

Northern Ethiopia: two years into the crisis

Since the conflict broke out in November 2020 in Tigray region between the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) and Tigrayan forces, the humanitarian situation in northern Ethiopia has deteriorated and become dire. The escalation of conflict after 24 August 2022 has likely worsened humanitarian needs in Tigray and along its border areas.

On 2 November 2022, Tigrayan forces and the Federal Government agreed on a “permanent cessation of hostilities” after talks led by the African Union in South Africa. The joint agreement mentions the restoration of basic services and infrastructure and “collaboration with humanitarian agencies” (BBC 02/11/2022; Bloomberg 02/11/2022).

About this report

This report provides an overview of key conflict events over the past two years and the humanitarian situation in terms of displacement, priority needs, and access. It also sheds light on food-related coping strategies in northern Ethiopia. It is based on the secondary data review of public sources. For a full overview of crisis contexts in Ethiopia, see the ACAPS website.

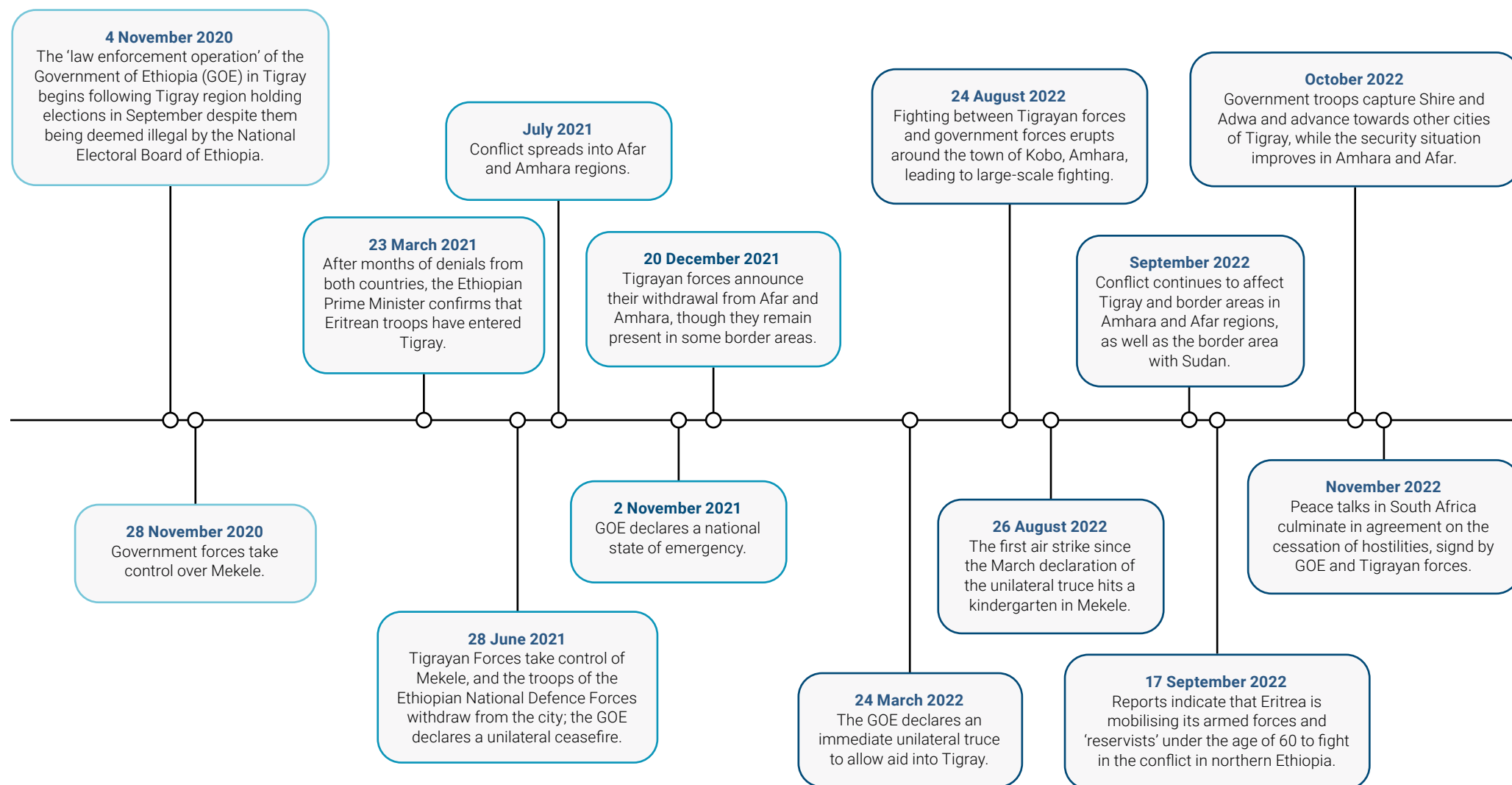
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KEY MESSAGES

