia has more than eighty officially recognised ethnic groups, described as 'nations, nationalities and peoples', of which the Oromo, with around 35% of the entire population, is the largest group. The Amhara are next with 29%. Both the Somali and the Tigrayans make up about 6% of the population, with slightly more Somali than their northern compatriots. The Sidama come in fifth with 4%. Then there are dozens of different groups with smaller numbers.⁴⁹⁸ The SNNPR is the region with the greatest diversity of ethnic groups: more than 40 ethnic groups originally come from this area.⁴⁹⁹ The Ethiopian Constitution requires at least one member of each 'Nation, Nationality and People' to sit in the Ethiopian House of the Federation. The federal system of the former ruling party EPRDF created the regions along ethnic lines as much as possible.⁵⁰⁰

Ethiopia is a country in which different ethnic groups with different ideologies live together. There have always been disputes and inter-ethnic violence, but Abiy's reforms were accompanied by a growing ethnic awareness and the number of disputes consequently increased. This gave rise to ethnic violence, with minorities in the various regions often becoming the victims of violence by the ethnic majority. The security structure at federal level has reportedly lost its effectiveness and dynamism in recent years, particularly in the outlying areas of Ethiopia.⁵⁰¹

USDoS wrote in March 2020 that while the political changes of recent years had resulted in fewer fatalities caused by government forces,⁵⁰² the inter-ethnic and mutual violence between civilians had actually increased.⁵⁰³ It is difficult to speak about the different ethnicities in general as far as the position and treatment of the different ethnic groups are concerned. According to a confidential source, if a person belongs to a minority in a particular region, then that person is more likely to be discriminated against and disadvantaged by the majority.⁵⁰⁴ The federal capital of

⁴⁹⁶ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

⁴⁹⁷ Confidential source, 17 September 2020; World Justice Project (WJP), *Rule of Law Index*, 2020: The 2020 Rule of Law Index shows how the rule of law functions in 128 countries, based on various factors such as the prevalence of corruption, open government and the powers and actions of the government. For the year 2020, Ethiopia ranks 114th out of 128 countries in the *Rule of Law Index* of the *World Justice Project*.

⁴⁹⁸ **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

⁴⁹⁹ EthioDemographyAndHealth, *Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Demography and Health*, July 2014.

⁵⁰⁰ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 21, 11 March 2020.

⁵⁰¹ Confidential source, 17 September 2020; confidential source, 17 August 2020; confidential source, 28 August 2020.

⁵⁰² However, this was before the conflict in Tigray occurred so the numbers for the year 2020 are likely to increase.

⁵⁰³ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 24, 11 March 2020.

⁵⁰⁴ Confidential source, 21 September 2020.

Addis Ababa and most federal institutions, such as the federal army, are described by sources as places where there is relative peace among different ethnicities and where ethnic tensions are less than in the rest of the country.⁵⁰⁵

In some cases, the problems do not lie along ethnic lines and people are discriminated against, disadvantaged or worse because of their political or religious denomination, according to a confidential source.⁵⁰⁶ For example, after the murder of the singer Hachalu in June 2020, in addition to Amhara, referred to as *Neftegna* ('those who bear arms'),⁵⁰⁷ Christian Oromo were attacked by other Oromo, especially the Qeerroo (see also sections 1.1.2 and 1.4.1).⁵⁰⁸ In Oromia, the regional security forces, which consist mainly of Oromo, are fighting together with the federal security forces against OLA/Shene, whose members are also ethnic Oromo.⁵⁰⁹

When asked, a confidential source said that the Amhara, outside their own region, are the most frequent victims of discrimination and ethnic violence. This is due to the fact that Amhara have spread throughout Ethiopia over the years and are a (relatively large) minority in many regions. Furthermore, they are often associated with the oppression of other ethnic groups during those periods when the Amhara held sway in Ethiopia. Even now, Amhara are often seen in other regions as supporters of the current government, 'rightly or wrongly', the source says.⁵¹⁰ On the other hand, the Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs writes that Amhara have relatively more freedom of movement in Ethiopia: not only because of the spread of this group throughout Ethiopia but also because Amharic still retains the status of Ethiopia's official national language.⁵¹¹

Since the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, an ethnic Tigrayan, in 2012, the influence of the Tigrayans on Ethiopian politics and polity has gradually diminished. After Abiy Ahmed took office, he immediately made efforts to minimise the presence of Tigrayans, especially TPLF adherents, in the government and the security apparatus. Many Tigrayan army officers and top officials were dismissed and replaced by Abiy loyalists.⁵¹² This is not to say that top positions are no longer held by Tigrayans, but most of these people back the current government. The loss of their privileged position in Ethiopia has angered many Tigrayans who are sceptical about Abiy Ahmed's reforms. Many Tigrayans feel that they are being marginalised by the current government. According to the Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, anti-Tigrayan sentiment has increased since 2018 and hate speech against 'ordinary' Tigrayans has increased since then.⁵¹³ Political activist Daniel Berhane, who is himself a Tigrayan, cites the situation of the Tigrayans and the Qemant in the Amhara region and believes that the federal government is actively campaigning to stir up genocide against Tigrayans.⁵¹⁴

After the outbreak of the armed struggle between the Tigray region and the federal government in early November 2020, anti-Tigrayan sentiments in Ethiopia increased. According to various sources, both confidential and open, there have been cases of ethnic profiling of people with a Tigrayan background. People with a

⁵⁰⁵ Confidential source, 17 September 2020; confidential source, 12 October 2020.

⁵⁰⁶ Confidential source, 30 September 2020; confidential source, 21 September 2020.

⁵⁰⁷ Pejorative term for the Amhara population.

⁵⁰⁸ Confidential source, 12 July 2020.

⁵⁰⁹ The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

⁵¹⁰ Confidential source, 21 October 2020.

⁵¹¹ DFAT, *Country Information Report – Ethiopia*, pages 25-26, 12 August 2020.

⁵¹² Reuters, *Ethiopian troops push for regional capital, rebels promise 'hell'*, 18 November 2020.

⁵¹³ DFAT, *Country Information Report – Ethiopia*, pages 23-24, 12 August 2020.

⁵¹⁴ Ethiopia Insight, *Violent Qemant dispute fueling explosive Amhara-Tigray divide*, 16 December 2018.

foreign passport but a Tigrayan surname⁵¹⁵ were reportedly not permitted to leave the country. Companies associated with Tigray have been shut down by the Ethiopian authorities.⁵¹⁶ The homes of Tigrayans have been searched, especially in Addis Ababa, and hundreds of Tigrayans have been arrested and Tigrayan officers and soldiers from the federal army discharged and detained.⁵¹⁷ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said there were reports of forced recruiting among young Tigrayans to get them to fight against their own communities.⁵¹⁸

The Ethiopian police reportedly asked the office of the UN World Food Programme in the Amhara region for a list of all Tigrayan employees. The police were allegedly ordered to identify all Tigrayans who worked for NGOs and government agencies.⁵¹⁹ The Ethiopian authorities said that many of the arrests were connected to elements that were suspected of plotting terrorist attacks and denied that Tigrayans were being arrested because of their ethnicity.⁵²⁰ It is not known whether everyone who was identified has actually been arrested.

The Ethiopian authorities, in the context of the *Ethiopian State of Emergency Fact Check*,⁵²¹ said that the charge that the Ethiopian police had visited the UN office in Amhara to ethnically profile employees was a 'complete misinterpretation' of the event. The Task Force, whose task is to report the official version of the events in Tigray and to combat misinformation, reported that it had received 'reliable' intelligence that TPLF elements had infiltrated national and international organisations. The authorities had acted on this information as part of the investigation, according to the Task Force.⁵²²

A former Tigrayan army soldier who fled the conflict in Tigray said in an article by DW that he had seen Amharic soldiers executing Tigrayans aged 18 and older.⁵²³ Ethiopia reportedly disarmed about 300 Tigrayan soldiers who were part of the Ethiopian contribution to the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia. Three soldiers of Tigrayan descent were also reportedly withdrawn from the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan. UN representatives said the discrimination against Tigrayan soldiers was a potential human rights violation.⁵²⁴ According to the Ethiopian authorities, the soldiers were disarmed not because of their ethnicity, but because of the infiltration of TPLF elements in various units of the Ethiopian army.⁵²⁵

⁵¹⁵ A confidential source notes that there are typical Tigrayan surnames, but that non-Tigrayans may also have such surnames and that Tigrayans may have a surname more likely to be found in other ethnic groups. Non-Tigrayans can therefore be mistaken for Tigrayans, according to the source: Confidential source, 26 January 2021.

⁵¹⁶ Confidential source, 17 November 2020; BBC Monitoring (Awate Website), *Ethiopia 'profiling' Tigrayans, arresting Eritrea dissidents*, 24 November 2020; The Telegraph, *Ethiopia Airlines accused of ethnic profiling over civil war with Tigray*, 4 December 2020.

⁵¹⁷ Confidential source, 17 November 2020, confidential source, 19 November 2020; BBC Monitoring (Fana Broadcasting Corporate), *Ethiopia arrests over 400 suspects 'recruited' by Tigray*, 12 November 2020; Reuters, *Exclusive: Ethiopia says disarms Tigrayan peacekeepers in Somalia over security*, 18 November 2020: After the Ethiopian Ministry of Defence expressed concern about the Tigrayan Gebreegziabher Mebratu Melese, the African Union sacked the man who had previously served as the organisation's security chief.

⁵¹⁸ Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia conflict 'spiralling out of control'*: UN, 9 December 2020.

⁵¹⁹ Al Jazeera, *Ethiopian police seeking lists of ethnic Tigrayans: UN report*, 13 November 2020.

⁵²⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia arrests nearly 800 linked to Tigray support*, 23 November 2020; Al Jazeera, *Concern grows for safety of Eritrean refugees as Tigray war rages*, 21 November 2020.

⁵²¹ A confidential source has serious doubts about the credibility of the Task Force and the reliability of the information disseminated by this government body: Confidential source, 28 December 2020.

⁵²² BBC Monitoring (ENA Website), *Ethiopia denies reports of ethnic profiling*, 14 November 2020.

⁵²³ DW, *Ethiopia: 'People in Tigray are terrified'*, 26 November 2020.

⁵²⁴ DW, *Ethiopia: 'People in Tigray are terrified'*, 25 November 2020; BBC Monitoring (Daily Nation), *Ethiopia peacekeepers withdrawn from South Sudan – UN*, 26 November 2020; Reuters, *Exclusive: Ethiopia says disarms Tigrayan peacekeepers in Somalia over security*, 18 November 2020.

⁵²⁵ Reuters, *Exclusive: Ethiopia says disarms Tigrayan peacekeepers in Somalia over security*, 18 November 2020.

In late November 2020, federal police announced that arrest warrants were being issued for military officers, especially Tigrayans, charged with treason and embezzlement of public funds, among other things. Police also listed the names of individuals accused of spreading offensive information through various media outlets, both inside and outside Ethiopia, with the aim of breaking up the country. One of these individuals was the Tigrayan activist and politician Daniel Berhane, and another was the Oromo activist and university researcher at a British university, Dr Awol Alo Kasim (see also section 3.3.1).⁵²⁶

Eritreans/Mixed Ethiopian/Eritrean descent

Around 165,000 Eritrean refugees live in Ethiopia, mainly in Tigray. The largest ethnic group in Eritrea are the Tigrayans, who share their language, culture and religion with the Tigrayans of the Ethiopian regional state of Tigray. The Australian Department of State wrote in August 2020 that there was no recent credible evidence to suggest that Eritreans were at greater risk of official or social discrimination due to their ethnicity. The Australian Ministry's estimate in the August 2020 report was that Ethiopians of Eritrean descent were also not at greater risk of official or social discrimination.⁵²⁷

Since early November 2020, after the armed conflict between the federal government and the TPLF erupted, there have been reports that Eritreans in Ethiopia, especially in the capital, are being monitored and arrested. First, *Al Jazeera* reported on the stories about the arrest of Eritrean refugees. Eritreans living in Ethiopia with a fake Tigrayan identity card⁵²⁸ now got rid of that card for fear of being mistaken for Tigrayans.⁵²⁹ In addition, the Ethiopian authorities stepped up their activities against the Eritrean opposition in Ethiopia and arrested members of Eritrean opposition parties who had been granted asylum in Ethiopia and in some cases had lived in the country for years. The Ethiopian intelligence and security service is said to have arrested members of the *Eritrean Salvation Front*, the *Red Sea Afar Democratic Organisation* and *Saghem (People's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Eritrea)*.⁵³⁰

There are around 100,000 Eritrean refugees in one of the four camps⁵³¹ in the Tigray region. Ann Encontre, UNHCR representative in Ethiopia, said after the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray in early November 2020 that she was concerned about the situation in the region. The Eritrean refugees who already faced limited access to essential services were said to be especially at risk of being affected by the worsening humanitarian situation.⁵³² UNHCR said in early December 2020 that the UN organisation had received an 'overwhelming' number of reports of Eritrean refugees in Tigray who had been killed, kidnapped or forcibly returned to Eritrea since the outbreak of the armed struggle. Eritrean troops and intelligence officers are reported to be involved in the forced return of Eritrean refugees. According to a source from *The Guardian*, the Eritrean security forces mainly targeted Eritrean opposition members.⁵³³ A confidential source spoken to before the outbreak of the

⁵²⁶ Fana Broadcasting Company, *Ethiopia issues arrest warrants for more Tigray officers*, 28 November 2020.

⁵²⁷ DFAT, *Country Information Report – Ethiopia*, pages 25-26, 12 August 2020.

⁵²⁸ The same language, Tigrinya, is spoken in Eritrea and Tigray.

⁵²⁹ *Al Jazeera*, *Concern grows for safety of Eritrean refugees as Tigray war rages*, 21 November 2020.

⁵³⁰ BBC Monitoring (Awate Website), *Ethiopia 'profiling' Tigrayans, arresting Eritrean dissidents*, 20 November 2020; BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopia seizes arms for Eritrean groups 'trained' by Tigray*, 16 November 2020.

⁵³¹ These are the camps Mai Aini, Adi Harush and the more northerly camps of Hitsats and Shimelba: UNHCR, Tigray Situation Update, 21 January 2021.

⁵³² *Al Jazeera*, *Concern grows for safety of Eritrean refugees as Tigray war rages*, 21 November 2020; UNHCR, *Ethiopian refugee numbers in Sudan cross the 40,000 mark*, 24 November 2020; Human Rights Concern-Eritrea, *Eritrean Armed Forces Fighting Inside Tigray*, 24 November 2020.

