

5. ETHIOPIA

New conflict threatens the region



KEY FACTS

Population: **115.0 million**

21.3 million people in need of humanitarian aid

8.5 million facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC 3+)

1.8 million people internally displaced

792,000 refugees hosted, mostly from South Sudan (359,000), Somalia (201,000) and Eritrea (179,000)

84th (of 195 countries) for capability to prevent and mitigate epidemics

121st (of 167 countries) for women's equality

157th (of 181 countries) for resilience to climate change

3/5 score for severity of access constraints (before escalation in Tigray)

55% of funding received for 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan

Above: The IRC constructed a water point in Tuli Guled in Ethiopia's Somali region, allowing Anab Farah to spend more time working on her family farm as she used to walk six hours to collect water.

PROBABILITY

7 HUMAN THREAT

5 NATURAL THREAT

IMPACT

7 CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE

8 EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION

Ethiopia features on the Watchlist for the third year in a row but rises into the top five for the first time due to escalating conflict. At the same time, climate change, desert locusts and the COVID-19 pandemic all further deepen the challenges facing the country in 2021, and drive up the number of people in need to the second highest in the world.

Ethiopia enters 2021 with a major confrontation underway in the northern Tigray region between the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which rules the Tigray region and was a key power in Addis Ababa until recently. Conflict in Tigray has already sparked a rapid increase in humanitarian needs and has the potential to allow instability to grow in other parts of Ethiopia as well. The rapid deterioration in the situation in Tigray comes at a particularly delicate time for the country. COVID-19 has exacerbated needs, particularly for communities that had already been affected by conflict and natural events. Similar shocks are likely to recur in 2021 due to climate change, political tensions, and the fact that Ethiopia is at the epicenter of the biggest locust outbreak in living memory, which could severely worsen food insecurity in the year ahead.

"In 2020 severe flooding, desert locusts, the COVID-19 pandemic, and internal conflicts have pushed Ethiopia into an extremely vulnerable and precarious state, placing additional burdens on many families whose coping capacities were already stretched. With over 21 million people already in need of humanitarian assistance and this number now rising due to the crisis in Tigray, we must ensure that nothing disrupts humanitarian access and programming, rather in this context we are morally obliged to strive to expand the scale, reach and efficiency of our efforts to address the needs of the community."

- Richard Data
Interim Deputy Director Emergencies, IRC Ethiopia



HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2021

- ▶ **Conflict in the Tigray region is driving a rapid rise in humanitarian needs, including refugee movements into Sudan, amid allegations of violence against civilians.** Tensions that had been growing steadily between the federal government in Addis Ababa and the TPLF in Tigray escalated rapidly in November 2020, when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed accused the TPLF of attacking a military base. [Amnesty International](#) has also documented allegations of at least one massacre of civilians since fighting escalated in Tigray. The situation is still evolving rapidly, but the UN has estimated that 9 million people are living in areas that could be affected by fighting ([OCHA](#)). The IRC and other NGOs working in Tigray are planning for as many as 2 million people to be displaced internally and for around 400,000 to flee to Sudan.
- ▶ **The conflict in Tigray and enduring political tensions increase the risk of greater conflict in other parts of Ethiopia as well.** The factors that have contributed to conflict in Tigray are also present in many other parts of Ethiopia, in particular political tensions sparked by the political transition that started with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed coming to office in 2018 and longstanding border disputes between regions formed along ethnic lines. Elections due to be held in 2021 mean that political tensions are likely to remain elevated. Moreover, if the federal security forces are focused in Tigray then armed groups in other parts of the country may be emboldened to step up their activities. The conflict in Tigray, particularly if it becomes prolonged, consequently has the potential to spark far wider instability in Ethiopia - and in neighboring countries, given Ethiopia's powerful role in the region, particularly Somalia.
- ▶ **COVID-19 is driving a massive increase in humanitarian needs.** Even before the outbreak of conflict in Tigray, which is likely to compound the economic challenges facing Ethiopia, the number of people in need had more than doubled during 2020, from 7 million before COVID-19 to 16.5 million by mid-2020 ([OCHA](#)). Ethiopia is second only to Yemen for the total number of people in need in 2021 ([GHO](#)). Rising need was primarily driven by the way COVID-19 limited economic activities and increased unemployment while interrupting the education of more than 26 million children across the country ([OCHA](#)). The [IMF](#) is now estimating that GDP growth will drop to 0% in 2021.
- ▶ **Ethiopia is the epicenter of the largest locust outbreak in decades.** Unusually good summer rains led to numerous new swarms forming in October 2020 ([FAO](#)). At least 1 million Ethiopians suffered crop losses due to the locusts ([OCHA](#)). As a result, 11 million Ethiopians are forecast to be facing crisis (IPC 3 or higher) levels of food insecurity in the first half of 2021 ([IPC Info](#)). Children are particularly affected; the number of children admitted to health facilities for Severe Acute Malnutrition already reached record levels in 2020 ([OCHA](#)). Efforts to control the locust swarms are underway, but the scale of the challenge and the reality that locust control activities are impossible in parts of neighboring Somalia - and may be disrupted by conflict in Tigray - mean that there is a real risk of further growth in locust numbers and major disruption to agricultural activities in 2021, which would significantly worsen food insecurity. Moreover, one million people were affected and [30,000](#) people displaced by flooding in 2020 alone ([OCHA](#)) and, with climate change increasing the frequency of extreme weather patterns, 2021 may also see major natural-driven emergencies.

THE IRC IN ETHIOPIA

The IRC provides a wide range of assistance for refugees living in camps and for vulnerable Ethiopian communities throughout the country who have been affected by drought, flooding, conflict and COVID-19. We distribute cash and basic emergency supplies, build and maintain safe water supply systems and sanitation facilities and deliver protection services to women and girls. The IRC also supports government partners and community workers in primary healthcare clinics, constructs classrooms and trains teachers and provides livelihoods-related training and job opportunities to youth and vulnerable households. Learn more about the [IRC's Ethiopia response](#).



• ADDIS ABABA