- **Food insecurity levels have drastically increased in northern Ethiopia since November 2020.** An estimated 13 million people need food assistance across northern Ethiopia, although the actual scale and severity of needs are unclear (WFP 17/06/2022 and 24/08/2022). Conflict is a key driver of food insecurity in the area, interrupting agricultural activities, preventing the distribution of food and agricultural inputs, and disrupting markets and supply chains (WFP 28/01/2022 and 18/08/2022).
- **There are indications that people's coping mechanisms have eroded throughout the two years of conflict.** Their needs have significantly deepened, increasing their reliance on life-saving humanitarian assistance (WFP 18/08/2022). The use of negative coping strategies, such as survival sex and begging, has increased, particularly in response to the lack of food (BBC 03/04/2022; IRC 03/05/2021; UNFPA 07/07/2022).
- **Access to essential services has worsened in the past two years.** The conflict has led to the destruction, damage, and looting of critical infrastructure, including hospitals and schools (TNH 26/04/2022; HRW 28/05/2021). Resource and access constraints and the conflict have limited any rehabilitation work (OCHA 01/11/2022).
- **The access of humanitarian organisations to people in need has varied over the course of the conflict.** The significant deterioration of the situation after 24 August 2022 restricted access within and into Tigray, jeopardising the limited access resulting from the ‘humanitarian truce’ between March–August (OCHA 13/09/2022).
- **Millions of people have been displaced across northern Ethiopia.** The displacement dynamics across northern Ethiopia have been fluid, with significant return movements observed in early 2022 (IOM 15/04/2022). After the re-escalation of conflict in August, renewed large-scale displacement was reported in Tigray and its border areas with Afar and Amhara. Many people have likely been displaced multiple times over the past two years (Protection Cluster 28/10/2022; UNICEF 29/10/2022; OCHA 17/10/2022).
- **Civilians' safety and security have been threatened throughout the conflict.** This is particularly the case during phases of increased fighting and air strikes (Reuters 05/10/2022; UN News 18/10/2022; ICG 20/10/2022; AP News 29/10/2022). All parties to the conflict have been accused of committing human rights violations, including ethnically motivated killings and the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war (EHRC 08/07/2022; OHCHR 22/09/2022; HRW/Amnesty International 06/05/2022; Amnesty International 16/02/2022).
- **Information has been limited, restricted, and politicised throughout the past two years.** This has resulted in an overall lack of information, a lack of reliable figures, and little disaggregated information about people's needs (Maxwell, Baker, et al. 05/2020; TNH 10/11/2021). This lack has reduced the ability of responders to target people adequately (Reuters 26/10/2021; CSIS 30/09/2022).

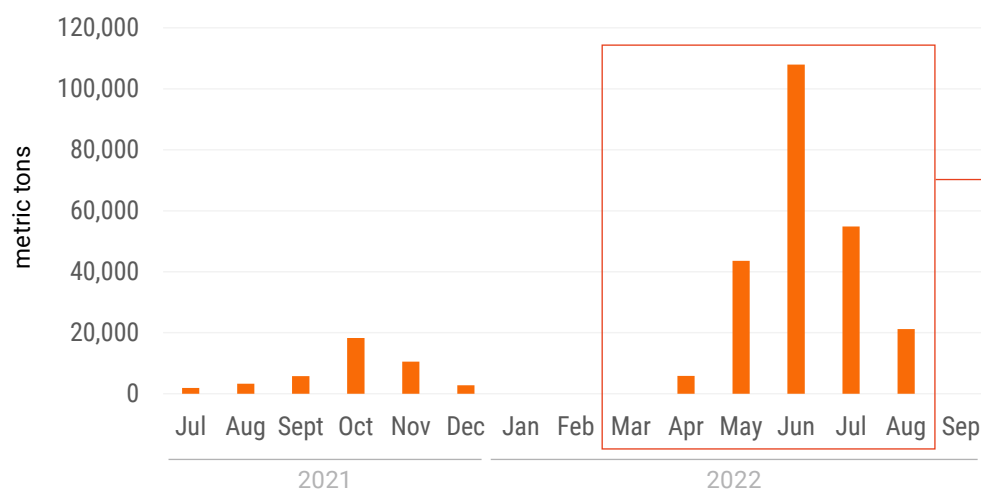
TIMELINE OF KEY CONFLICT EVENTS



Sources: NYT (28/11/2020); Reuters (23/03/2021, 24/08/2022, 17/09/2022, and 25/10/2022); The Guardian (28/06/2021, 22/07/2021, and 27/08/2022); TNH (04/10/2021); France 24 (15/02/2022); Al Jazeera (15/02/2022); UN (25/03/2022); Africanews (26/08/2022); Protection Cluster/UNHCR (29/09/2022); OCHA (17/10/2022 and 01/11/2022); ABC (31/10/2022); DW (20/12/2021);

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Figure 1. Cargo entering Tigray via road convoys, July 2021 to September 2022



One truck carries on average 40 metric tons

With the 'humanitarian truce' between 24 March and 24 August 2022, the number of humanitarian convoys entering Tigray increased, but the amount of aid entering the region was still insufficient to meet the needs of the population.