⁵³³ *Al Jazeera*, *'Overwhelming' reports of killings of Eritreans in Tigray: UN*, 11 December 2020; Confidential source, 16 December 2020; Elsa Chyrum, @ElsaChyrum, 15 December 2020:

conflict in Tigray already mentioned the possible presence of Eritrean intelligence officers on Ethiopian territory (see also section 1.7.1).⁵³⁴

The UNHCR statement was issued in early December on the same day that the Ethiopian government said it would send Eritrean refugees back to the camps in Tigray. The Eritreans had fled from the camps in Tigray to the capital Addis Ababa for safety reasons. IOM denied any involvement in this. According to the Ethiopian government, the camps were safe again after the end of the military campaign against the TPLF. Aid agencies reported the deaths of at least four employees. *The Guardian* wrote that three guards from an NGO in the Hitsats camp were murdered in November 2020 while trying to prevent refugees from being kidnapped (see also section 1.8.7).⁵³⁵

3.2.2 *Prosecution of or discrimination against minorities by fellow citizens and/or government and the degree of government protection*

The government of Abiy Ahmed has been accused from different quarters of not treating the various regions equally despite the policy of Medemer (*unity*). Abiy, for example, was accused of not intervening when large groups of people from mainly the Gedeo tribe from the SNNPR had been driven from their homes because of attacks by ethnic Oromo in the summer of 2018.⁵³⁶ Activists from smaller ethnic groups living in poorer, remote regions, such as the Benishangul-Gumuz region, say they are being oppressed by the large populations such as the Amhara, Tigrayans and Oromo, who are the largest of all the ethnic groups.⁵³⁷

Sudanese Online wrote in September 2018 – several months after Abiy took office – that the new government had taken over the Oromo's policy of dominating Ethiopia's other ethnic groups. The website cites as evidence the increase in inter-ethnic violence since Abiy took office.⁵³⁸ Many Oromo believe that the government's current policy runs counter to the interests of the Oromo and promotes the interests of the Amhara.⁵³⁹ One Oromo activist said that Abiy wants to force the pan-Ethiopian mindset, culture and religion of the Amhara on the other ethnic groups.⁵⁴⁰ According to some sources, there is still violence on a vertical level in Oromia, given that the Oromo opposition poses the greatest threat to the incumbent government. That is why government forces, including the federal military and regional security forces, are using excessive force in the fight against OLA/Shene, and the opposition parties in the region, such as the OFC and OLF, are experiencing significantly more repression than other opposition parties, according to various sources. The sources

twitter.com/ElsaChyrum/status/1338785002910326785; *The Guardian*, 'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses, 21 December 2020.

⁵³⁴ Confidential source, 21 September 2020.

⁵³⁵ Ethiopia State of Emergency Fact Check, @SOEFactCheck, *On Irregular movement of Eritrean Refugees*, 11 December 2020: [Twitter.com/SOEFactCheck/status/1337349284623241217](https://twitter.com/SOEFactCheck/status/1337349284623241217); confidential source, 16 December 2020; *The Guardian*, 'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses, 21 December 2020.

⁵³⁶ Ezega News, *Members of OLF Shene Charged with Terrorism; 12 Farmers Reportedly Killed by Government in Southern*, 27 January 2020: Here, Ezega News writes about millions of displaced people, but the general estimate is that it involved around 800,000 displaced people.

⁵³⁷ Ethiopia Insight, *Violent Qemant dispute fuelling explosive Amhara-Tigray divide*, 16 December 2018, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018*, pages 7 and 74, July 2018; Website Minority Rights Group, **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (consulted on 27 January 2021): Examples of this are the fact that in regions such as Afar and Gambella there is a poorer infrastructure and there is less money for and access to education and healthcare. Another example is the forced resettlement ('villagisation') of populations in the regions where these smaller ethnic groups live. However, the largest ethnic group, the Oromo, also had to deal with this when they were forced to move due to the expansion of the capital Addis Ababa as part of the so-called 'Master Plan' (see also the *General Country of Origin information report Ethiopia 2018*).

⁵³⁸ Sudanese Online, *Statement on the repeated attacks on Benishangul 's People villages*, 5 September 2018.

⁵³⁹ Confidential source, 12 July 2020.

⁵⁴⁰ Confidential source, 30 September 2020.

note that this is in fact also inter-Oromo violence, because the regional security forces fighting OLA/Shene are almost entirely Oromo.⁵⁴¹

According to a confidential source, the Amhara distrust Abiy because of his Oromo lineage and believe their interests are being undermined by the Abiy government.⁵⁴² After the kidnapping of 27 students from Amhara who had tried to flee Oromia after the outbreak of ethnic violence at their university, tens of thousands of people in the Amhara region took to the streets. They chanted anti-government slogans and accused Abiy Ahmed of not doing enough to secure the students' release.⁵⁴³ The Welkait and Raya ethnic groups believe they are disadvantaged in the Tigray region. Among other things, they have accused the Tigrayan authorities under the TPLF of settling Tigrayans in areas where the Welkait and Raya had previously made up the majority.⁵⁴⁴ Tigrayan special security forces are said to be responsible for the deaths of four ethnic Raya who protested against the regional division of the Raya minority in Tigray in October 2018 (see section 1.8.7).⁵⁴⁵ Ethnic Amhara and Welkait were reportedly murdered by Tigrayan militias in the town of May Cadera on 9 November 2020 in the conflict between the federal government and the TPLF. In an article, Reuters cited a source that claimed the opposite and that believes that Tigrayan villagers were murdered by Amhara militias.⁵⁴⁶

ICG writes that local Amhara leaders accused the federal army of taking the side of the Qemant and Tigrayans against ethnic Amhara in acts of violence between the various population groups in the Amhara region.⁵⁴⁷ The Tigrayans, in turn, feel that the government is doing too little to protect the Qemant and the Tigrayan minority in the Amhara region. *Insight Ethiopia* quotes a political activist as saying that the Qemant in Amhara are victims of ethnic cleansing, massacres and discrimination.⁵⁴⁸ Furthermore, religious institutions such as the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Council expressed concerns about the lack of the rule of law and said that the government was not doing enough to protect churches and mosques.⁵⁴⁹

The above statement claiming that Ethiopia has become more of a horizontal society from a vertical society is endorsed by a confidential source. In the past, it was the federal government that was mainly held responsible for violating the human rights of Ethiopian citizens, but nowadays most of the violations occur during conflicts between civilians. And the federal army is often unable to intervene (in time).⁵⁵⁰ Other sources share the view that most violence nowadays occurs on a horizontal level, but are divided about the extent to which the federal authorities still have a say outside Addis Ababa. Some sources note that it is more the role of the regional

⁵⁴¹ Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020; NRC, *More than nine thousand arrests in the aftermath of protests in Ethiopia*, 13 August 2020.

⁵⁴² Confidential source, 21 September 2020.

⁵⁴³ Ethiopian Monitor, *Mass Protests over Abducted Students*, 28 January 2020; The New York Times, *Abduction of Ethiopian Students Fuels Anger*, 30 January 2020; AP News, *Clashes on Ethiopian campuses kill 3 university students*, 13 November 2019

⁵⁴⁴ Ethiopia Insight, *Violent Qemant dispute fueling explosive Amhara-Tigray divide*, 16 December 2018.

⁵⁴⁵ ACLED DATA Tool: 13 October 2018 (consulted on 3 December 2020): ESAT, *Over 200 detained amid continued deadly protest in Northern Ethiopia*, 24 October 2020.

⁵⁴⁶ Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings*, 24 November 2020; Daniel Bekele, @DanielBekele, 24 November 2020: **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**; Reuters, *Ethiopians fleeing to Sudan describe air strikes and machete killings in Tigray*, 13 November 2020.

⁵⁴⁷ ICG, *Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North*, 12 June 2020.

⁵⁴⁸ Ethiopia Insight, *Violent Qemant dispute fueling explosive Amhara-Tigray divide*, 16 December 2018; Borkena, *Renewed violence involving Kemant Amhara communities reported in Central Gonder region*, 30 September 2019.

⁵⁴⁹ Ezega News, *Members of OLF Shene Charged with Terrorism; 12 Farmers Reportedly Killed by Government in Southern*, 27 January 2020.

⁵⁵⁰ Confidential source, 17 September 2020.

security forces to monitor public order and to quell any ethnic unrest. The federal army does not have that mandate and can only act if the regional forces fail to do so, say these sources.⁵⁵¹

3.2.3 *Deprivation of particular ethnic groups*

According to confidential sources, the federal government is not pursuing a policy that discriminates against certain ethnic groups. However, those ethnic groups that have not been given their own region or that live within the boundaries of a region in which they are a minority may experience repression, discrimination and deprivation by other ethnic groups that are larger in size and/or make up the majority in the region (see also sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 and the subsections of 1.8 for more information about ethnic conflicts per region).⁵⁵²

3.2.4 *Problems due to involvement or membership of OLF, ONLF or PG7*

OLF

After taking office as Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed invited the illegal opposition parties living abroad to return to Ethiopia so that they could legally take part in the political spectrum. When the OLF returned to Ethiopia on 15 September 2018, millions of people came to Meskel Square in Addis Ababa to celebrate. In December 2019, the party was officially registered as a political party in Ethiopia.⁵⁵³ Several sources reported that with the appointment of Abiy Ahmed there seemed to be a break with the previous rulers because he had expressed his wish to allow different political opinions.⁵⁵⁴

As already mentioned in section 1.1, expectations have been toned down and hopes have turned to disappointment for many. Like its predecessor, Abiy Ahmed's government is reportedly engaging in the intimidation, detention and murder of OLF supporters or people with alleged links to the organisation.⁵⁵⁵ In the weeks following the return of the OLF, the military leader of the OLF, Gamachu Ayana, was arrested, along with other leaders and supporters of the organisation.⁵⁵⁶ According to USDoS, Addis Ababa police arrested 1,204 youths suspected of participating in the deadly riots that followed the OLF's return in September 2018.⁵⁵⁷

The UK Foreign Office wrote in its July 2020 country of origin information report that experiences with arrests varied from region to region. A source said that the Tigrayan authorities had been looking after their own affairs and that the federal government did not interfere too much in that region until the TPLF attacked part of the federal army, the Northern Command, in early November 2020 (see also section 1.1.2.1). There was little interaction between the federal government and the Tigray regional government. But the federal government is active in Amhara and in Oromia. Mass arrests are taking place in both regions. In Amhara, the authorities are selective about whom they arrest: mainly influential people such as journalists

⁵⁵¹ Confidential source, 19 November 2020; confidential source, 17 September 2020.

⁵⁵² Confidential source, 28 August 2020.

⁵⁵³ AP News, *Ethiopian rebel group accuses government of airstrikes*, 18 January 2019.

⁵⁵⁴ DIS, *Country of Origin Information, Ethiopia: Political situation and treatment of opposition*, page 10, September 2018.

⁵⁵⁵ Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020; AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

⁵⁵⁶ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 95, July 2020; Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020; Oromo Press, @Oromo Press, 27 December 2019: twitter.com/oromopress/status/1210586722314194944.

⁵⁵⁷ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 8, 11 March 2020.

and activists have been arrested. The situation in Oromia is different, according to the report (see also sections 3.3.9 and 3.4.1).⁵⁵⁸

On a mission to Ethiopia in September 2019, the UK Foreign Office team heard from a representative of the opposition party OFC that Oromo were being arrested on the basis of their ethnic origin and that every dissident noise could be linked to the OLF. Another source said that before Abiy took office, arbitrary arrests of Oromo associated with the OLF were definitely common practice. However, this source did not address the situation after Abiy took office, according to the report from the UK Foreign Office.⁵⁵⁹

Several confidential sources believe that the situation has deteriorated recently and that practices such as the arbitrary arrest of (alleged) supporters of the OLF are again the rule rather than the exception. Some of them note that these practices are regionally determined. In Addis Ababa, this will happen less quickly than in areas such as the Guji and Wollega zones, for example, where OLA/Shene is conducting an armed struggle against the Ethiopian authorities.⁵⁶⁰ On the other hand, one confidential source says that the federal government is inviting everyone to participate in political dialogue and is advocating a democratic Ethiopia. The source says he knows many members of the OLF who can organise political activities undisturbed. If you oppose peacefully, then you have nothing to fear from the government, according to the source.⁵⁶¹

In early 2019, the OLF declared on its website that the ruling party EPRDF was still trying to suppress any noise other than the official government noise with the detention of OLF leaders and mass arrests of alleged OLF supporters.⁵⁶² According to *Addis Standard*, the Ethiopian authorities were arresting people who had participated in peaceful activities by the OLF. It was also reported that OLA fighters who had voluntarily surrendered their weapons and intended to integrate into the Oromia Regional State Police had been arrested and taken to detention centres.⁵⁶³ In a conversation with UK Home Office employees, journalist William Davison said that the government could cite alleged ties to OLA or Shene in order to arrest someone perceived as a threat.⁵⁶⁴

Estimates of the number of detainees in Oromia vary widely; it is not clear exactly during which periods the arrests took place.⁵⁶⁵ In March 2019, more than 1,000 people had been arrested for alleged links to the OLF, according to *Ethiopia Insight*.⁵⁶⁶ A year later, in February 2020, the same news channel cited sources who spoke of the arrest of between 5,000 and 10,000 (alleged) members of the OLF since July 2019. The youngest detainee known to *Ethiopia Insight* was 13 years old and the oldest 76. The detainees included students, farmers, civil servants, religious leaders and Abbaa Gadaas (members of the Oromo elder council).⁵⁶⁷ Many of those

⁵⁵⁸ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 42, July 2020.

⁵⁵⁹ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 83, July 2020.

⁵⁶⁰ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020; Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020

⁵⁶¹ Confidential source, 15 September 2020.

⁵⁶² OLF Website, *The Intimidation and Imprisonment of the OLF officials and its members by the Ethiopian government must stop immediately*, 19 January 2019.

⁵⁶³ Addis Standard, *Failed Politics and Deception: Behind the Crisis in western and southern Oromia*, 20 March 2020.

⁵⁶⁴ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 96, July 2020.

⁵⁶⁵ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 102, July 2020.

⁵⁶⁶ Ethiopia Insight, *OLF integration underway yet tensions remain*, 1 March 2019.

⁵⁶⁷ Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020

arrested in these mass arrests were detained for months with no access to any form of legal assistance, according to Amnesty International.⁵⁶⁸

In an article, *The Economist* wrote about the double risk that residents run in areas where armed conflict was taking place. Local farmers, even though they were doing their jobs, could be seen by OLA/Shene fighters as government informers, while the military could accuse them of passing information on to the 'guerrillas'.⁵⁶⁹ Confidential sources report that local people are victims of violence on the part of both the Ethiopian authorities and the OLA/Shene. Opinions are divided about the extent to which both parties are committing violence against the local population.⁵⁷⁰

ONLF

Several sources said that the reintegration of ex-ONLF fighters had worked out better than that of their OLF colleagues. The ONLF also reportedly had more room to manoeuvre than their Oromo counterparts. In some cases, this is attributed to the smaller size and smaller constituency of the ONLF compared to the OLF. This would greatly reduce the threat posed to the current government by the ONLF. The new president of the Somali Regional State, Mustafa Muhummed Omer, who says he is very committed to human rights, is also said to have contributed to the reintegration of the ONLF in the political spectrum.⁵⁷¹

The UK Home Office report stated that sources, including Hassan Moalin, a leading member of the ONLF, believed that the ONLF could generally function without undue difficulty. The party was able to set up offices in the SRS with the support of the regional government. Despite the arrest of some ONLF members at local level, the situation, while not entirely secure, was much better than under the previous administration, Home Office sources said in September 2019.⁵⁷²

In October 2020, the SRS regional police arrested at least three senior members of the ONLF. ONLF Chairman Abdirahman Mahdi told *Addis Standard* that the regional government was using tactics such as intimidation and threats to provoke the ONLF and try to force the organisation to break the peace agreement. According to the regional authorities, the arrests were made to maintain the rule of law. The ONLF chairman said that the authorities regarded his party as a threat and therefore arrested members of the party for alleged disturbances and vandalism.⁵⁷³

On the other hand, the ONLF sits on the joint council of political parties and deputy chair of the ONLF, Hassan Moalin, said in late October 2020 that he believed the Ethiopian National Electoral Council was doing everything in its power to ensure that the upcoming elections were open and fair.⁵⁷⁴ However, Somali radio station Radio Risala reported in late January 2021 that ONLF offices running the election campaign had been closed in more than ten villages. A precise reason was not given by the radio station.⁵⁷⁵

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⁵⁶⁸ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020

⁵⁶⁹ The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

⁵⁷⁰ Confidential source, 21 October 2020.

⁵⁷¹ Confidential source, 17 August 2020; Reuters, *Ethiopian who demanded justice now has half a year to deliver it*, 28 January 2020.

⁵⁷² Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 102, July 2020.

