

# NOTE

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This is an excerpt from IDMC's 2019 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID).

## SPOTLIGHT

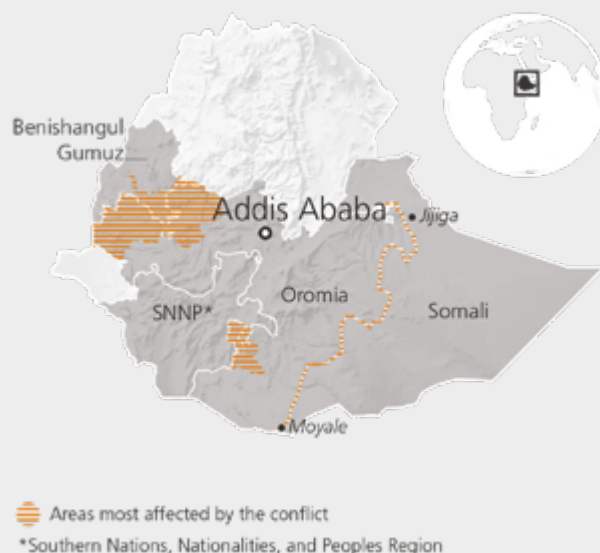
# ETHIOPIA

## New waves of conflict cause unprecedented displacement

Ethiopia had the highest number of new internal displacements associated with conflict worldwide in 2018. The country's crisis has been deepening steadily since 2016, but conflict and intercommunal violence escalated significantly and spread to new areas last year, triggering almost 2.9 million new displacements, four times the figure for 2017. Conflict and displacement were recorded along three of the Oromia region's borders, with the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' (SNNP) region in the south-west, the Benishangul-Gumuz region in the north-west and the Somali region in the east. Urban centres were also affected, including Addis Ababa and Jijiga, the capital of the Somali region.<sup>37</sup>

This unprecedented rise in new displacement comes against the backdrop of significant political change in the country, with a new prime minister taking power in April 2018. The new government ended the country's state of emergency, released political prisoners and forged a peace deal with Eritrea.<sup>38</sup> It has also been praised for abandoning past practices including the excessive use of force to curb protests and for its cooperation with aid agencies in responding to acute humanitarian needs. By doing so the new government has acknowledged the presence of conflict-induced IDPs within its border. A crucial step towards addressing their plight.<sup>39</sup>

After two decades of relative calm, the most significant displacement was triggered by inter-communal violence between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups that erupted in April and again in June in the West Guji zone of Oromia and the Gedeo zone of SNNP. Underlying ethnic tensions were aggravated by competition for land and scarce resources.<sup>40</sup> The conflict left hundreds of thousands of people sheltering in overcrowded collective centres, where humanitarian agencies struggled to provide food, health, water and sanitation for the rapidly growing displaced population. The government collaborated with the agencies, who had no previous



presence in the south of the country, to set up and coordinate a large-scale response.<sup>41</sup>

Ethnic violence also broke out between Oromos, Amharas and Gumuz in Benishangul Gumuz in October following the killing of three local police officers.<sup>42</sup> Around 62,000 new displacements were recorded between October and December. Humanitarian needs were acute, but insecurity hampered agencies' access and only one aid delivery was reported.<sup>43</sup>

Fighting and displacement that began along the border between the Oromia and Somali regions in 2017 continued unabated last year. Conflict over the disputed border was aggravated by drought, which increased competition for scarce resources, leading to the displacement of ethnic Oromos living in the Somali region and ethnic Somalis living in Oromia. Hundreds of thousands of new displacements were recorded. Heavy fighting in the Oromo town of Moyale between the Somali Garreh and Oromi Borenas sub-clans triggered around 80,000 new displacements in two weeks in December. The town also suffered significant damage. Its hospital was destroyed and its shops and banks looted.<sup>44</sup>

Inter-communal violence in Jijiga, a previously calm and vibrant city, led to the displacement of 140,000 people in just a few days in August, of whom 35,000 remained in the city and sheltered in and around churches. Jijiga was inaccessible for several weeks as a result of the insecurity, but economic activity had resumed by the middle of the month and many people returned once the situation had stabilised.<sup>45</sup> Clashes on the outskirts of Addis



*Displaced women attending a focus group discussion on beneficiary satisfaction in Guji Zone, Oromia Region. Photo: Rikka Tupaz / UN Migration Agency (IOM) 2017*

Ababa in September, when Oromo youth flocked to the capital to welcome Oromo Liberation Front fighters returning from Eritrea, displaced 15,000 people.<sup>46</sup>

Ethiopia's new government has put a number of measures in place in response to the country's displacement crisis, including peace-building activities to promote voluntary returns and programmes to support those who prefer to integrate into their host communities or settle elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> A minister for peace has also been appointed. A durable solutions strategy for the Somali region was developed in 2017 in line with the Guiding Principles and the Kampala Convention, a regional treaty on IDPs' protection and assistance.<sup>48</sup>

The government has been criticised, however, for encouraging premature returns to regions not yet safe and for not doing enough to protect civilians.<sup>49</sup> Nor has Ethiopia ratified the Kampala Convention yet. In light of the country's growing internal displacement crisis and in the spirit of improving policies to tackle the phenomenon, the tenth anniversary of the convention's adoption in 2019 presents an ideal opportunity to do so.

## | Notes

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42. Ethiopia Insight, "Tens of thousands flee Benishangul after Oromia border dispute flares", October 4, 2018.
43. OCHA, "Humanitarian Bulletin, Ethiopia, 29 October-11 November", 2018.
44. ECHO, "Ethiopia: Internal Conflict, Displacement, Daily Flash", December 21, 2018.
45. International Federation of the Red Cross, "Emergency Plan of Action (EPoA), Ethiopia: IDP Population Movement", August 29, 2018.
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