As at 2 November, all convoy movements into Tigray had been suspended for over two months, risking the depletion of already limited humanitarian stocks and fuel.

Sources: Logistics Cluster monthly overviews July 2021 - October 2022; Reuters (24/03/2022); Al Jazeera (24/03/2022); BBC (07/04/2022); WHO (14/02/2022); UNHCR (30/08/2022); OCHA (10/02/2022)

Between November 2020 and July 2021, fighting highly limited access within Tigray (The Economist 01/12/2020; OCHA 19/01/2021). After the withdrawal of ENDF from Tigray in late June 2021, the movement of fuel and humanitarian cargo was controlled and restricted, effectively resulting in a blockade (Reuters 20/12/2021; BBC 07/04/2022; Devex 24/03/2022). De-escalation of fighting led to improved access within Tigray, but access into the region remained majorly restricted (BBC 07/04/2022; WHO 14/02/2022). As at early November 2022, electricity, banking, telecommunication, media, and basic services cut off since July 2021 had not been restored. On 2 November, both parties agreed to the cessation of hostilities and a commitment to restore services, which may improve the access situation (Al Jazeera 02/11/2022; AP News 02/11/2022; AU 02/11/2022; BBC 02/11/2022). As at 2 November, it remained unclear how this will materialise.

The blockade led to fuel shortages and the depletion of humanitarian stocks in Tigray throughout 2022 (OCHA 13/09/2022). Aid workers have had to prioritise the entry of certain stocks and the lack of fuel further limited aid distribution.

The resumption of fighting on 24 August jeopardised humanitarian access within Tigray and affected areas of Afar and Amhara, leading to the suspension of aid activities (BBC 19/10/2022). Active conflict and changing frontlines affected aid distribution within the region, as was the case in the initial stages of the conflict between November 2020 and

July 2021 (OCHA 13/09/2022 and 12/07/2021; Al Jazeera 09/01/2022; VOA 09/01/2022). Fighting after 24 August restricted access in Central, Eastern, and North Western zones (Food Cluster 14/09/2022; OCHA 19/09/2022). Western zone has been fully inaccessible since November 2020 (OCHA 09/08/2022). In Afar, conflict was primarily concentrated in woredas in Kilbati (Zone 2) and Fanti (Zone 4), though significant access improvements were reported in late October (OCHA 01/11/2022). Fighting in Amhara, including North Gondar, North Wello, and Wag Hamra, limited humanitarian access, though the security situation improved as at late October (Logistics Cluster 06/09/2022; BBC 01/09/2022 and 24/08/2022; OCHA 13/09/2022 and 01/11/2022; Reuters 24/08/2022). Regular UNHAS flights were disrupted after 24 August, affecting the mobilisation of cash for relief operations and the rotation of aid workers in and out of Tigray.

The conflict has jeopardised the safety and security of humanitarian responders, restricting the movement of aid workers. At least 27 humanitarian workers have died in northern Ethiopia since the start of the conflict in November 2020 (IRC 15/10/2022; OCHA 13/09/2022; Addis Standard 28/10/2022; ICRC Ethiopia Twitter 28/10/2022). This includes the killing of a Red Cross ambulance driver on 28 October 2022, whilst transporting injured patients (ICRC Ethiopia Twitter 28/10/2022). Two weeks prior, on 14 October 2022, an International Rescue Committee aid worker died from an air strike in Shire, which also injured another responder (IRC 15/10/2022; Reuters 15/10/2022).

DISPLACEMENT AND RETURNS

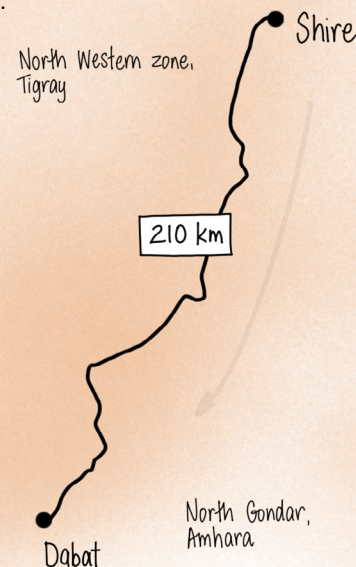
Over the past two years, displacement and returns in northern Ethiopia have been fluid, with people travelling hundreds of kilometres to escape conflict, access services, or find food (IOM 05/08/2022; FEWS NET 05/08/2022). The scale of displacement in northern Ethiopia has been difficult to verify given access constraints resulting from active conflict and, in Tigray, a lack of fuel and communication blackouts (OCHA 08/08/2022). Assessments have been limited since November 2020. The latest endorsed and publicly available data, collected between June–July 2022, does not assess the situation in Tigray; the last comprehensive figure for the region is still from August 2021 (IOM 20/10/2022 and 05/08/2022). Figures for Afar and Amhara are likely outdated given displacement after the end of August.