⁵⁷³ *Addis Standard, Ethiopia's Somali state police arrest opposition leaders*, 21 October 2020.

⁵⁷⁴ Ethiopia PR Observer, *Joint Council of Political Parties Commends Preparation of NEBE for General Election*, 23 October 2020.

⁵⁷⁵ BBC Monitoring (Radio Risala), *Ethiopia's Somali region closes former rebel group offices*, 27 January 2021.

PG7 has disbanded and merged into the political party E-ZEMA. There is no information to indicate that members of PG7 or people associated with the party encountered problems with the authorities during the reporting period (see also section 1.1.1). Since the outbreak of violence between the Tigray region and the federal government, the party has expressed support for Abiy Ahmed.⁵⁷⁶

3.2.5 *Treatment due to involvement with or membership of OLF or ONLF*

OLF

Various sources believe that, particularly since the summer of 2019, the Ethiopian authorities have arrested huge numbers of OLF supporters in order to nip dissident political voices in the bud.⁵⁷⁷ Although there were fewer reports of arbitrary arrests in Ethiopia than during the EPRDF/TPLF regime, members of the OLF and alleged supporters of the organisation fell victim to such practices. This was especially true in the areas of Oromia in which the armed struggle between OLA/Shene and the army is still ongoing.⁵⁷⁸ According to Amnesty International, members of the kebele militias, the Oromia Regional Police and the Ethiopian Federal Army carried out mass arrests in East and West Guji. Many detainees were held for months without access to lawyers or legal assistance.⁵⁷⁹

Many of the arrests are being made without clear charges against the arrestees. USDoS notes that family members have been denied access to detainees held on suspicion of terrorist activity.⁵⁸⁰ Colonel Gamachu Ayana, a prominent OLF member, was released in late December 2019 and the charges against him were dropped after he had been imprisoned for months on terrorism charges. According to *Ethiopia Insight*, he had been remanded in custody for eleven months, much longer than the legal maximum of four months.⁵⁸¹ *Oromo Press* tweeted after his release that Gamachu had allegedly been tortured and held in solitary confinement. According to *Oromo Press*, Gamachu had been falsely convicted as he had only been standing up for the rights of the Oromo (see also section 3.4.5).⁵⁸²

On 29 February 2020, security forces in Addis Ababa arrested Abdi Regassa, a senior member of the OLF, along with eight other party members. The eight others were released the same day, but Abdi Regassa was still in detention at the end of the reporting period with no charges having yet been brought against him.⁵⁸³ The (former) chairman of the OLF, Dawud Ibsa, was under house arrest at the time of writing this country of origin information report. According to *Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa* (HRLHA), on 12 October 2020 security forces raided his home where a political rally was taking place. Six people, including two journalists from *Voice of Oromo Liberation*, were arrested.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁷⁶ Confidential source, 17 November 2020; EthioTube, *Ethiopia: Ezema leader Berhanu Nega (PhD) has a message to the people of Tigray*, 5 November 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3wDXzoWK-c>.

⁵⁷⁷ AI, *Ethiopia: Authorities crack down on opposition supporters with mass arrests*, 27 January 2020.

⁵⁷⁸ HRW, *World Report 2020*, page 207, 2020.

⁵⁷⁹ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

⁵⁸⁰ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 5, 11 March 2020; AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

⁵⁸¹ Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020; AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020: *Ethiopia Insight* writes that he had been remanded in custody for eleven months and Amnesty International for eight months.

⁵⁸² Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 95, July 2020; Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020; Oromo Press, @Oromo Press, 27 December 2019: twitter.com/oromopress/status/1210586722314194944.

⁵⁸³ HRW, *World Report 2021*, page 238, January 2021.

⁵⁸⁴ HRLHA, *Ethiopia: The OLF chairman Dawud Ibsa, and audiences present to attend media brief put under house arrest at the chairman's residence*, 14 October 2020.

In many cases, the homes of detainees, particularly in Guji and Wollega, were also looted by security forces. If these security forces were unable to find the suspect, they would arrest or kidnap family members, including children, Amnesty International wrote in May 2020.⁵⁸⁵ Members of the OLA/Shene or people with alleged links to this organisation are also the victims of extrajudicial killings, according to Amnesty International.⁵⁸⁶ In conversations with investigators at the UK Home Office, members of the OLF reported human rights violations in Oromia, such as massacres, rape and destruction of property.⁵⁸⁷ In the second half of 2019, the NGO *Oromia Support Group* recorded 64 extrajudicial killings and at least 1,400 arbitrary arrests. *The Economist* wrote that many more cases of human rights violations had been reported since then, including the burning of homes. The government denied all the charges; *The Economist* found the denials unconvincing. However, the news medium stated that the atrocities did not necessarily have to be decreed from the top. It was possible that there was no longer a clear chain of command and that senior officers of the federal army were unaware of exactly what was happening in the outer areas.⁵⁸⁸

For example, in November 2020 a high school teacher was killed after allegedly being taken from his home by ten members of the *Oromo Special Police Force*. Since federal troops had been sent to Tigray in early November 2020 due to the conflict in that region, this special police force has become increasingly involved in operations targeting OLA/Shene. Speaking to the BBC, a sister of the victim said that she believed her brother had been politically active for the OLF only when he had sat on a committee that welcomed the OLF leaders on their return in 2018.⁵⁸⁹

In some cases, detainees are sent to re-education camps. More than 1,000 young people arrested in the riots that followed the return of the OLF to Ethiopia in September 2018 were subjected to a month of re-education in a military training camp.⁵⁹⁰ Amnesty International also reported that detainees were required to undergo rehabilitation training for a period of time, usually a few months, during which time the doctrine of the ruling party was allegedly imposed on detainees.⁵⁹¹ A source from the UK Home Office said in an interview in September 2019 that prisoner rehabilitation centres were a method more favoured by the previous government. He believed that inmates were still being 're-educated,' but that this was happening on a much smaller scale than before.⁵⁹² As mentioned in section 3.2.4, OLF fighters who laid down their weapons were also subjected to a rehabilitation programme and some said it felt like being in prison. However, an unknown number of these fighters were arrested after successfully completing the programme and sent to detention centres, *Addis Standard* wrote in March 2020. The newspaper also wrote about the alleged bad conditions in these rehabilitation centres.⁵⁹³ In March 2019, AfricaNews reported on the hunger strike that former OLF fighters had started due to poor conditions in the Tolay camp in southwest

⁵⁸⁵ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

⁵⁸⁶ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

⁵⁸⁷ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 90, July 2020.

⁵⁸⁸ *The Economist*, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

⁵⁸⁹ BBC, *Ethiopia's Oromia conflict: Why a teacher was killed 'execution-style'*, 16 January 2021.

⁵⁹⁰ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 8, 11 March 2020.

⁵⁹¹ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

⁵⁹² Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 103, July 2020.

⁵⁹³ *Addis Standard*, *Failed Politics and Deception: Behind the Crisis in western and southern Oromia*, 20 March 2020; Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 13, July 2020.

Ethiopia. According to one of the fighters, most of his 'comrades' were ill because of the lack of hygiene and food.⁵⁹⁴

ONLF

Several sources believe that members of the ONLF or people associated with the organisation are no longer at risk of prosecution by the authorities.⁵⁹⁵ This applies to both the federal capital Addis Ababa and the SRS. *The Economist* wrote that the contrast between the SRS and other parts of Ethiopia was striking. While democratic reforms in large parts of the country were accompanied by an increase in violence and lawlessness, the situation in the SRS under the new government had improved significantly. But even in the SRS, the process is not perfect and is still fragile, the paper said.⁵⁹⁶ Confidential sources agree that the region has changed drastically since former president Abdi Illey was ousted and the new president had taken office, and that the human rights situation has improved significantly. However, the situation remains shaky and the ONLF ex-fighters could take up arms again if their reintegration falters and the reforms do not happen fast enough, according to a confidential source.⁵⁹⁷

On 24 October 2020, thousands of Somalis celebrated the second anniversary of the peace treaty⁵⁹⁸ between the ONLF and the Ethiopian government. However, the festivities ended on a bad note when three leading members of the ONLF were arrested (see also section 3.2.4). On Twitter, the ONLF wrote in response to this event that the organisation would continue to work for peace despite the continuous arrests of its members.⁵⁹⁹

3.2.6 *Developments surrounding ethnic violence in Ethiopia*

Sections 3.1 and 3.2 and the accompanying subsections focus on the developments surrounding violence between ethnic groups in Ethiopia and the attitude of the Ethiopian authorities, among others, to that violence.

3.3 Members of opposition parties/political activists

3.3.1 *Monitoring political opponents abroad*

When asked, many confidential sources say that monitoring opponents abroad was part of the EPRDF/TPLF regime but does not know the extent to which the current government uses such practices.⁶⁰⁰ The Australian Department of State wrote in its August 2020 country of origin information report that while the authorities probably have the necessary intelligence capabilities and qualities to monitor major anti-government demonstrations abroad and anti-government activity online, the Department assumed that people who openly criticise the government abroad run a low risk of reprisals by the authorities when they return to Ethiopia.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁴ AfricaNews, *Ethiopia's returnee OLF rebels on hunger strike*, 14 March 2019.

⁵⁹⁵ Confidential source, 15 September 2020; confidential source, 17 September 2020.

⁵⁹⁶ The Economist, *Ethiopia's most repressive state is reforming*, 3 October 2019.

⁵⁹⁷ Confidential source, 21 September 2020.

⁵⁹⁸ Like the OLF and PG7, the ONLF signed a peace treaty with the federal government after the ONLF leadership had returned from exile. The peace treaty between the federal government and the ONLF was signed on 21 October 2018, two months after the OLF had signed the peace treaty: Reuters, *Ethiopia signs peace deal with rebels from gas-rich region*, 22 October 2018.

⁵⁹⁹ ONLF, @ONLFOfficial, twitter.com/ONLFOfficial?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor, 24 October 2020.

⁶⁰⁰ Confidential source, 23 September 2020; confidential source, 17 September 2020; confidential source, 21 September 2020.

⁶⁰¹ DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, 12 August 2020.

A number of sources believe that Ethiopia's internal problems are such that the monitoring of dissident voices abroad has been relegated to the background.⁶⁰² Some sources believe that the power of the Ethiopian intelligence and security service, NISS, has diminished since the departure of high-ranking Tigrayans, which also means that there is less capacity to monitor political opponents abroad.⁶⁰³ One confidential source believes that, because of Abiy's background in the Ethiopian intelligence and security service, it is likely that the positions of the Tigrayans were filled by people close to Abiy whom he still knows from that period.⁶⁰⁴

Following the increase in ethnic violence in Ethiopia, the government submitted a draft law to parliament in November 2019 that criminalises hate speech, incitement to violence and the spread of disinformation. The draft law is subject to criticism because it is broadly interpretable and can undermine freedom of speech. On the other hand, freedom of speech is guaranteed by the Ethiopian constitution and legislation.⁶⁰⁵ In February 2020, the Ethiopian government passed the new law (*Hate Speech and Disinformation Proclamation*). This prohibits posts on the Internet that could incite violence or disrupt public order.⁶⁰⁶ Sources indicate that inflammatory messages, particularly from the diaspora, are distributed through the social media channels.⁶⁰⁷

Many Ethiopians in the diaspora express political views that often do not correspond with the standpoint of the Abiy government.⁶⁰⁸ However, it is inconceivable that the Ethiopian authorities are monitoring all online activities, according to one confidential source.⁶⁰⁹ Most sources agree that the higher a person's profile, the more likely they are to be monitored. If someone can mobilise people and pose a threat to the government from abroad, this person can count on attracting the government's attention, the sources said.⁶¹⁰ Ethiopians abroad have been charged in absentia for their allegedly inflammatory texts on social media (see also section 3.3.7).⁶¹¹ After the outbreak of the conflict between the federal government and the Tigray region, the police released a list of the names of individuals accused of spreading offensive information through various media outlets, both inside and outside Ethiopia, that was aimed at breaking up the country. One of these individuals was the Tigrayan activist and politician Daniel Berhane, and another was the Oromo activist and university researcher at a British university, Dr Awol Alo Kasim (see also section 3.2.1).⁶¹²

There have been reports that individuals were arrested and imprisoned for some time for publishing statements on online forums and in print that are critical of the government (see also Chapter 5).⁶¹³ The more the government sees a person as a

⁶⁰² Confidential source, 25 September 2020; confidential source, 23 September 2020.

⁶⁰³ Confidential source, 17 September 2020; confidential source, 19 November 2020.

⁶⁰⁴ Confidential source, 8 October 2020.

⁶⁰⁵ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020; USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 11, 11 March 2020.

⁶⁰⁶ ITWeb Africa, *Ethiopia enacts strict social media and fake news law*, 18 February 2020; Federal Negarit Gazette, *Proclamation No. 1185 /2020 Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation*, 23 March 2020.

⁶⁰⁷ Confidential source, 8 October 2020; confidential source, 30 September 2020; confidential source, 17 September 2020.

⁶⁰⁸ VOA, *From Outside, Ethiopia's Diaspora Pushes for Change*, 30 July 2020; Sahan Journal, *Minnesota's Oromo community demands justice after musician and activist Hachalu Hundessa is killed in Ethiopia*, 30 June 2020.

⁶⁰⁹ Confidential source, 25 September 2020.

⁶¹⁰ Confidential source, 30 September 2020; confidential source, 23 September 2020.

⁶¹¹ Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopian prosecutors charge Jawar with training terror group in Egypt*, 25 September 2020.

⁶¹² Fana Broadcasting Company, *Ethiopia issues arrest warrants for more Tigray officers*, 28 November 2020.

⁶¹³ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, pages 47-48, 2020.

threat, the greater the risk of being monitored abroad, say several confidential sources.⁶¹⁴ However, it is not known on which scale this is taking place.

3.3.2 *Which activities are monitored and in which way?*

The 2018 country of origin information report mentioned reports that the then president of the SRS, Abdi Mohammed, allegedly had informers in the Ogadeeni diaspora who were monitoring the comings and goings of ONLF sympathisers.⁶¹⁵ Since Abdi disappeared from the political scene and the current president of the SRS took office, there is no information to indicate that these practices have continued.

Several confidential sources say that the current federal government has informers in the diaspora that report to the Ethiopian authorities. According to the sources, these are sometimes government-directed and paid informers, but it can also involve supporters of Abiy Ahmed who, out of loyalty to the authorities, report dissident views.⁶¹⁶ This information could not be verified by public sources.

The previous country of origin information report also mentioned the alleged use of spyware by the Ethiopian authorities. The spyware/surveillance malware is said to have been used against opponents in exile, amongst others.⁶¹⁷ *Axios.com* wrote in September 2019 that Ethiopia reportedly used spyware to monitor journalists. The news medium traced a link to FinFisher's Surveillance Software, to which Ethiopia was connected as far back as 2013 by researchers from Canada-based TheCitizenLab. The *Axios* article does not say whether Ethiopia is still engaging in such practices.⁶¹⁸ Some sources believe that this is indeed no longer the case at the present time, because the Ethiopian intelligence and security service has lost its effectiveness and because the problems at home currently require most of the capacity of the security apparatus (see also section 3.3.1).

3.3.3 *Role of embassies and of the Ethiopian intelligence and security services in monitoring Ethiopians abroad*

Sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 have already focused on the alleged role of informers and the Ethiopian intelligence and security services in monitoring opposition activities abroad. Confidential sources said they have seen embassy staff taking photographs of protesters at demonstrations abroad. Two confidential sources, who are both active on social media and have both expressed criticism of the government, also say that they have been approached personally by embassy employees. The conversations that followed were not perceived as threatening, but did show that the embassy was watching them, the sources said.⁶¹⁹

3.3.4 *Consequences of marginal opposition activities*

When asked, a number of confidential sources said that the more a person is seen as a threat by the government, the greater the risk that person is running. Most marginal opposition activities will therefore not be noticed by the government. One frequently heard statement is that the government will not generally see people who engage in such activities as a direct threat or take action against them. It should be

⁶¹⁴ Confidential source, 21 October 2020.