The lack of baseline data complicates the emergency response, including adequately responding to individual needs and multiple displacements (OCHA 13/09/2022; UN 15/10/2022; Protection Cluster/UNHCR 28/10/2022). Large-scale displacement was once again recorded after August 24, with most displacement happening within Tigray and along the border areas of Afar and Amhara. People were likely displaced for the second or third time after returning to their homes in areas where conflict had subsided and frontlines had shifted in recent months (BBC 19/10/2022 and 18/10/2022; UNHCR 14/10/2022; OCHA 08/08/2022; Protection Cluster/UNHCR 28/10/2022). The re-escalation of conflict in areas previously affected by fighting is likely to influence return movements.

There is a lack of understanding of displacement trends and return movements given the fluidity of the situation.

The routes people take and the challenges they face along the way affect their humanitarian needs, but there is an overall lack of information on the issue. Indiscriminate air strikes and quickly moving frontlines have suddenly displaced people (VOA 23/05/2022; The Guardian 10/10/2022; Reuters 09/02/2022). Fleeing without identification may leave them struggling to access services at a later stage (Reuters 30/03/2022; WFP 20/10/2021; UNHCR 18/02/2022). Families become and remain separated (UNHCR 12/04/2022; Reuters 30/03/2022). Many people with disabilities have been unable to escape and have been left behind in their homes while their family members, caregivers, and other villagers have fled (Protection Cluster/UNHCR 23/06/2022; Keep the Faith 04/06/2022).



210km separate Shire in Tigray and Dabat in Amhara. Displaced people along this route likely walk for up to three days across the Simien National Park, a mountainous landscape with rough terrain (UNESCO accessed 25/10/2022; Ethiopiaaid 28/11/2021; IOM 05/08/2022).

Once displaced, people stay in displacement sites, makeshift shelters, or rented houses among host communities. Displacement sites are often overcrowded, with limited access to services, and lacking livelihood opportunities, meaning most IDPs depend on humanitarian aid and services (DW 05/10/2022; Addis Standard 12/07/2022). IDPs initially received support from the host communities they are staying with, but the ability of host communities to support displaced populations has declined over time (Protection Cluster/UNHCR 07/07/2022).



Large-scale displacement means subsequent returns once conflict has subsided. Returns to areas of origin remain the preferred solution of IDPs, but they often receive little related support. They often return to find their homes and local infrastructure damaged, looted, or occupied (DW 04/10/2022; VOA 23/05/2022; IOM 16/09/2021). Large-scale returns have been particularly high in eastern Amhara since December 2021 upon the withdrawal of Tigrayan forces (BBC 03/10/2022; OCHA 09/08/2022). Between December 2021 and February 2022, almost 1.5 million conflict-displaced people returned to Amhara (IOM 15/04/2022). Their humanitarian needs remain largely unclear. At the same time, people displaced from Western zone since November 2021 and early 2022 are likely facing protracted displacement as they are blocked from returning to Western zone and their homes are likely occupied (AI 06/04/2022).

Health

An estimated 3.9 million people in Tigray and ten million in Amhara need access to healthcare (OCHA 17/06/2022; IMC 23/08/2022). People recently displaced in Afar require medical services, but this need remains inadequately addressed because of the lack of supplies in the region (UNICEF 29/10/2022). In Tigray, the provision of health services has been severely disrupted, with health facilities remaining dysfunctional and medical supplies being unavailable (DW 28/10/2022; TNH 26/04/2022; Devex 18/01/2022; Al Jazeera 28/10/2022).

Agriculture

Agricultural production for 2022 is expected to be below average because of the lack of a sustained provision of agricultural inputs, constrained access to farmlands following the re-escalation of conflict in late August 2022, and the subsequent suspension of aid convoys to the region (FEWS NET 05/08/2022; FAO 16/07/2022; OCHA 13/09/2022). In June, 7.4 million people across Afar, Amhara, and Tigray needed agricultural and livestock support, including animal health services and supplementary animal feeds, seed provision, and irrigation schemes (OCHA 17/06/2022).