⁶¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018*, page 72, July 2018.

⁶¹⁶ Confidential source, 8 October 2020; confidential source, 30 September 2020.

⁶¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018*, pages 65 and 66, July 2018.

⁶¹⁸ *Axios*, *Spyware's human rights dilemma*, 12 September 2019; TheCitizenLab, *You Only Click Twice FinFisher's Global Proliferation*, 13 March 2013.

⁶¹⁹ Confidential source, 30 September 2020; confidential source, 25 September 2020.

noted here that people who are politically active have more room for manoeuvre in Addis Ababa than elsewhere.⁶²⁰

According to USDoS, NGOs have frequently reported significant reductions in arrests, detention, mistreatment and threats to people critical of the government since Prime Minister Abiy took office.⁶²¹ Thousands of political prisoners were released after Abiy became Prime Minister. The *Danish Immigration Service* (DIS) wrote in its September 2018 report that the majority of sources confirmed that an undefined number of prisoners had been released after Abiy had taken office. Those released included journalists, human rights activists and prominent politicians. Months after Abiy took office, the promise that all political prisoners and opposition leaders would be released had still not been fulfilled, according to a source from the Danish investigation team.⁶²²

The 2020 report from *Freedom House* stated that while more than 10,000 people were released following the change of political leadership, hundreds of new arrests have been made since then. For example, hundreds of supporters of regional opposition movements were arrested in the days following the assassination of the President of Amhara in June 2019 (see also under 1.8.1).⁶²³ Sources of the UK Home Office investigation team said in September 2019 that the number of arrests and charges for political reasons had plummeted after the current administration took office. However, one of the leaders of the NAMA political party with whom the team spoke believed that he could be arrested at any time.⁶²⁴

Amnesty International confirmed the arrest of 75 OLF supporters in early 2020. The arrests had been made throughout Oromia and were the latest in a long line of mass arrests of opposition activists, Amnesty International wrote.⁶²⁵ Since June 2019, following the 'coup attempt' in Amhara, Ethiopian authorities have been making arbitrary arrests. However, these arrests often took place after incidents such as that of June 2019 and the murder of the singer Hachalu and not during demonstrations against the government (see also sections 1.1 and 1.2.1).

3.3.5 *Risk of retaliation for participating in a demonstration abroad*

Several confidential sources say that they have no examples of people who participated in a demonstration outside Ethiopia and got into trouble as a result when they returned to Ethiopia (see also sections 3.3.1 to 3.3.3).⁶²⁶ An NGO employee says that in his opinion it is more about the role that a person plays in the opposition. If this person plays a prominent role and stands at the front of a demonstration abroad shouting anti-government slogans, he or she could get into trouble when visiting Ethiopia. However, no concrete cases are known to him.⁶²⁷

Three sources, all of Oromo descent, say they no longer dare to return to Ethiopia because of their opposition activities abroad.⁶²⁸ One source said he is not a member of the OLF and that he only engages in marginal opposition activities, such as attending demonstrations in front of embassies. Yet he does not believe he is safe in

⁶²⁰ Confidential source, 21 October 2020; confidential source, 23 September 2020; confidential source, 17 August 2020.

⁶²¹ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, pages 11-12, 11 March 2020.

⁶²² DIS, *Country of Origin Information, Ethiopia: Political situation and treatment of opposition*, page 12, September 2018.

⁶²³ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia, paragraph B1*, 4 March 2020

⁶²⁴ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 42, July 2020.

⁶²⁵ AI, *Ethiopia: Authorities crack down on opposition supporters with mass arrests*, 27 January 2020.

⁶²⁶ Confidential source, 17 August 2020; confidential source, 15 September 2020.

⁶²⁷ Confidential source, 6 August 2020.

⁶²⁸ Confidential source, 30 September 2020; confidential source, 8 October 2020.

Ethiopia. In the second half of 2019, he was in Ethiopia for a family visit. He won't do that anymore for the time being, the source stated.⁶²⁹

One of these sources said that his father in Ethiopia had already had security forces at the door several times who wanted to arrest him. The father, who according to the source was not an outspoken opponent of the current government, had managed to evade arrest. He thought his activities for the Oromo community abroad had gotten his father in Ethiopia into trouble, but he couldn't say for sure.⁶³⁰

3.3.6 *How does the Ethiopian government act in such situations?*

There are no specific cases known of people who participated in demonstrations abroad and suffered the consequences on their arrival in or return to Ethiopia.

3.3.7 *Possible criminal prosecution after return*

Section 3.3.1 refers to people who have been charged in absentia because of their alleged inflammatory posts from abroad. Following the riots after the murder of Hachalu, the Ethiopian authorities charged four people in absentia with incitement to ethnic and religious-based violence, among other things. One of the defendants, who lives in the United States, reportedly held Amhara responsible for the death of the singer on OMN and called on Oromo to do everything in their power to overthrow the prevailing 'neftenga' – or Amhara – system.⁶³¹

No information was found about other cases of charges or convictions in connection with (marginal) opposition activities abroad.

3.3.8 *Position of sympathisers and members of organisations such as OLF, ONLF and PG7*
For the answer to this question, see sections 3.2.4 and 3.2.5.

3.3.9 *Position of members of opposition parties*

Ethiopia's constitution and legislation prohibit arbitrary arrests and detention and enable everybody to challenge the legality of his or her arrest.⁶³² Most sources agree that after Abiy Ahmed took office, there was more room for political dialogue and political voices other than those of the ruling party. As mentioned above, Abiy invited illegal opposition parties abroad to return to Ethiopia and rejoin the political spectrum (see section 1.1.1).

The Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated in its August 2020 report that political opposition had been given much more leeway since April 2018. Opposition parties reportedly had more freedom to unite and organise party activities, especially in the capital Addis Ababa. The Ministry was of the opinion that people in Ethiopia could speak out openly against the ruling party.⁶³³ However, Amnesty International stated that while there was a significant opening of political space after Abiy took office, since June 2019 the human rights organisation had seen an increase in unlawful impediments to and violations of the rights of, amongst others, critical journalists and members of opposition parties.⁶³⁴ Furthermore, contrary to what the constitution guarantees, the Ethiopian authorities had arbitrarily arrested individuals, including activists, journalists and members of the opposition.⁶³⁵

⁶²⁹ Confidential source, 8 October 2020.

⁶³⁰ Confidential source, 8 October 2020.

⁶³¹ Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopian prosecutors charge Jawar with training terror group in Egypt*, 25 September 2020.

⁶³² Constitution of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Part One, Articles 17 & 19, 8 December 1994.

⁶³³ DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, page 29, 12 August 2020.

⁶³⁴ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

⁶³⁵ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 6, 11 March 2020.

According to confidential sources, the current government is showing increasing hostility to dissenters, especially members of the OLF and those associated with that party, and is becoming increasingly authoritarian.⁶³⁶

Regional differences

Some confidential sources believe that the situation in the capital is better than in other regions of Ethiopia. In the SRS, the situation is said to be better than in other regions and the ruling party and the main opposition party, the ONLF, are reportedly working together in relative peace (see also sections 3.2.4 and 3.2.5). However, Somali radio station Radio Risala reported in late January 2021 that ONLF offices running the election campaign had been closed in more than ten villages.⁶³⁷ Another confidential source says the situation in the SRS is somewhat better than in the other regions, but believes that Afar is the only region where the opposition and the Prosperity Party are working closely together.⁶³⁸ Several sources believe that the opposition parties in Oromia, particularly the OFC and the OLF, are experiencing the most repression from the authorities. This is because these parties pose the greatest threat to the current government, according to the sources (see also sections 1.2, 3.2.4 and 3.2.5).⁶³⁹ Tigray was de facto its own state. The TPLF had changed from being the ruling party to the (federal) opposition party but had increasingly withdrawn into its own state. Since the conflict between the TPLF and the federal government and the capture of Mekelle by federal troops in late November 2020, this situation has changed (see also section 1.1.2.1).

E-ZEMA, which confidential sources say is on good terms with the Prosperity Party and, like TAND, can freely move in Addis Ababa.⁶⁴⁰ However, the party said that it was unable to open offices in parts of Oromia due to security concerns and opposition from local government officials.⁶⁴¹ A confidential source has also heard stories of oppression and intimidation of this party by local authorities in certain parts of Ethiopia, but believes the PP does not see E-ZEMA as a threat.⁶⁴² After the outbreak of the conflict with Tigray in early November 2020, E-ZEMA leader Berhanu Nega expressed his support for Abiy, saying that the TPLF was the cause of the conflict.⁶⁴³ Some political parties, including OLF, NaMA, TAND and OFC, stated during the reporting period of this country of origin information report that they could not open offices in certain parts of the country due to threats, intimidation and attacks on their members.⁶⁴⁴ Balderas was impeded from organising public gatherings in 2019.⁶⁴⁵ It was also mentioned earlier in this section that ONLF offices in the SRS were closed by the authorities at the end of January 2021.

In an article in early 2020, *Ethiopia Insight* wrote that the OLF was not engaging in any political activity in the zones in Oromia that were under the control of a command post.⁶⁴⁶

Impediments and arrests

⁶³⁶ Confidential source, 30 September 2020; confidential source, 8 October 2020.

⁶³⁷ BBC Monitoring, Ethiopia's Somali region closes former rebel group offices, 27 January 2021; confidential source, 17 September 2020; confidential source, 23 September 2020.

⁶³⁸ Confidential source, 21 September 2020.

⁶³⁹ Confidential source, 23 September 2020; confidential source, 30 September 2020; confidential source, 8 October 2020.

⁶⁴⁰ Confidential source, 21 September 2020; confidential source, 17 August 2020.

⁶⁴¹ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 21, 11 March 2020.

⁶⁴² Confidential source, 21 September 2020.

⁶⁴³ BBC Sounds, *Berhanu Nega on the Tigray conflict*, 24 November 2020.

⁶⁴⁴ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 14, 11 March 2020.

⁶⁴⁵ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 15, 11 March 2020.

⁶⁴⁶ Ethiopia Insight, *Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion*, 14 February 2020.

A confidential source believes that if people pursue peaceful opposition, they do not need to be concerned about repercussions from the government.⁶⁴⁷ This claim is contradicted by another confidential source who believes that the arrest of opposition member Lidetu Ayalewu, who is said to be opposing the government by peaceful means, is a sign that the current government is becoming increasingly repressive.⁶⁴⁸ Several incidents have been reported in which members, supporters and leaders of political parties have been prevented from holding meetings, demonstrations and press conferences. For example, police have stopped Balderas Council leader Eskinder Nega from holding press conferences and demonstrations in Addis Ababa. Several organisers were reportedly arrested at a demonstration planned by the party in October 2019.⁶⁴⁹ According to various sources, TAND can function freely in Addis Ababa while, although it has its origins in Tigray, it has no freedom of movement in Tigray because the TPLF sees it as a threat.⁶⁵⁰

The USDoS report on the human rights situation in 2019 stated that the *Ethiopian Human Rights Council* (HRCO) had expressed concerns about the arrests of members of NaMa, OFC and E-ZEMA and of journalists and civilians.⁶⁵¹ After the killings in Bahir Dar (the capital of the Amhara region) and Addis Ababa at the end of June 2019, NaMA claimed that more than 500 members of the party had been arrested (see section 1.8.3 for more context). Members of other regional parties are said to have been arrested as a result of the events in Amhara.⁶⁵² On this point, one confidential source says that members of this party had close ties with the 'coup plotters' and therefore thinks it is logical that the government arrested so many people.⁶⁵³ Another confidential source believes the party has moderated its rhetoric after the events of June 2019 and has become less 'radical'.⁶⁵⁴

After the murder of Hachalu in late June 2020, OFC leaders Jawar Mohammed and Bekele Gerba were arrested for their alleged involvement in the riots that followed the murder. Non-Oromo politicians such as Lidetu Ayalewu were also arrested after the riots. Some confidential sources question the charges against the politicians and believe they have been arrested for their criticism of the government and the fact that they have large followings.⁶⁵⁵ One confidential source wonders how Lidetu could have been charged with inciting Oromo youth given that he himself is Amhara.⁶⁵⁶ At the end of the reporting period for this country of origin information report, a regional court in Oromia ordered that Lidetu should be released on bail.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁴⁷ Confidential source, 15 September 2020.

⁶⁴⁸ Confidential source, 17 September 2020.

⁶⁴⁹ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia* (section E.1), 4 March 2020.

⁶⁵⁰ Confidential source, 15 September 2020; confidential source, 21 September 2020; Ezega News, *Dr Aregawi Berhe Says He Was Attacked and Detained in Mekelle*, 2 July 2020.

⁶⁵¹ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 4, 11 March 2020.

⁶⁵² USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 8, 11 March 2020; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia*, paragraph B1, 4 March 2020

⁶⁵³ Confidential source, 17 August 2020.

⁶⁵⁴ Confidential source, 23 September 2020.

⁶⁵⁵ Confidential source, 21 October 2020; confidential source, 30 September 2020; Anadolu Agency, *Ethiopian opposition figure held despite bail*, 24 September 2020.

⁶⁵⁶ Confidential source, 21 September 2020.

⁶⁵⁷ BBC Monitoring (Addis Standard Website: Twitter), *Ethiopia frees opposition leader held over ethnic clashes*, 11 December 2020.

3.4 Compliance and violations

3.4.1 *State of play regarding compliance with and violation of human rights*

This country of origin information report referred above to the more horizontal nature of the current problems concerning violence in Ethiopia. Two confidential sources have said independently that this trend also relates to human rights violations in Ethiopia. Before Abiy took office, most reports of human rights abuses in Ethiopia related to actions by the Ethiopian authorities against the civilian population. Nowadays it is the communities that stand against each other and do not shy away from violence or other means to settle conflicts among themselves, according to the sources.⁶⁵⁸

The PP has lost control in some parts of the country. 'Now there are armed opposition groups, vigilante movements and criminal groups,' says a source, and continues: 'The human rights abuses are happening not because of the authorities, but because of a lack of them. It has all become much more complex.'⁶⁵⁹ A confidential source noted that many government officials, including members of the security forces, are largely the same people as under the EPRDF. As a result, old, repressive reflexes can still crop up, according to the source.⁶⁶⁰

Arrests

The UK Home Office investigation team that visited Ethiopia in September 2019 heard several stories about the improved human rights situation compared to the time before Prime Minister Abiy took office. Various sources said the government was making far fewer arbitrary arrests than before. In addition to the reduced number of arbitrary arrests, there were also fewer reports of beatings of detainees compared to in the past. The sources added that arbitrary arrests were certainly not a thing of the past and that there were still serious concerns about such practices, especially outside the capital Addis Ababa.⁶⁶¹

In its 2020 report, HRW confirmed that there were fewer reports of arbitrary arrests in Ethiopia overall. According to the organisation, violent arrests of alleged members and supporters of the OLF were regularly reported in areas where there was fighting between OLA/Shene and the army. Amnesty International also reported such arrests in those areas.⁶⁶²

As already mentioned in this report, mass arrests took place, for example, after the failed 'coup attempt' of June 2019 and after the murder of the singer Hachalu in late June 2020 (see sections 1.8.2 and 1.8.3). In HRW's report on the events of 2020, the organisation writes, among other things, that coverage of mass arrests of Oromo civilians accused of supporting or sympathising with OLA/Shene was widespread.⁶⁶³

Detention

Although the government of Abiy has released thousands of political prisoners, both low-profile and high-profile political prisoners are still being held. One source noted that it is not always easy to arrive at a clear definition of a political prisoner.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁵⁸ Confidential source, 17 September 2020; confidential source, 19 November 2020.

⁶⁵⁹ Confidential source, 17 September 2020.

⁶⁶⁰ Confidential source, 14 January 2021.

⁶⁶¹ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, pages 41 and 52, July 2020.

⁶⁶² HRW, *World Report 2020*, page 207, 2020; AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

⁶⁶³ HRW, *World Report 2021*, page 236, January 2021.

⁶⁶⁴ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 22, July 2020.

Several sources told the UK Home Office team that there were military training/rehabilitation camps or detention centres in which political prisoners were being held (see also section 3.2.5). This was particularly the case in Oromia. Those held in military prisons were denied a fair hearing, such as arrest without charge and lack of access to family and lawyers.⁶⁶⁵

USDoS wrote in its 2019 Human Rights Situation Report that there were still abuses related to the treatment of prisoners by security personnel. Following the murders of 22 June 2019, the police reportedly arrested more than 300 activists, politicians and journalists. The media reported on the inhumane conditions in which some suspects were held at a police station in Addis Ababa.⁶⁶⁶ At a press conference on 1 August 2019, Prime Minister Abiy allegedly dismissed allegations of torture and the detention of prisoners in dark cells, according to USDoS.⁶⁶⁷

In the same month that Abiy took office as Prime Minister, the infamous Maekelawi prison closed (see section 1.1.1) and the Ogaden prison closed in September 2018. In July 2018, HRW had released a report on all kinds of abuses in prison.⁶⁶⁸ According to USDoS, however, the conditions in prisons and detention centres were still poor during the reporting period of this country of origin information report and in some cases the situation could even be life-threatening. The authorities were reportedly still physically assaulting prisoners. Furthermore, many prisons were overcrowded and there was a lack of water, food and medical care.⁶⁶⁹

Demonstrations

A source from the UK Home Office said that demonstrations were permitted, which was not the case under the previous government.⁶⁷⁰ Another Home Office source reported that peaceful demonstrations were still prohibited in some parts of the country. The feeling that demonstrations were controlled by the state had diminished, as had the violence that the government had used against demonstrations, the source said.⁶⁷¹ Yet state violence was still being deployed for demonstrations. For example, during the riots that broke out after Jawar Mohamed's bodyguard had been taken away from him, 12 protesters were killed in acts of violence by security forces in the cities of Ambo and Adama.⁶⁷² According to Amnesty International, people died as a result of state violence when residents of the Amhara region protested against a convoy that they believed was transporting weapons and ammunition. Witnesses reportedly said that the demonstration was initially peaceful.⁶⁷³

In July 2020, independent UN human rights experts called on the Ethiopian authorities to permit peaceful demonstrations. The experts did this in response to the deaths by state violence of protesters who had taken to the streets following the death of the popular singer and activist Hachalu.⁶⁷⁴ According to *Freedom House*,

⁶⁶⁵ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 100, July 2020.

⁶⁶⁶ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 4, 11 March 2020; BBC Monitoring (Ethiopia Observer Website), *Ethiopia coup suspects face abuse in jail, says lawyer*, 3 July 2019.

⁶⁶⁷ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 4, 11 March 2020; BBC Monitoring (The Reporter), *Ethiopian premier says failed coup bid was 'very dangerous'*, 3 August 2019: The article in The Reporter refers to Abiy's press conference and the fact that he said that many of the detainees had been released but does not mention Abiy's rejection of the charges.

⁶⁶⁸ AfricaNews, *Ethiopia's Somali region closes notorious 'Jail Ogaden'*, 22 September 2018; HRW, *"We are Like the Dead" Torture and other Human Rights Abuses in Jail Ogaden, Somali Regional State, Ethiopia*, 4 July 2018.

⁶⁶⁹ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 5, 11 March 2020.

⁶⁷⁰ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 107, July 2020.

⁶⁷¹ Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, page 108, July 2020.

⁶⁷² AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020.

⁶⁷³ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020.

⁶⁷⁴ UN News, *Ethiopia urged to allow peaceful demonstrations, investigate protestor deaths*, 21 July 2020.

the UN Human Rights Council had also expressed concern in March 2019 about the reports of deadly state violence during demonstrations across Ethiopia.⁶⁷⁵

Amendments to laws

The 2018 country of origin information report cited two repressive laws passed in 2009: the Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSO Act)⁶⁷⁶ and the Anti-Terrorism Act. During the reporting period of that country of origin information report, these laws are said to have been used extensively to restrict freedom of expression and civil society.⁶⁷⁷ Immediately after taking office as Prime Minister, Abiy began reforming legislation that had been criticised by human rights organisations. The ongoing reform of the media law, the CSO law and the electoral law created more space for civil society organisations and made it easier for the media and the public to access opposition parties, according to the UN Human Rights Council in February 2019.⁶⁷⁸ On 5 February 2019, the Ethiopian Parliament adopted a severely amended *Charities and Societies Proclamation* (No. 1113/2019). The new law lifted the restrictions that had been imposed on foreign governments and private funds for the funding of civil society in Ethiopia.⁶⁷⁹ However, in its 2020 World Report HRW noted that there were still concerns about the new law, such as the restrictions on lobbying activities from abroad.⁶⁸⁰

On 2 January 2020, the Ethiopian government replaced the anti-terrorism legislation (ATP: Anti-Terrorism Proclamation) of 2009, which critics say was often used to silence dissident voices. The old law was still used after Abiy had taken office – for example after the murder of the president of the Amhara region in June 2019.⁶⁸¹ According to Amnesty International, lawsuits filed under the ATP Act involved abuses such as illegal and delayed pre-trial detention, unreasonable delays and ongoing complaints about torture and other ill treatment.⁶⁸² While much of the old law's vague terminology had been replaced, the amended version still left room for broad interpretation. Fisseha Tekle of Amnesty International said in an interview with *Agence France Presse* (AFP) that the new human rights law had evolved but that it still offered potential for abuse.⁶⁸³

Organisations such as USDoS and Amnesty International also criticised other legislation passed since Abiy had taken office. As specified in section 3.3.1, the *Hate Speech and Disinformation Proclamation* was passed in February 2020. This prohibits posts on the Internet that could incite violence or disrupt public order.⁶⁸⁴ The law is subject to criticism because it is broadly interpretable and can undermine freedom of expression.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁷⁵ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia (section E.1)*, 4 March 2020; AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020: Amnesty International cites the example of the 50 deaths in Sidama in July 2019 as a result of ethnic violence and the excessive use of force by the government in the crackdown on the riots.

⁶⁷⁶ This CSO law stipulates, among other things, that NGOs that are more than ten percent dependent on foreign funding are not permitted to engage in human rights activities, including women's rights, children's rights and the rights of the disabled. There are heavy fines for administrative violations of the law, such as the late submission of reports.

⁶⁷⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia*, page 44, July 2018.

⁶⁷⁸ UN Human Rights Council, *National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21*, sections 62–63, 25 February 2019.

⁶⁷⁹ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 22, 11 March 2020; Federal Negarit Gazette, *Proclamation No. 1113/2019 Organizations of Civil Societies Proclamation*, 12 March 2019.

⁶⁸⁰ HRW, *World Report 2020*, page 206, 2020.

⁶⁸¹ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 2, 11 March 2020.

⁶⁸² AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020.

⁶⁸³ Agence France-Presses, *Ethiopia Adopts New Version of Much-Criticized Terrorism Law*, 3 January 2020.

⁶⁸⁴ ITWeb Africa, *Ethiopia enacts strict social media and fake news law*, 18 February 2020.

⁶⁸⁵ AI, *Country Profile Ethiopia 2019*, 8 April 2020; USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 11, 11 March 2020.

In December 2020, the Ethiopian government passed a draft bill aimed at regulating the print and online media. State broadcaster ENA reported that the new legislation would strengthen freedom of expression and freedom of the press. However, *Reporters without Borders* (RSF) argued that despite Abiy's reforms no significant improvements had been made to the 'draconian media laws'. Media watchdogs believe that news outlets and journalists are self-censoring themselves for fear of being arrested or prosecuted.⁶⁸⁶

The Internet

During this reporting period, it often happened that the government blocked the Internet and mobile network traffic. After the alleged coup attempt in the Amhara region in June 2019, the Internet was shut down in the country and only became operational again two weeks later. Abiy allegedly defended the Internet blockade by saying that the Internet was not a basic necessity such as 'air or water'.⁶⁸⁷ In addition, the Internet was shut down for almost three weeks after the murder of the popular singer Hachalu.⁶⁸⁸ The Ethiopian offices of OMN and Tigray TV were also temporarily shut down.⁶⁸⁹ One confidential source said that the government had no choice but to shut down the Internet in Ethiopia because many of the incitements to violence after the murder came from outside Ethiopia.⁶⁹⁰ After the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray, on 4 November 2020 NetBlocks found that Internet and telephone traffic in Tigray had been cut off.⁶⁹¹ On 14 December 2020, the Ethiopian authorities announced that telecommunication was once again possible in large parts of Tigray. The Internet had not yet been restored. According to the authorities, elements associated with the TPLF had sabotaged the telecommunication and electricity infrastructure when the conflict broke out.⁶⁹² However, Tigray TV, which is affiliated with the TPLF, continued to broadcast during the federal government's military operation: after the capture of Mekelle, broadcasting continued from an unknown location.⁶⁹³

⁶⁸⁶ ENA, *Amended Media Proclamation Crucial to Close Legal Gaps: Broadcasting Authority*, 12 December 2020; RSF, *New freedoms to be consolidated*, **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**, no date (consulted on 23 December 2020).

⁶⁸⁷ HRW, *World Report 2020*, page 207, 2020.

⁶⁸⁸ Netblocks, *Internet cut in Ethiopia amid unrest following killing of singer*, 30 June 2020.

⁶⁸⁹ Confidential source, 6 August 2020.

⁶⁹⁰ Confidential source, 17 September 2020; confidential source, 6 August 2020; Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopian prosecutors charge Jawar with training terror group in Egypt*, 25 September 2020.

⁶⁹¹ Netblocks, *Internet disrupted in Ethiopia as conflict breaks out in Tigray region*, 4 November 2020.

⁶⁹² France24, *Civilians in Ethiopia's Tigray speak of horror as blackout lifts*, 14 December 2020; Fana Broadcasting Corporate, *Ethiopia restores telecom services in some Tigray areas*, 14 December 2020.

⁶⁹³ BBC Monitoring (Tigray Television), *Tigrayan forces explain 'withdrawal' from regional capital*, 3 December 2020; Human Rights Concern-Eritrea, *Eritrean Armed Forces Fighting Inside Tigray*, 24 November 2020.

4 Refugees and displaced persons

4.1 Numbers of refugees and displaced persons

IDPs

After a period during which the numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) decreased, in June 2019 the numbers started increasing again as a result of drought, floods and internal conflicts. In the summer of 2020, IOM counted 1,820,811 individual IDPs distributed over the various regions (Afar: 80,000; Amhara: 18,000; BG: 3000; Oromia: 600,000; SNNPR/Sidama: 94,000; Somali: 896,000; Tigray: 100,000). 68% of the displacements were caused by internal conflicts, 19% by drought and 6% by floods. IOM noted that they had not been able to reach all of Ethiopia due to security reasons and poor access to certain areas.⁶⁹⁴

According to IOM, Ethiopia had the highest number of new internally displaced persons worldwide in 2018, bringing the total to 3,191,000 IDPs. One of the main causes of the new IDPs involved the conflicts along ethnic and geographic lines. The conflict on the border between Oromia and SRS and the conflict between the Gedeo and Guji Oromo ethnic groups in West Guji created large groups of IDPs. By August 2018, there were an estimated 748,499 IDPs due to the Gedeo-West Guji conflict. In the same month, inter-community violence caused 141,410 IDPs to flee the SRS capital of Jijiga. Added to this, there were 90,000 IDPs in Amhara because of the ongoing tensions between the Amhara and Qemant communities. A conflict in Benishangul-Gumuz and the fighting in West Oromia between the OLA/Shene and federal and regional security forces resulted in an estimated 191,995 IDPs.⁶⁹⁵ The Tigray conflict claimed the lives of thousands and reportedly led to almost one million IDPs (approx 900,000) and refugees (around 50,000, most of whom fled to neighbouring Sudan).⁶⁹⁶

Of these more than three million IDPs, according to official figures approximately 1.8 million people had returned to their place of origin by June 2019.⁶⁹⁷ Confidential sources noted that many IDPs had been forcibly returned by the government, sometimes 'at gunpoint', and suspected that the actual numbers of IDPs were higher.⁶⁹⁸ Another confidential source questioned whether the authorities had used force to return IDPs. The communication and the way it was done certainly left something to be desired, according to this source. Contrary to all COVID-19 measures, large numbers of IDPs were loaded into buses in the summer of 2020 and returned to their original places of residence.⁶⁹⁹ In contrast to the above, OCHA wrote in a bulletin that the organisation had concluded from conversations with returned IDPs displaced due to the conflict between Oromia and the SRS that almost

⁶⁹⁴ IOM, *ETHIOPIA NATIONAL DISPLACEMENT REPORT 5, Site Assessment Round 22 & Village Assessment Survey Round 5: June – July 2020*, 10 September 2020; Trouw, *In Ethiopië is de toon gezet voor de strijd (In Ethiopia, the tone has been set for the conflict)*, 17 August 2020; AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020: Figures from the *Internal Displacement Monitor Centre (IDMC)* put the number of IDPs at 1,414,000 in December 2019.

⁶⁹⁵ IOM, *ETHIOPIA NATIONAL DISPLACEMENT REPORT 5, Site Assessment Round 22 & Village Assessment Survey Round 5: June – July 2020*, 10 September 2020; AP News, *Ethiopian rebel group accuses government of airstrikes*, 18 January 2019; USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 31, 11 March 2020; The Economist, *Onslaught in Oromia, A hidden war threatens Ethiopia's transition to democracy*, 19 March 2020.

⁶⁹⁶ Reuters, *The conflict in Ethiopia*, 18 December 2020.

⁶⁹⁷ IOM, *ETHIOPIA NATIONAL DISPLACEMENT REPORT 5, Site Assessment Round 22 & Village Assessment Survey Round 5: June – July 2020*, 10 September 2020.

⁶⁹⁸ Confidential source, 28 July 2020; confidential source, 6 August 2020; USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 2, 11 March 2020.

⁶⁹⁹ Confidential source, 10 November 2020.

all of the returnees believed that the process of return had taken place voluntarily and that the government had adequately informed them over a period of almost one year. The organisation expressed concern about the circumstances in which many of the returned IDPs found themselves (see section 4.2).⁷⁰⁰ A confidential source believes that such reporting was the exception rather than the rule and that most NGOs and UN organisations had doubts about the voluntary and safe return that the government had promised.⁷⁰¹

The *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre* (IDMC) reported in August 2020 that many returned displaced persons found their homes damaged or destroyed or faced other difficulties in getting back their homes and land. The security situation in some areas to which IDPs returned resulted in a significant number of secondary displaced persons. According to IDMC, some IDPs went into hiding or sought refuge in order not to have to return to their original area of residence. Humanitarian organisations cited the lack of the possibility of a safe, voluntary and humane return of IDPs. In addition, these organisations reportedly did not have access to all IDPs, which they identified as a major concern.⁷⁰²

Refugees/asylum seekers

Ethiopia is one of the African countries that hosts the most refugees/asylum seekers. At the end of September 2020, there were 792,030 registered refugees and asylum seekers in the country, according to figures from UNHCR. The vast majority of this group of persons of concern comes from South Sudan, approximately 359,000 people. This is followed by Somalia with 201,000, Eritrea with 179,000, Sudan with 44,000 and Yemen with 2,100 refugees/asylum seekers. More than 900,000 refugees/asylum seekers were counted in August 2018 and 655,105 in July 2019. According to a confidential source, it is difficult to draw conclusions from these figures. In 2018, the deaths were not corrected and the duplicates and other incorrect registrations had not yet been removed, which resulted in a much higher number of refugees. In 2019, the registration was temporarily halted and not all refugees had yet been counted, so the number was lower again. The registration and counting of refugees/asylum seekers has become more efficient partly due to the use of BIMS (see section 2.1.3).⁷⁰³

Most of the current 792,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers are sheltered in 26 refugee camps spread across five regional states. A significant group lives outside the camps, including the 33,000 people registered as urban refugees in the capital Addis Ababa. A confidential source says that cities also have a large contingent of unregistered refugees. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the registration of asylum seekers/refugees has drastically reduced.⁷⁰⁴

In response to the conflict in Tigray, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Italian Filippo Grande, expressed serious concern about the humanitarian situation in the region and the impact it could have on civilians, especially Eritrean refugees. While

⁷⁰⁰ OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin Ethiopia Issue #12*, 12-26 July 2020.