Nutrition

Malnutrition rates continue to increase in northern Ethiopia given high food insecurity rates, limited access to healthcare, and a lack of nutrition supplies (Al Jazeera 28/10/2022; BBC 20/10/2022; UNICEF 29/10/2022). Varying data collection methodologies and a lack of clarity in the number of people screened for malnutrition pose challenges in understanding the scale of the issue over time.

WASH

As at July 2022, 8.6 million people in Afar, Amhara, and Tigray needed WASH services (OCHA 07/07/2022 and 22/07/2022). Conflict has destroyed and disrupted WASH services, and limited resources have constrained rehabilitation work (OCHA 01/11/2022 and 03/03/2022).

Note: figures do not reflect potential changes resulting from the conflict escalation after August 2022.

Protection

Wide-spread sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has been reported throughout the conflict with medical and psychological support needed for survivors in all three regions (EHRC 08/07/2022; OHCHR 22/09/2022). Given the scale of displacement, there is a need for family reunification for unaccompanied and separated children (OCHA 11/07/2022: Protection Cluster/UNHCR 29/09/2022).

Food

13 million people need food assistance across all three regions (WFP 17/06/2022 and 24/08/2022). About 5.4 million people are currently food-insecure in Tigray, nearly half of whom are experiencing a severe lack of food (WFP 21/10/2022 and 18/08/2022). This figure represents a sharp increase from the 400,000 people identified in October 2020 (WFP 28/01/2022). 7 million people in Amhara and 1.2 million in Afar are considered to be in need of food assistance (WFP 21/10/2022). The last Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) assessment was carried out in May 2021, meaning updated figures on the scale of food insecurity in 2022 are not available (IPC 22/07/2021).

ESNFI

Renewed displacement since August 2022 has increased the need for emergency shelter and NFIs in the conflict-affected areas of Tigray and border areas of Amhara and Afar (OCHA 15/10/2022 and 01/11/2022; Protection Cluster/UNHCR 28/10/2022).

Education

Conflict and a lack of school rehabilitation prevented children from returning to school in September 2022, with some missing out on school for a third school year in a row (Education Cluster 04/08/2022). Conflict-related school closures affect children across Afar, Amhara, and Tigray.