⁷⁰¹ Confidential source, 24 December 2020.

⁷⁰² IDMC (website), *Ethiopia – Overview 2019: Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.* (consulted 11 August 2020); USDOS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 2, 11 March, 2020; AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

⁷⁰³ UNHCR, *Fact Sheet Ethiopia September 2020*, September 2020; UNHCR, *Fact Sheet Ethiopia June 2019*, July 2019; UNHCR, *Fact Sheet Ethiopia October 2019*, October 2019; USDOS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 18, 11 March 2020; Confidential source, 24 December 2020.

⁷⁰⁴ UNHCR, *Fact Sheet Ethiopia September 2020*, September 2020; UNHCR, *Fact Sheet Ethiopia June 2019*, July 2019; UNHCR, *Fact Sheet Ethiopia October 2019*, October 2019; USDOS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 18, 11 March 2020; Confidential source, 24 December 2020: For a map of the 26 camps in the different regions, see <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents>.

there were positive developments, such as the distribution of food packages to almost 25,000 refugees in the Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps, Grande said that UNHCR and other aid organisations still had no access to the Shimelba and Hitsats camps. This has been the case since the start of the conflict in November 2020.⁷⁰⁵

4.2 Reception locations for internally displaced persons

4.2.1 *What is the actual situation in these areas?*

Most displaced persons live in camps, which are often makeshift, and collective centres (such as public buildings), but an unknown number of IDPs and returnees are hosted by host communities. This has led to a lack of information about the situation of these individuals and the ways they deal with this situation, according to the *Humanitarian Response Plan* of February 2019.⁷⁰⁶ There is really only one large camp for IDPs in Ethiopia, according to a confidential source. The Qoloji camp is located in the SRS, 65 kilometres from the capital Jijiga. The Ethiopian government is not in favour of camps for IDPs, as they can quickly 'urbanise' and attract new IDPs and others, the source said.⁷⁰⁷

Both open and confidential sources say that conditions in the locations where IDPs are housed are precarious: there is a lack of basic services, adequate shelter, opportunities for people to live self-sufficiently, access to medical care and education, and in some locations there were safety issues.⁷⁰⁸ There is a video from the EU on YouTube that highlights the lack of sanitation and drinking water in the largest IDP camp in the SRS, which housed some 80,000 people in early 2019. A woman who is housed in an abandoned building complains about the dire situation of her family; they don't have proper beds and must sleep on a cement floor, for example.⁷⁰⁹ The survey conducted by IOM in June and July 2020 in almost 1,300 sites with IDPs⁷¹⁰ found that 236 sites (18%) had no access to food. The SRS accounted for almost half of this number with 110 sites. More than 750 of the sites surveyed had problems with the quality of the drinking water. IDPs in 178 sites (14%) reported having no access to medical care. The relationship between the IDPs and the host communities was good to very good in more than 90% of the sites.⁷¹¹

In some cases, the government urged IDPs to return to their homes even when security was not guaranteed and it was not known where there were shelter and facilities.⁷¹² However, 70% of IDPs chose local integration over return. In many cases, they had no homes to return to because they had been destroyed.⁷¹³ As already mentioned in section 4.1, some sources said that the return of the IDPs was

⁷⁰⁵ UNHCR, *Statement attributable to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi on the situation of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 14 January 2021.

⁷⁰⁶ National Disaster Risk Management Commission, *Humanitarian Country Team and Partners, Humanitarian Response Plan January – December 2019*, page 38, February 2019; Euronews, *Millions displaced in Ethiopia: a forgotten crisis*, 5 February 2019: www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmS0A_YMukU.

⁷⁰⁷ Confidential source, 10 November 2020.

⁷⁰⁸ Confidential source, 26 October 2020; USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 17, 11 March 2020; IDMC, *Ethiopia – Overview 2019, 2019*; AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020; USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 27, 11 March 2020: USDoS stated that in children of IDPs was reportedly being trafficked in western Oromia.

⁷⁰⁹ Euronews, *Millions displaced in Ethiopia: a forgotten crisis*, 5 February 2019: www.youtube.com/channel/UCKasAEU4v-TWrzQMIIyodKw.

⁷¹⁰ According to the data collected by IOM between June and July 2020, the 1.82 million IDPs (329,084 households) counted were spread over 1,297 sites in Ethiopia. To be classified as a site, a location must contain at least 20 IDP households.

⁷¹¹ IOM, *ETHIOPIA NATIONAL DISPLACEMENT REPORT 5, Site Assessment Round 22 & Village Assessment Survey Round 5: June – July 2020*, 10 September 2020.

⁷¹² USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 17, 11 March 2020.

⁷¹³ IOM, *ETHIOPIA NATIONAL DISPLACEMENT REPORT 5, Site Assessment Round 22 & Village Assessment Survey Round 5: June – July 2020*, 10 September 2020.

not always voluntary. Amnesty International wrote about complaints from IDPs that the government used government assistance as a means of returning them to their villages even though the IDPs considered the villages unsafe due to the risk of inter-ethnic violence.⁷¹⁴

The situation of many returned IDPs is also described as precarious by various sources. According to HRW and USDoS, IDPs who had returned often found themselves forced to move on (secondary or tertiary displacement) due to continued lack of safety and humanitarian support in the areas to which they had returned.⁷¹⁵ Of the almost 1,300 sites with returned IDPs visited by IOM in June and July 2020,⁷¹⁶ there were 897 villages (74%) in which IDPs had access to the land they claimed. Nevertheless, for 304 villages (25%), returning IDPs who believed they had a claim to land no longer had access to that land.⁷¹⁷ A confidential source agreed that for many IDPs, the return of their homes and property had not been properly arranged.⁷¹⁸

Ethiopia ratified the Kampala convention in February 2020. The convention is the first and only convention in the world to serve as a binding legal instrument for the protection of IDPs who are often at higher risk of being victims of sexual and other types of violence during their displacement and have difficulty accessing basic services.⁷¹⁹ A confidential source noted that the basic principle should be that IDPs are treated as ordinary citizens, but that was not the case in Ethiopia. For example, the source foresaw problems if elections are held in 2021. Voting rights for IDPs is one of the unresolved issues, the source said.⁷²⁰ Another confidential source argues that IDPs do have the right to vote but not the ability, as they cannot return to the kebele/woreda where they are registered.⁷²¹ In some areas of Ethiopia, the increasing incidence of natural and man-made disasters, such as drought, floods and locust plagues, only added to the complexity of the crisis. According to OCHA, it was and remains a major challenge to come up with long-term solutions.⁷²²

A convoy of medicines and relief supplies from the *International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC) and the *Ethiopian Red Cross Society* (ERCS) had reached Mekelle, according to a statement by the ICRC. The convoy is the first convoy to reach Mekelle after the conflict in Tigray broke out on 4 November. The ICRC reported that the Ethiopian authorities had also delivered medical supplies.⁷²³ Both Ethiopians and Eritrean refugees were severely short of food and medicine because of the conflict.⁷²⁴ OCHA wrote on 10 December that IDP food rations had run out.⁷²⁵ According to the UN, around one million people are said to have been displaced by the conflict.⁷²⁶ A confidential source said that international aid organisations require permission from the Ministry of Peace (MoP) and the regional government before

⁷¹⁴ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020.

⁷¹⁵ HRW, *World Report 2020*, page 208, 2020; USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 17, 11 March 2020.

⁷¹⁶ According to IOM, there were around 1.4 million returned IDPs in Ethiopia at that time.

⁷¹⁷ IOM, *ETHIOPIA NATIONAL DISPLACEMENT REPORT 5, Site Assessment Round 22 & Village Assessment Survey Round 5: June – July 2020*, 10 September 2020.

⁷¹⁸ Confidential source, 10 November 2020.

⁷¹⁹ UNHCR, *UNHCR welcomes Ethiopia's ratification of Kampala Convention*, 14 February 2020.

⁷²⁰ Confidential source, 10 November 2020.

⁷²¹ Confidential source, 29 January 2021.

⁷²² OCHA, *HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLAN ETHIOPIA 2020*, page 7, January 2020.

⁷²³ BBC Monitoring (ENA), *Ethiopia orders Tigray state workers to return to work*, 13 December 2020.

⁷²⁴ BBC Monitoring (Fana Broadcasting Company), *Ethiopia sends humanitarian aid to Tigray region*, 11 December 2020.

⁷²⁵ OCHA, *Daily Noon Briefing Highlights: Ethiopia*, 10 December 2020.

⁷²⁶ Reuters, *Ethiopia shifts focus from war to economy, U.N. worries about Tigray*, 9 December 2020.

they can travel to Tigray. This federal access was previously not required, so it is hampering the delivery of humanitarian aid to the region.⁷²⁷

4.3 Legal provisions and policy related to Eritrean refugees/asylum seekers

The previous country of origin information report of July 2018 stated:

'Ethiopia is a member of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, the associated 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU (*Organisation of African Unity*) Convention. The *Refugee Proclamation* (2004) has been in force in Ethiopia since 2004. In May 2018, the Ethiopian Council of Ministers passed a revised Aliens Act that is expected to be approved by Parliament at the end of 2018 [this occurred de facto in early 2019]. This new law should enable Ethiopia to implement its pledges and commit to its agreements within the *Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework* (CRRF). (...)

In November 2017, the Ethiopian government launched the CRRF. This facilitates the implementation of the nine pledges⁷²⁸ to which Ethiopia committed itself at the Refugee Summit in New York in September 2016. The Ethiopian refugee organisation ARRA has drawn up a roadmap to implement the pledges. The 2004 amendment to the *Refugee Proclamation* (...) will enable refugees to become more independent, enjoy more protection and have greater access to local services.⁷²⁹

Refugee Proclamation No. 1110/2019, which was adopted on 17 January 2019 and entered into force on 27 February of the same year, provides guidelines for determining the refugee status of persons applying for asylum in Ethiopia.⁷³⁰ USDoS wrote that the law was intended to significantly improve the rights of refugees in the country. The *Refugee Proclamation* gives refugees the right to work and to primary education and the possibility to obtain a driving licence and register births, marriages and deaths. USDoS wrote in March 2020 that there were uncertainties because it was not described how, for example, the right to work would function in practice and who would ultimately qualify for it.⁷³¹ In April 2020, ARRA developed directives for, among other things, procedures for obtaining a work permit or residence permit (see section 4.3.7).⁷³² Despite the directives, however, there are still some ambiguities. The new law requires clear guidelines to be published to inform newcomers, asylum seekers and humanitarian organisations, including UNHCR, about the possibility of registration and the possibility for asylum seekers to appeal if their asylum application is rejected. These guidelines had not yet been published, according to HRW.⁷³³ According to a confidential source, the council through which an asylum seeker could appeal his or her asylum decision was not yet functional. This council, the *Appeal Hearing Council*, was ordained in the *Refugee Proclamation*⁷³⁴

⁷²⁷ Confidential source, 16 December 2020

⁷²⁸ The pledges to refugees are: (1) increasing self-reliance; (2) promoting peaceful coexistence of host communities; (3) including refugees in development plans; (4) expanding the Out of Camp Policy; (5) granting work permits; (6) providing education for refugee children; (7) clearing ten thousand hectares of fertile land for 20,000 refugees, who will thereby be able to provide for themselves; (8) realising the local integration of refugees who have lived in Ethiopia for more than 20 years and that 100,000 people will be given jobs in new industrial parks, of which 30% will be reserved for refugees; (9) issuing birth certificates to refugee children born in Ethiopia.

⁷²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia 2018*, page 84, July 2018.

⁷³⁰ Federal Negarit Gazette, *Proclamation No. 1110/2019 Refugees Proclamation*, 27 February 2019.

⁷³¹ USDoS, *Ethiopia 2019 Human Rights Report*, page 18, 11 March 2020.

⁷³² UNHCR, Fact Sheet Ethiopia April 2020, April 2020; Confidential source, 24 December 2020.

⁷³³ HRW, *Ethiopia: Unaccompanied Eritrean Children at Risk*, 21 April 2020.

⁷³⁴ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

The Ethiopian government announced that it would pursue a different policy towards persons of Eritrean nationality from January 2020. The biggest change was that Eritreans are no longer immediately granted refugee status on prima facie grounds. Instead, Eritrean asylum seekers must go through an individual procedure. However, ARRA has not yet provided clarification about such a process, although UNHCR has repeatedly requested this. UNHCR says that the new procedures are not clear, not sufficiently consistent and most likely will not meet international standards.⁷³⁵ In April 2020, the *Swiss Peace Foundation* stated that the protection and security of Eritrean refugees had deteriorated since the peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia.⁷³⁶

4.3.1 *Access to asylum procedure in Ethiopia and recent restrictions introduced by Ethiopia*

As part of the implementation process, Ethiopia's asylum policy provides refugee status based on group recognition (prima facie) to asylum seekers coming from the following countries or regions: South Sudan; the Blue Nile and South Kordofan areas of Sudan; South-Central Somalia and Yemen (but only people from this country who arrived in Ethiopia on or after 1 January 2015).⁷³⁷ ARRA and other relevant local authorities conduct a 'nationality screening' to determine whether an asylum seeker is from one of these countries or regions. Asylum seekers who do not come from these countries or regions undergo an *individual refugee status determination* procedure. These individual procedures are currently conducted by UNHCR, although ARRA is mandated to undertake these procedures under the *Refugee Proclamation*. It should be noted here that at the time of writing this report the Ethiopian government had not yet formalised its new asylum policy, which is based on group recognition or takes place by means of an individual process.⁷³⁸

As of March 2019, approx 170,000 Eritrean refugees were living in Ethiopia, of which approx 70,000 lived outside the 26 camps. 18,000 Eritrean refugees were living in urban areas.⁷³⁹ At the time, approx 40 Eritrean asylum seekers were arriving in Afar and 250 in Tigray every day.⁷⁴⁰ Throughout 2019, the Ethiopian authorities registered more than 70,000 new asylum seekers from Eritrea. This number placed a significant burden on the registration and arrival conditions in various camps in the regions. The number also had a negative impact on the existing shortage of shelter in the camps.⁷⁴¹

As mentioned earlier, the *National Refugee Proclamation* was adopted in January 2019. This legislation was intended to ensure that refugees would be more independent and better protected. Furthermore, the law would increase access to local facilities for refugees. The *Swiss Peace Foundation* listed the new law as one of

⁷³⁵ Confidential source, 26 October 2020; VOA News, *Ethiopia Ends Blanket Protection for Eritrean Refugees*, 22 April 2020; HRW, *Ethiopia: Unaccompanied Eritrean Children at Risk*, 21 April 2020.

⁷³⁶ Swiss Peace Foundation, *Peace for whom? The situation of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia*, 1 April 2020.

⁷³⁷ According to a confidential source, ARRA says that the law only recognises individual *Refugee Status Determination* (RSD) : Confidential source, 24 December 2020.

⁷³⁸ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁷³⁹ Swiss Peace Foundation, *Peace for whom? The situation of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia*, 1 April 2020: The border between Eritrea and Ethiopia officially reopened in September 2018. Many people used those two months to cross the border, including large numbers of women and children. After two months, however, the border was closed again on the Eritrean side. As a result, it was again mainly Eritrean young men crossing the border to flee conscription in Eritrea. Now there are fewer places where Eritrean asylum seekers can register than before, according to the Swiss Peace Foundation.

⁷⁴⁰ UNHCR, *Eritrean refugees 2020/2021 Country Operations Planning, Refugee Coordination Group Meeting*, 25 March 2019.

⁷⁴¹ UNHCR, *Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia: Tigray & Afar Regions situational update*, 31 December 2019: With the increase of 70,000 refugees, the number of Eritrean refugees has not grown proportionally compared to March 2018, when 170,000 Eritrean refugees were recorded. In September 2020, UNHCR counted 179,000 Eritrean refugees, which means that not all refugees have remained in Ethiopia.

the most progressive in Africa.⁷⁴² The downside of the new law is that laws and regulations that existed to protect Eritrean refugees are subject to amendments. These amendments are probably the result of the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. HRW wrote in April 2020 that the peace agreement between the two countries had failed to improve the human rights situation in Eritrea.⁷⁴³

As mentioned above, Eritreans are no longer recognised as *prima facie* refugees and must go through an individual procedure to find out which status they will be granted. Not every Eritrean asylum seeker is admitted to the programme (see section 4.3.2). Furthermore, the new policy of the Ethiopian government is aimed at getting Eritrean refugees into the *Out of Camp Policy* (OCP) process more quickly. The OCP allows Eritreans to live outside the refugee camps. They must have the financial means to do this. However, as soon as a refugee lives outside a camp, he or she is no longer entitled to refugee assistance.⁷⁴⁴

In April 2020, the government also announced a plan to close the Hitsats refugee camp, which mainly houses Eritrean refugees, and relocate the camp's residents to the Adi Harush and Mai Aini camps in Tigray. However, UNHCR warned of the pre-existing overcrowding and lack of facilities in these camps. The displacement of the refugees could trigger an outbreak of COVID-19 in the two camps, the UN organisation said.⁷⁴⁵ ARRA has given the Hitsats refugees the opportunity to use the OCP. An Eritrean refugee in Hitsats said in an interview with *The New Humanitarian* that most of the people in Hitsats, some 28 miles from the nearest city, have no money or connections to survive outside the camp.⁷⁴⁶ As far as is known, the Ethiopian government has not yet closed the Hitsats camp (see also 4.1).

4.3.2

Certain restrictions for specific groups from Eritrea

As noted earlier, the Ethiopian government announced in early 2020 that it wanted to change its asylum policy. For years, this policy had granted refugee status to Eritrean asylum seekers as a group on *prima facie* grounds. With the announced changes, the Ethiopian government was excluding certain categories of Eritrean newcomers from registering as asylum seekers, including unaccompanied and separated children, single women, individuals who came to Ethiopia for family reunification, individuals with medical conditions and those intending to travel further. The government has no new criteria for registration, no procedures to appeal against a negative judgement and no alternative legal routes for newcomers. The reasons for the changes have not been officially disclosed to its partners, such as UNHCR. At the time of writing this report, the changes had not yet been officially put in writing but are reportedly already being applied in practice.⁷⁴⁷

Throughout 2019, 15% of all new asylum seekers in Tigray were UASCs. Due to the increase in this group, the number that could receive basic services was exceeded, according to UNHCR.⁷⁴⁸ HRW wrote in April 2020 that according to UNHCR figures, as of December 2019 27% of Eritrean children who arrived in the refugee camps in

⁷⁴² Swiss Peace Foundation, *Peace for whom? The situation of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia*, 1 April 2020.

⁷⁴³ HRW, *Ethiopia: Unaccompanied Eritrean Children at Risk*, 21 April 2020.

⁷⁴⁴ Swiss Peace Foundation, *Peace for whom? The situation of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia*, 1 April 2020; Confidential source, 24 December 2020: If a refugee chooses OCP, he or she gives up his or her right to refugee assistance, excluding legal assistance. However, there are refugees living outside the camp that come to get help every month.

⁷⁴⁵ Swiss Peace Foundation, *Peace for whom? The situation of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia*, 1 April 2020; HRW, *Ethiopia: Unaccompanied Eritrean Children at Risk*, 21 April 2020;

⁷⁴⁶ The New Humanitarian, *Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia resist camp closure amid COVID-19 fears*, 17 August 2020; VOA News, *Ethiopia Ends Blanket Protection for Eritrean Refugees*, 22 April 2020.

⁷⁴⁷ HRW, *Ethiopia: Unaccompanied Eritrean Children at Risk*, 21 April 2020; VOA News, *Ethiopia Ends Blanket Protection for Eritrean Refugees*, 22 April 2020; confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁷⁴⁸ UNHCR, *Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia: Tigray & Afar regions Situational Update*, 31 December 2019.

Tigray were unaccompanied. Every day, around thirty unaccompanied and separated children arrived in Tigray from Eritrea. According to HRW, the Ethiopian authorities have not been registering these children since the end of January 2020. Without registration, these children are on their own and have no right to protection or housing in a refugee camp. Ethiopia's refusal to register certain categories, especially UASCs, could put individuals from these categories in situations of concern, such as at risk from smuggling and exploitation, which is in violation of international refugee law.⁷⁴⁹ A confidential source says that, in practice, the UASCs are included in the camps and that they share the food rations there.⁷⁵⁰

4.3.3 *Risk of deportation if refugee status is not obtained or if the asylum seeker is not registered*

A confidential source says that he believes that individuals who did not go through the procedure will nevertheless be granted access to Ethiopian territory. He does not have information to indicate that people are being returned, but he does not rule out that this will happen.⁷⁵¹ ARRA denies that Eritreans are being returned.⁷⁵²

4.3.4 *Access of Eritrean minors to asylum procedure*

The Ethiopian government's decision to no longer grant UASCs the right to asylum is seen as problematic by a confidential source. It means that the children lack protection against the greater risks that a minor faces. The source notes that since ARRA started registering new asylum seekers again in July 2020, a small number of UASCs have been accepted and registered as refugees. However, it is still unclear what the new criteria and standards are. The standards and criteria used by ARRA are also not always consistent, according to the source (see section 4.3.2).⁷⁵³

4.3.5 *Registration by the ARRA of (Eritrean) asylum seekers*

To apply for asylum and obtain official refugee status, an (Eritrean) asylum seeker must report to one of the ARRA reception centres as soon as he/she has crossed the border, whereby UNHCR is not present.⁷⁵⁴ In accordance with the 2019 Refugee Act, an asylum application must be made within thirty days of arrival in Ethiopia, regardless of where the asylum seeker entered the country and regardless of whether the person has crossed the border legally or illegally.⁷⁵⁵ If the period of thirty days is exceeded, the person in question can still apply for asylum, provided good reasons are given.⁷⁵⁶

When an asylum seeker has reported to a reception centre, the first step is to use biometric data to find out whether the asylum seeker has previously applied for asylum and is already registered in Ethiopia. If a person is already registered, a process is started to find out why that person has registered multiple times. If a person is not yet registered, or if it appears that he or she had valid reasons for registering for a second time, the nationality screening is carried out. One reason for carrying out a nationality screening a second time is if an asylum seeker comes with new information – for example, after the first registration he says is Sudanese, while he originally said that he came from South Sudan.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁴⁹ HRW, *Ethiopia: Unaccompanied Eritrean Children at Risk*, 21 April 2020; VOA News, *Ethiopia Ends Blanket Protection for Eritrean Refugees*, 22 April 2020.

⁷⁵⁰ Confidential source, 24 December 2020.

⁷⁵¹ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁷⁵² Confidential source, 24 December 2020.

⁷⁵³ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁷⁵⁴ HRW, *Ethiopia: Unaccompanied Eritrean Children at Risk*, 21 April 2020; confidential source, 24 December 2020.

⁷⁵⁵ Federal Negarit Gazette, *Proclamation No. 1110/2019 Refugees Proclamation*, article 15, 27 February 2019.

⁷⁵⁶ Confidential source, 10 November 2020.

⁷⁵⁷ Confidential source, 10 November 2020; **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (consulted on 5 November 2020).

ARRA performs the nationality screening, among other things, using the documents an asylum seeker has with him and/or by means of a linguistic survey in which the asylum seeker's accent is examined. According to a confidential source, there are still a number of areas in which ARRA's investigative capabilities could be improved.⁷⁵⁸ Registration in the biometric system only takes place after the nationality screening and after the nationality of the asylum seeker has been determined. In this way, the legal status of the asylum seeker is also determined in accordance with the existing procedures. When refugee status is granted, this is recorded in the biometric system. After this, the refugee is issued one or more documents, including proof of registration and identity card.⁷⁵⁹

In late 2019, UNHCR indicated that at that time registration capacity was limited and that there were backlogs and delays in issuing individual identity cards to asylum seekers. The UN organisation indicated that UASCs often had to wait between three to five weeks in the arrival centres before receiving adequate care in the camps. However, this was before the Ethiopian government's announcement that it wanted to change its asylum policy towards Eritrean asylum seekers.⁷⁶⁰

4.3.6 *Out of Camp Policy*

The *Out of Camp Policy* (OCP) allows a registered Eritrean refugee to request ARRA to provide him or her with an OCP certificate that allows the refugee to formally live outside the camps. Refugees who make this request must be able to demonstrate that they can meet their own basic needs. The number of people in Ethiopia using OCP rose in 2019 from 19,633 to 35,340 refugees, according to UNHCR.⁷⁶¹ Most of the refugees living outside the camps reside in Addis Ababa, Afar and Tigray.⁷⁶²

Article 28.1 of the 2019 *Refugee Proclamation* gives every refugee, irrespective of his or her nationality, the right of free choice of residence. However, Article 28.2 of the same law states that ARRA can designate places or areas where refugees and asylum seekers can live.⁷⁶³ Regardless of the new law, very few registered refugees from Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan were able to use OCP in 2019 or very few refugees from these countries applied to ARRA for an OCP certificate.⁷⁶⁴ Although the Refugee Act that was adopted in 2019 makes OCP possible for people with a nationality other than Eritrean, this intention has not yet been formalised, according to a confidential source.⁷⁶⁵ To implement the facilities envisaged by the new Refugee Act with regard to OCP, in December 2019 ARRA adopted a *Directive to Determine Conditions for Movement and Residence of Refugees Outside of Camps* to determine the conditions for refugees to be allowed to move or settle outside camps. According to the aforementioned source, these guidelines have not yet been fully implemented.⁷⁶⁶

Due to the lack of adequate shelter in the camps, refugees are obliged to reside in settlements in host communities or in makeshift shelters outside the refugee camps. Refugees are generally well received by host communities, but an increase in the

⁷⁵⁸ Confidential source, 10 November 2020; **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (consulted on 5 November 2020).

⁷⁵⁹ Confidential source, 26 October 2020; UNHCR: **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (geraadpleegd op 5 November 2020); confidential source, 24 December 2020: Although UNCHR is responsible for a large part of the registration activities, ARRA is the body that issues the refugee card.

⁷⁶⁰ UNHCR, *Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia: Tigray & Afar Regions situational update*, 31 December 2019.

⁷⁶¹ This count was made on 2 December 2019.

⁷⁶² UNHCR, *Ethiopia Summary Pledge Progress Report 2019*, pages 10-11, July 2020.

⁷⁶³ Federal Negarit Gazette, *Proclamation No. 1110/2019 Refugees Proclamation*, article 15, 27 February 2019.

⁷⁶⁴ UNHCR, *Ethiopia Summary Pledge Progress Report 2019*, page 14, July 2020.

⁷⁶⁵ Confidential source, 10 November 2020.

⁷⁶⁶ Confidential source, 10 November 2020.

number of refugees outside the camps is also driving up rents, which can complicate the relationship between refugees and the host communities.⁷⁶⁷

4.3.7 *Access to work, amenities and freedom of movement*

When they have official refugee status, (Eritrean) refugees are entitled to services and protection.⁷⁶⁸ The right to work is ordained in Article 26 of the 2019 *Refugee Proclamation*. At the same time as the OCP, ARRA issued a *Directive to Determine the Procedure for Refugees Right to Work*.⁷⁶⁹ ARRA recently issued 2,500 residence permits, which also serve as work permits, to refugees in various parts of the country, according to a confidential source.⁷⁷⁰ These types of permits are only issued to refugees who work in positions that cannot be filled by Ethiopians or work in donor-funded projects. Furthermore, the employer applying for a permit must have a letter of recommendation from ARRA. In July 2020, UNHCR wrote that many refugees were economically active at the time. Of the 277,087 refugees aged 18 and older who were included in a survey, 132,004 (48%) were in some form of paid employment.⁷⁷¹

4.3.8 *Conditions for the exit of recognised refugees*

In 2019, 15,000 to 20,000 refugees were registered with UNHCR for resettlement in a third country. With the reduced resettlement quota, only 1,900 refugees received help to move to a country of resettlement; these included 800 Eritreans. UNHCR was of the opinion that there should be more calls for resettlement countries in order to increase the quota.⁷⁷²

If a recognised refugee wishes to leave Ethiopia on his or her own account or for resettlement, he or she must apply for an exit visa from the *Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency* (INVEA). For the issue of *UN Convention Travel Documents* (UNCTD), a letter from UNHCR to ARRA is required. ARRA then applies for an exit visa from INVEA. For an *Emergency Travel Document*, the refugee should apply for an exit visa.⁷⁷³

A confidential source adds that only registered asylum seekers/refugees are given the green light for an exit visa and that it is not possible to legally leave the country without an exit visa.⁷⁷⁴

4.3.9 *Exit fine after illegal stay*

An exit fine must be paid if a person stays illegally in Ethiopia and wants to leave the country after the illegal stay. According to a confidential source, this is three US dollars per day and a maximum of 540 dollars. The source adds that refugees told some embassies in Addis Ababa that they had to pay thousands of dollars to obtain an exit visa.⁷⁷⁵

4.4 **Distinction in asylum law by nationality**

⁷⁶⁷ UNHCR, *Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia: Tigray & Afar Regions situational update*, 31 December 2019.

⁷⁶⁸ HRW, *Ethiopia: Unaccompanied Eritrean Children at Risk*, 21 April 2020.

⁷⁶⁹ UNHCR, *Ethiopia Summary Pledge Progress Report 2019*, page 14, July 2020.

⁷⁷⁰ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁷⁷¹ UNHCR, *Ethiopia Summary Pledge Progress Report 2019*, page 36, July 2020; confidential source, 24 December 2020.

⁷⁷² UNHCR, *Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia: Tigray & Afar Regions Situational Update*, 31 December 2019.

⁷⁷³ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁷⁷⁴ Confidential source, 29 January 2021: The conflict in Tigray is complicating the situation, according to the source, because the Ethiopian authorities are afraid that TPLF members will purchase exit visas to leave the country.

⁷⁷⁵ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

Article 4 of the *Refugee Proclamation No. 1110/2019* stipulates that the law will be applied without distinction as to race, religion, nationality, membership of a specific social group, political affiliation or other similar reasons.⁷⁷⁶

The ultimate asylum policy in Ethiopia does in fact make a distinction between different nationalities. For example, asylum seekers from certain countries are recognised as prima facie refugees (see section 4.3.1). In addition, the Ethiopian government announced in early 2020 that it would tighten its policy with regard to Eritrean asylum seekers (see section 4.3.2).