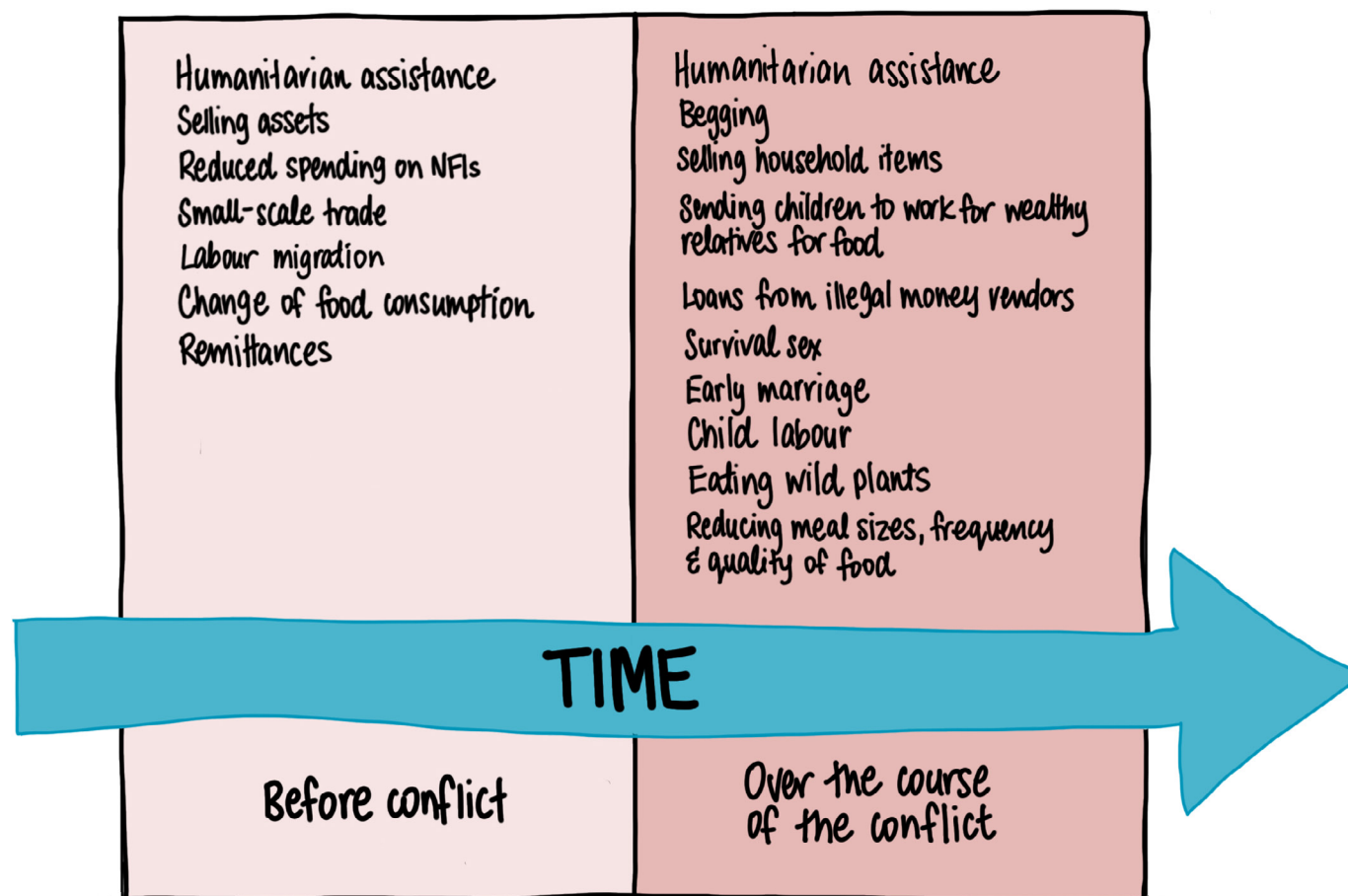


Overview of humanitarian needs

HOW PEOPLE COPE WITH THE LACK OF FOOD IN TIGRAY REGION

Food remains the priority for all communities in Tigray, but there has been limited food availability in the region. The loss of agricultural assets earlier in the conflict, particularly the 2020 *Meher* harvest, has left a major food deficit given that crop production covered about 60% of food needs for a poor household (WFP 28/01/2022 and 18/08/2022; FEWS NET 05/08/2022). The disruption of markets and supply routes throughout the conflict has led to increased food prices further limiting people's access to food and increasing their reliance on humanitarian aid (WFP 28/01/2022, 18/08/2022 and 29/04/2022). A lack of access to cash has reduced households' purchasing power and the blockade restricted access to banking services, including receiving salaries and remittances from abroad (USAID 30/07/2021; Al Jazeera 23/09/2021; OCHA 04/11/2021; The Guardian 19/08/2022). 75% or more of households' income was reported being spent on food (WFP 18/08/2022; FEWS NET 05/08/2022).

Figure 2. How coping mechanisms have changed in Tigray



Source: Tigray Bureau of Agricultural and Rural Development 10/02/2022; WFP 28/01/2022 and 18/08/2022; FEWS NET 05/08/2022; The Guardian 19/08/2022; Protection Cluster/UNHCR 06/05/2022
 Disclaimer: Non-exhaustive. Categories are not mutually exclusive. Visual reflects an overall trend, not a precise analysis of frequency of use and changes over time.

There are indications that negative strategies to cope with food insecurity and a lack of income have become more common, as shown in Figure 2. Coping strategies used at the onset of the conflict such as community sharing of food, money in form of gifts, loans and donations, as well as other resources have dwindled because of the widespread lack of food and livelihood opportunities (OCHA 03/02/2022; Tigray Bureau of Agricultural and Rural Development 10/02/2022; NRC/OCHA 26/07/2022). Conflict disrupted the productive safety-net program (PSNP) that poor households used as a key income source, further reducing their support system (Tigray Bureau of Agricultural and Rural Development 10/02/2022; FS Cluster 01/2022; WFP 28/01/2022 and 18/08/2022; FEWS NET 05/08/2022).

Coping strategies based on food consumption increased in June 2022 compared to November 2021. These included limiting portion sizes for adults and the frequency of meals, and eating less preferred or less expensive foods (WFP 18/08/2022). With prolonged conflict, maintaining these becomes challenging for households because of the limited availability of and access to food in the region, leading to high malnutrition rates particularly among pregnant women and children (WFP 28/01/2022 and 18/08/2022). Malnutrition as the underlying cause of illness is apparent among the most vulnerable, with a reported increase in the death of children under five years of age as a result of malnutrition compared to before the conflict (Health Cluster 26/07/2022; BBC 20/10/2022). Limited assessment coverage restricts an understanding of coping mechanisms among people in inaccessible areas, and a more granular understanding of changes over time.

Protection risks linked to negative coping mechanisms are highly concerning. There are reports that some displaced women, especially in households headed by single women, as well as SGBV survivors, including unaccompanied and separated adolescent girls, engage in survival sex to meet their basic needs because of a lack of access to food and income sources (Protection Cluster/UNHCR 06/05/2022, 23/06/2022, and 07/07/2022; UNFPA 07/07/2022). The risk of exposure to SGBV, sex for survival, sexual exploitation, and early marriage is also higher in displacement situations because of limited access to basic services and lack of adequate shelters and housing (Protection Cluster/UNHCR 23/06/2022).