⁷⁷⁶ Federal Negarit Gazette of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *Refugee Proclamation*, Article 4, 27 February 2019.

5 Ethiopians returning to Ethiopia

5.1 Problems for migrants in the case of (forced) return

Millions of Ethiopian migrants live abroad, especially in Europe and the United States. Many members of the Ethiopian diaspora regularly return to Ethiopia and contribute to the economy, partly through the money they transfer from abroad to their families in Ethiopia. Large numbers of Ethiopians seek their fortunes in other countries in the hope of finding a better economic situation there. The Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, are a favourite destination due to the high demand for cheap labour in these countries. Most Ethiopian migrants in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states do not have valid documents. The men mostly work in construction and the women in domestic service. In recent years, hundreds of thousands of illegal Ethiopians have been deported from Saudi Arabia, less than 30,000 of whom have left voluntarily, according to the Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁷⁷⁷

Article 32 of the Ethiopian Constitution stipulates that every Ethiopian citizen has the right to return to the country.⁷⁷⁸ Many of the Ethiopians deported from Saudi Arabia had no possessions, money, food or shelter on their return and reported poor conditions and treatment in the Gulf state, including torture, mistreatment and rape. IOM provides the returned migrants with food, temporary shelter, possibilities for internal transit, financial aid and other forms of assistance such as clothing and bedding. The organisation is supported by the Ethiopian government.⁷⁷⁹

However, NGOs such as HRW and Amnesty International report that neither the government nor the international community is providing adequate assistance to these migrants who have often suffered physical and psychological trauma in countries such as Yemen and Saudi Arabia due to the poor conditions and ill treatment in these countries.⁷⁸⁰ Despite a range of measures by the Ethiopian authorities to prevent illegal migration, such as high penalties for human trafficking, as well as the war that is still raging in Yemen, there are still Ethiopians trying to make the crossing to the Arabian peninsula. According to Australian State Department sources, in some cases the money that repatriated Ethiopians had received for their reintegration was used for a renewed migration attempt.⁷⁸¹

There is no information to show that migrants faced problems from the authorities on their arrival in Ethiopia (see also sections 3.3.5 and 5.2). A confidential source spoke about the problems that Ethiopians can face when they are unable to send money to their families from abroad and then (forcibly) return to Ethiopia. In such cases, the migrant is sometimes not received with open arms and may experience problems with his family, the source said. In addition, women who have worked in

⁷⁷⁷ The Guardian, *Ethiopians face beatings and bullets as Saudi 'deportation machine' cranks up*, 16 August 2019; DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, page 47, 12 August 2020: DFAT reports that 300,000 Ethiopians have been deported from Saudi Arabia.

⁷⁷⁸ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, article 32, 21 August 1995.

⁷⁷⁹ Confidential source, 14 October 2020; The Guardian, *Ethiopians face beatings and bullets as Saudi 'deportation machine' cranks up*, 16 August 2019.

⁷⁸⁰ HRW, *World Report 2020*, page 209, 2020; The Guardian, *Ethiopians face beatings and bullets as Saudi 'deportation machine' cranks up*, 16 August 2019; AI, *SAUDI ARABIA: "THIS IS WORSE THAN COVID-19": ETHIOPIANS ABANDONED AND ABUSED IN SAUDI PRISONS*, October 2020.

⁷⁸¹ DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, pages 47-48, 12 August 2020

Saudi Arabia or any other Gulf state, regardless of the actual work they were doing, are reportedly often labelled as prostitutes on their return to Ethiopia.⁷⁸²

5.2 Problems after the return of other migrants, such as people identified abroad during demonstrations against the regime

As stated earlier in this country of origin information report, one of the first steps taken by newly appointed Prime Minister Abiy was to invite dissident journalists and activists and members of the opposition in exile to return to Ethiopia (see also section 1.1). The Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs writes in its August 2020 report that Ethiopian asylum seekers reportedly terminated their asylum process and returned to Ethiopia after Abiy promised them leniency. Some of the Ethiopians who returned are now active in the political spectrum or social arena.⁷⁸³ Former political dissidents now head the EHRC and the Ethiopian NEBE Electoral Council.⁷⁸⁴

The Australian Ministry assumes that asylum seekers, people critical of the government and members of the opposition who have returned to Ethiopia run a low risk of problems such as monitoring, abuse, detention and discrimination on the part of the current government after their return.⁷⁸⁵ Several confidential sources agree that during the EPRDF/TPLF administration, individuals such as asylum seekers, political dissidents and activists were more likely to face negative treatment by the authorities upon their return than by the current administration.⁷⁸⁶ One confidential source noted that those returning from Egypt in particular were of interest to the then government as Egypt was reportedly training opposition members.⁷⁸⁷

The positive trend described above has come to an end, according to a number of sources. The current government has reverted to the old methods of oppression and repression, the sources say. People who are politically active abroad say that they are not travelling to Ethiopia at the moment because of their fear of reprisals.⁷⁸⁸ Some confidential sources do add, however, that it is impossible for the Ethiopian government to monitor all activities abroad. Ethiopians who are very active abroad and who are very verbal on social media and try to mobilise people and succeed in doing so are likely to encounter problems when they return. However, no concrete cases had been identified at the time of writing this report (see also sections 3.3: 3.3.4 to 3.3.8).⁷⁸⁹

5.3 Problems for former asylum seekers after their return

The Ethiopian authorities are pursuing a policy of encouraging Ethiopian refugees to return. A *Memorandum of Understanding* between ARRA and UNHCR was signed on 29 May 2019 for the voluntary repatriation of Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers. Several hundred Ethiopian refugees have since returned, according to a confidential source. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the repatriation has been temporarily halted. UNHCR has established standards in order to restart voluntary

⁷⁸² Confidential source, 14 September 2020; confidential source, 10 November 2020.

⁷⁸³ DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, page 47, 12 August 2020.

⁷⁸⁴ The Reporter, *Chairwoman steps up*, 24 November 2018; Africa News, *Ethiopia appoints top rights advocate as head of human rights body*, 2 July 2019.

⁷⁸⁵ DFAT, *Country Information Report ETHIOPIA*, page 47, 12 August 2020.

⁷⁸⁶ Confidential source, 15 September 2020; confidential source, 21 October 2020.

⁷⁸⁷ Confidential source, 14 October 2020.

⁷⁸⁸ Confidential source, 8 October 2020; confidential source, 30 September 2020.

⁷⁸⁹ Confidential source, 14 October 2020; confidential source, 26 October 2020; confidential source, 9 November 2020.

repatriation, both generic standards and standards related to COVID-19.⁷⁹⁰ As mentioned above, no concrete cases are known in which asylum seekers/refugees have encountered problems with the authorities on their return.

5.4 Negative interest in specific groups on their return

According to a confidential source, as far as is known the Ethiopian authorities have treated every Ethiopian who has returned equally and have provided them with letters of recommendation so that the returned migrants/asylum seekers can use the various services that are also available to their Ethiopian fellow citizens.⁷⁹¹ Although some confidential sources say that a distinction is currently being made, no concrete information was found at the time of writing this report to prove the contrary (see also section 3.3.5).

5.5 Risks for persons who have been involved in (marginal) opposition activities abroad

Sections 3.3.4 to 3.3.7 describe the risks people can experience if they organise (marginal) opposition activities abroad. Many sources say that it is more about the profile of the person who engages in opposition activities than the moment the person joined an opposition party.

5.6 Risks for persons affiliated to previously prohibited groups such as the OLF

Sections 3.2.4, 3.3.4 and 3.3.9 discuss the position of people who belonged to previously prohibited groups such as the OLF and the possible risks they run in the event of their return to Ethiopia.

5.7 Risks of voluntary return

As mentioned earlier, Article 32 of the Ethiopian Constitution stipulates that every Ethiopian has the right to return to Ethiopia. It does not distinguish between persons who have left the country legally or illegally. As far as is known, the policy of the Ethiopian authorities also makes no distinction in this regard. For example, in late October 2020 government officials welcomed more than 400 migrants at Bole International Airport after they had been repatriated from Lebanon and Saudi Arabia (see also section 5.1).⁷⁹²

5.8 Procedures prior to voluntary return to Ethiopia

The first step prior to a voluntary return is that the country in which the Ethiopian applied for asylum and UNHCR verify the voluntary nature of the return. This information is then shared with the relevant Ethiopian embassies and consulates, which perform identity checks on behalf of ARRA and issue Laissez-Passers accordingly. The countries in which asylum has been sought then organise trips to

⁷⁹⁰ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁷⁹¹ Confidential source, 26 October 2020.

⁷⁹² Fana Broadcasting Company, *Ethiopia repatriated 437 of its citizens from Saudi Arabia and Lebanon today*, 22 October 2020.

places as close as possible to the place of origin. This is done in consultation with the UNHCR representation in Ethiopia. UNHCR Ethiopia shares travel information with ARRA in order to make the necessary preparations for the reception of returnees.⁷⁹³

UNHCR offers a reintegration package in the form of financial assistance for basic needs. This is paid in three instalments: for the first instalment, around 10% is paid on arrival; the second instalment, approximately 40%, is paid one week after arrival; the third instalment, approximately 50%, is paid 3 months after arrival. UNHCR opens bank accounts for the heads of families, who then receive the money. Additional money is also available for people with special needs and for school-aged children. Returnees are received on their arrival by UNHCR and ARRA. On arrival, the bank accounts are activated, the first instalment of the money is paid out and the returnees are taken to their destination. ARRA provides letters of recommendation that enable the returnees to access various services enjoyed by every other Ethiopian citizen. UNHCR provides for overnight stays, possibly in cooperation with IOM, if returnees cannot be transferred to their destination on the same day.⁷⁹⁴

The above outlines the situation regarding the return of people who applied for asylum abroad. When it involves migrants, IOM plays a greater role in matters such as shelter, transport and financial support. In October 2020, IOM was expecting more than half a million Ethiopian migrants to return from the Gulf states due to the corona crisis. According to the UN organisation, this would pose a huge challenge for Ethiopia.⁷⁹⁵

5.9 Return of Eritreans with refugee status obtained in Ethiopia

Eritreans with refugee status in Ethiopia may return to Ethiopia after a stay in a third country. Before departure, Eritrean asylum seekers must submit a request to this effect to ARRA. ARRA assesses each individual request for re-admission.⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹³ Confidential source, 26 October 2020

⁷⁹⁴ Confidential source, 26 October 2020; UNHCR, *First major group of Ethiopian refugees return home from Kenya*, 19 February 2020.

⁷⁹⁵ IOM, *Government of Ethiopia Provide Cash Grants to Thousands of Migrants Returning Due to COVID-19*, 9 October 2020; IOM, IOM, *European Union and the Government of Ethiopia Strengthen Partnership to Support Migrants during COVID-19*, 13 October 2020.

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All Africa	ITWeb Africa
Amhara Association of America	Netblocks
AI	New Business Ethiopia NOS
Anadolu Agency	NRC
A New Business Ethiopia	NRC Next
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6.2 List of abbreviations

AAA	- Amhara Association of America
ACLEDD	- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
ADP	- Amhara Democratic Party
AEDP	- All Ethiopian Democratic Party
AEUP	- All Ethiopian Unity Party
AFP	- Agence France Presse
AI	- Amnesty International

ALF	- Afar Liberation Front
AMISOM	- African Union Mission in Somalia
ANC	- Agaw National Congress
ANDM	- Amhara National Democratic Movement
ANDP	- Afar National Democratic Party
APLP	- Afar People's Liberation Party
ARDUF	- Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front
ARRA	- Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs
ATP	- Anti-Terrorism Proclamation
BPLM	- Benishangul Gumuz People's Liberation Movement
BDP	- Benishangul-Gumuz Democratic Party
BIMS	- Biometric Identity Management System
CRRF	- Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DFAT	- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australian Government)
DIS	- Danish Immigration Service
DNIC	- Danish National ID Centre
DRC	- Danish Refugee Council
DW	- Deutsche Welle
EDP	- Ethiopian Democratic Party
EDF	- Eritrean Defence Forces
EEBC	- Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission
EHRC	- Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
ENA	- Ethiopian News Agency
EPP	- Ethiopian Prosperity Party (see PP)
EPRDF	- Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESDP	- Ethiopian Socialist Democratic Party
ETV	- Ethiopian Television
E-ZEMA/ECPSJ	- Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice
ICG	- International Crisis Group
IDMC	- Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	- Internally displaced person
IRC	- International Rescue Committee
GERD	- Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
GMN	- Gamo Media Network
GPDM	- Gambela People's Democratic Movement
GPLM	- Gambela People's Liberation Movement
GRM	- Gambela Regional Movement
HNL	- Harari National League
HRCO	- Ethiopian Human Rights Council
HRLHA	- Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa
HRW	- Human Rights Watch
INVEA	- Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency (INVEA)
KGP	- Kaffa Green Party
KDP	- Kimant Democratic Party
MDINA	- Main Department for Immigration and Nationality Affairs
MEDREK	- Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum
MDP	- Mocha Democratic Party
NaMA	- National Movement of Amhara
NEBE	- National Electoral Board of Ethiopia
NGP	- New Generation Party
NISS	- National Intelligence and Security Service
OAU	- Organization of African Unity
OCP	- Out of Camp Policy

ODF	- Oromo Democratic Front
ODP	- Oromo Democratic Party
OFC	- Oromo Federalist Congress
OLA	- Oromo Liberation Army
OLF	- Oromo Liberation Front
OMN	- Oromo Media Network
ONLF	- Ogaden National Liberation Front
ONP	- Oromo Nationalist Party
OPDO	- Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization
PG7	- Patriotic Ginbot 7
PP	- Prosperity Party (see EPP)
SEPDM	- Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
SDP	- Somali Democratic Party
SNNPRS	- Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State
SPLM	- Sidama People's Liberation Movement
SRS	- Somali Regional State
TAND	- Tigrayan Alliance for National Democracy
TPLF	- Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
UASC	- Unaccompanied and Separated Child
UDJ	- Unity for Democracy and Justice
UNISFA	- United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei
UNMISS	- United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan
USDoS	- United States Department of State
VERA	- Vital Events Registration Agency
WBO	- Waraana Bilisummaa Oromoo

6.3 Map with regions & population figures



Population figures:

The population of Ethiopia, which numbered approximately 116 million at the end of the reporting period of this country of origin information report, was distributed among the following cities and regional states in 2013 (the population was then approximately 96 million): Addis Ababa (approx 3,434,000); Afar (approx 1,810,000); Amhara (approx 21,130,000); Benishangul-Gumuz (approx 1,066,000); Dire Dawa (approx 466,000); Gambela (approx 436,000); Harari (approx 246,000); Oromia (approx 35,470,000); Somali Regional State (approx 5,749,000); Tigray (approx 5,247,000); Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' Region (approx 19,170,000).⁷⁹⁷

In 2016 (with a population of approximately 104 million), according to the CIA the population of Ethiopia was divided into the following ethnic groups: Oromo 34.9%, Amhara 27.9%, Tigray 7.3%, Sidama 4.1%, Wolayta 3%, Guraghe 2.8%, Somali 2.7%, Hadiya 2.2%, Afar 6%, other ethnic groups 12.6%.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁷ **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (consulted on 25 January 2021); **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (consulted on 25 January 2021).

⁷⁹⁸ CIA, Factbook Ethiopia Summary (consulted on 25 January 2021); <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/ethiopia-population/> (consulted on 25 January 2021).

6.4 Map of conflict areas⁷⁹⁹



⁷⁹⁹ On this map, it should be noted that the shaded areas are areas that are mentioned relatively often in the country of origin information report. The map is intended solely to give an indication of where these areas are located. This is a snapshot; the situation in Ethiopia is fluid.