The closure of schools in many parts of the region has increased the risk of exploitation and sexual abuse for children. Many displaced children resort to street begging and child labour to support their families (Protection Cluster/UNHCR 07/07/2022; VOA 04/07/2022). Early marriage among girls is common, especially those coming from households unable to provide food for them (Protection Cluster/UNHCR 06/05/2022 and 23/06/2022).

SGBV survivors have often been isolated from society and faced stigma or rejection from families, leaving them economically vulnerable in displacement situations (UNFPA 07/07/2022; Protection Cluster/UNHCR 23/06/2022). The conflict damaging or destroying 80% of hospitals, as per the Tigray Health Bureau, aggravates these risks and reduces access to support systems (OCHA 08/06/2022; NPR 25/10/2022).

HOW PEOPLE COPE WITH THE LACK OF FOOD IN AFAR AND AMHARA REGIONS

Information about coping mechanisms in Afar and Amhara is limited compared to Tigray.

In addition to conflict, the drought in Afar resulting from the consecutive failed rainy seasons in conflict-affected areas of Kilbati (zone 2) and Fanti (zone 4) has resulted in a lack of food and water, further aggravating food insecurity and malnutrition levels (OCHA 22/07/2022 and 08/09/2022; UNFPA 12/07/2022). Many displaced and affected communities rely on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs, but aid remains irregular and insufficient (OCHA 22/07/2022 and 27/05/2022; FEWS NET 05/08/2022; ESNFI Cluster 16/05/2022; UNFPA 12/07/2022). There is inadequate information on the coping strategies of conflict-affected and displaced communities in collective sites and host communities in Afar.

The spread of conflict to the boundary areas of Amhara at various periods in 2021–2022 has increased humanitarian needs, with clashes unrelated to the northern Ethiopia conflict further aggravating the situation (OCHA 07/07/2022). Funding shortages have reduced the number of people targeted for assistance, leading to an overall decrease in the assistance received (OCHA 07/07/2022 and 22/07/2022). Previously inaccessible districts in Wag Hamra received food aid at the end of July 2022 for the first time since the spread of conflict in July 2021 (WFP Ethiopia Twitter 27/07/2022; Addis Standard 27/07/2022). There is little information available on how displaced people coped with the lack of assistance and food shortages before then (WFP Ethiopia Twitter 27/07/2022; Addis Standard 27/07/2022).

In Afar, high malnutrition levels have been reported in conflict-affected areas, with food scarcity leading to extremely poor food consumption patterns (WFP 21/10/2022; FEWS NET 05/08/2022). According to a January-February 2022 assessment, more than a third of assessed households in these areas had admitted their children to health facilities because of a lack of food. 3% of these households had reported children dying because of malnutrition (WFP 17/06/2022).

Returning IDPs report temporarily moving to different locations in search of water and pasture for their livestock to cope with the impact of drought (IOM 09/07/2022). They also reduce meals, rely on family support and loans, and sell livestock to cope with food scarcity (IOM 09/04/2022).

In Amhara, returning IDPs rely on loans and family support, temporarily migrate in search of food and services, reduce meals, eat wild plants, sell livestock, and receive food aid as coping mechanisms (IOM 09/04/2022).

As in Tigray, there are protection concerns related to negative coping mechanisms. Reports indicate that early marriage and dropping out of school are common among displaced boys and girls in Afar and Amhara (Protection Cluster/UNHCR 06/05/2022).

INFORMATION IS LIMITED AND RESTRICTED

Why has information been limited?

As at 2 November 2022, telecommunication, internet, and electricity services within Tigray remained cut off since July 2021, creating challenges for exchanging information and reporting on the humanitarian situation (OCHA 17/06/2022). The agreement on the “cessation of hostilities” signed on 2 November 2022 mentions the restoration of basic services (BBC 02/11/2022; Bloomberg 02/11/2022).

Information has been politicised and independent reporting has been lacking throughout the conflict (Reuters 26/11/2021; Maxwell, Baker, et al. 05/2020; TNH 10/11/2021). Media access in Tigray remains highly restricted. Journalists reporting on the conflict have faced detentions and harassment. Ethiopian authorities have accused some journalists of ‘promoting terrorism’ (RSF 29/03/2022; DW 27/01/2022).

Access constraints because of insecurity have impeded the collection of data on people in need (CSIS 30/09/2022). The lack of fuel necessary to deploy data collectors has limited humanitarian assessments in Tigray (VOA 22/06/2022; OCHA 13/09/2022).

Restrictions on the amount of cash circulating within the region have prevented humanitarians from paying data collectors (UN 14/01/2022; OCHA 13/09/2022).

What is the impact of information being limited?

The latest comprehensive and endorsed displacement figure for Tigray is from August 2021 (IOM 05/08/2022). The figure for IDPs within Tigray does not reflect the current situation.

Humanitarian needs in Western zone remain largely unclear because the zone has been inaccessible to humanitarians since the conflict broke out in November 2020 (BBC 06/05/2022).

There is scarce information about the needs and access to assistance of people in inaccessible areas, such as rural areas and border areas with Eritrea.

No IPC analysis has been conducted in Ethiopia since May 2021, which prevents an understanding of the number of people facing different levels of food insecurity (IPC 22/07/2021).

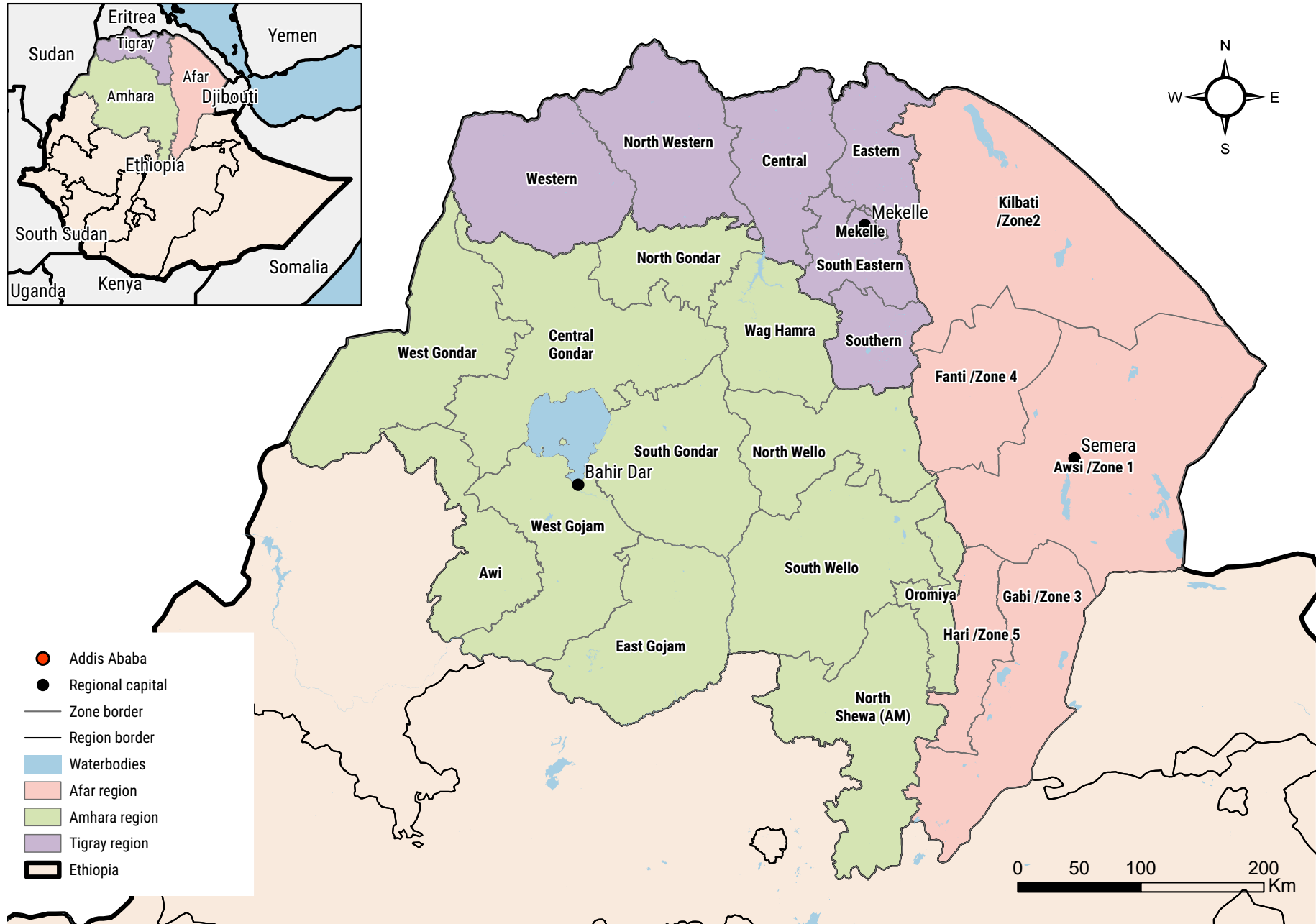
What does this mean for the humanitarian response?

There is limited access to information for crisis responders.

Gaps in existing data, such as a lack of gender- and age-disaggregated data or information about people with disabilities, prevent a targeted response to people’s individual needs.

The lack of accurate and up-to-date data on people in need hinders the planning of humanitarian programmes and operations (CSIS 30/09/2022).

MAP: NORTHERN ETHIOPIA ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS



Source: ACAPS