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Forced displacement and social cohesion in Ethiopia

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List of Acronyms

AAU	Addis Ababa University
ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement
CoH	Cessation of Hostilities agreement
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
CSO	Civil society organisation
ECFE	Evangelical Churches Fellowship Ethiopia
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EOTC	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	German Society for International Cooperation (Germany's development agency)
GLF	Gambella Liberation Front
IDPs	Internally displaced people
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IKEA	Ingvar Kamprad Elmtar AB, a multinational furniture retail corporation
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCP	Out-of-camp policy
OLA	Oromo Liberation Army
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organisation
RRP	Refugee Response Plan
RRS	Refugees and Returnees Service
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

1 Introduction

Population displacement as a result of humanitarian and protection emergencies is a significant challenge in Ethiopia. As of June 2023, an estimated 4.4 million people in the country were internally displaced (UNHCR, 2023). The main drivers of this forced displacement have been, in particular, a combination of the intensification of conflicts and violence in different parts of the country as well as climatic hazards (mainly drought). Around 66% of the displacement is estimated to be conflict-induced, while over 18% is caused by drought (USAID, 2023). Recently, in drought affected regions such as Somali, flooding has also become an important cause of displacement. These dynamics have an impact on the availability of resources and may lead to disease outbreaks (e.g. of measles, cholera and malaria) and high malnutrition rates. While Tigray leads in the severity of conflict-induced displacement, Somali Region hosts the largest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) primarily displaced as a result of climate hazards (IOM, 2024). This separation between conflict-induced and climate-induced displacement, however, is quite simplistic, as the boundary between the two is fluid and often overlaps.

At the same time, as of December 2023, the country was hosting 963,181 refugees, mostly from South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan. This number includes around 100,000 new arrivals, who fled to Ethiopia following the May 2023 clashes and violence in Laascaanood, Somaliland/Somalia (Reliefweb, 2023). In addition, due to the conflict in Sudan, over 90,000 Sudanese refugees and secondarily displaced South Sudanese and Eritrean refugees have recently arrived in Ethiopia (UNHCR, 2024a). On top of that, some 100,000 Eritrean refugees who were hosted in four camps in Tigray at the start of the conflict between the federal government and the Tigray regional administration were facing an uncertain future. Some of these were resettled in a temporary camp established at Alemwach in Amhara region; others spontaneously moved to Addis Ababa (IOM, 2022).

Ethnic hostility, territorial claims and counter-claims, compounded by a lack of good governance, has resulted in intense conflicts. In some areas, the conflicts have taken the shape of '"people-versus-people wars"', increasing the involvement and suffering of the civilian population. The signing of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in November 2022 has resulted in shifting dynamics of mobility, as some populations have been able to return to their areas of origin, while others await a more durable peace to be able to weigh the possibilities of return. Returns, especially across these regional states, have been prevented by people's fears for their safety. In some areas such as Western Tigray (referred to as Wolkait by many non-Tigrayans), return has been prevented by a lack of agreement over the political future of the area and the continuing military and administrative control by forces hostile to the IDPs and the Tigrayan refugees who had sought asylum in Sudan. The scale of displacement in the three northern regions of Ethiopia has been difficult to assess and there is an overall lack of information and of reliable figures on the different impacts of the conflict.

Food and essential non-food assistance needs are high. As of October 2023, 20 million people were estimated to be in need of food assistance in the country; this is likely to be an underestimate, since the actual scale and severity of needs are unclear thanks to problems of limited access (FEWS Net, 2023). The suspension of food aid by the US Agency for International Development (USAID)between

May and November 2023, following a "widespread and coordinated" diversion of aid allegedly by both federal and regional authorities[1]) further worsened the situation. In many areas, public services are currently not operational given the damage to or destruction of numerous infrastructures. In particular, many health and education facilities have been devastated and looted. For instance, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that, by the end of 2022, only 3%of Tigray's health facilities were fully operational. In rural areas, loss of livelihood resources, including tools, animals and seeds is reducing people's ability to support themselves after return. In December 2023, the Tigray regional government announced that 91% of the population of the region was exposed to hunger (Reliefweb, 2024). Following a drought that killed millions of livestock in Southern Oromia and Somali regions in 2022 and 2023, floods displaced hundreds of thousands in Somali Region and the South Omo zone of the South Ethiopian Region.[2]

While the Ethiopian security forces were focused on fighting the conflict in Northern Ethiopia, in September 2022 the Somali insurgent movement Al Shabaab attempted to penetrate deep into Somali Regional State. Other attacks on the Ethiopian border were conducted in mid-2023, contributing to a general environment of insecurity.

At the start of January 2024 Ethiopia and Somaliland signed a controversial memorandum of understanding (MOU), which Ethiopia hopes will give it access to the Gulf of Aden and which the latter expects to fulfil its aspiration for formal international recognition. This has stirred up a bitter reaction from Somalia, which claims that its sovereignty has been violated by Ethiopia's negotiation with the Somaliland authorities.

In Oromia, violence has intensified following the failure of the peace talks held in November 2023 in Tanzania between the Government of Ethiopia and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). Tens of thousands of people have already been displaced in Eastern Wollega and Horro Guduru Wollega Zones of Oromia, bordering the Amhara Region, since the beginning of 2023. Insecurity has deepened as the crisis has expanded to central parts of Oromia (Western, Eastern, Northern Shewa and Arsi zones). In Amhara Region, a state of emergency has been in effect since August 2023, with reports of conflict in most areas.

In the Benishangul-Gumuz Region, an alarming increase in violence involving an array of actors – Gumuz militias, the Benishangul People's Liberation Army (BPLA), OLA, regional and federal forces and Amhara militias – has been affecting many communities since 2020 (Adugna&Wakjira,2022). The situation stabilised in the Metekel zone at the end of 2022, allowing for the return of some IDPs to their places of origin. In the southwestern region of Gambella, inter- communal tension between Anyua and Nuer ethnic groups has escalated in the past few months, affecting relations between refugees and the host community.

1.2 Scope of the study

Generally, Ethiopia is facing political polarisation, economic slowdown with a high level of inflation and societal fragmentation. Against this background, this study discusses one of the most important

[1] "US to resume food aid to Ethiopia following monitoring agreement" In Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/united-states/article/2023/11/15/us-to-resume-food-aid-to-ethiopia-following-monitoring-agreement_6256084_133.html accessed 19.03.2024

[2] 'News: at least 30 died of hunger in Gambella refugee camps amid "increasingly concerning" food shortage'. Addis Standard, 2023 [available at https://addisstandard.com/news-atleast-30-died-of-hunger-in-gambella-refugee-camps-amid-increasingly-concerning-food-shortage-ehrc/]. Accessed: 1 January 2024.

factors severely affected by these multifaceted crises: social cohesion. Conflict has caused a great deal of social tension and has eroded the social fabric among the various Ethiopian social groups, as well as trust between these groups and the state. So far, except for some emerging discussions and initiatives among partners working on displacement, there has been no research on, or systematic engagement with, social cohesion. Our report examines social cohesion by focusing on two main areas. Part one introduces social cohesion, providing definitions of it, discussing why working on it is important and examining the factors affecting social cohesion in the country. In part two, we look at the factors determining social cohesion in the context of displacement (that is, among refugees and IDPs). Interest in the latter part of the study was triggered by the increasingly protracted nature of displacement, global initiatives focusing on local integration, and the urgent need for the inclusion of displaced populations in national and local socioeconomic systems. Understanding the general national context affecting social cohesion – intra-and intergroup relations and the social fabric – is crucial to understanding the different contexts in which the displaced and hosting communities live together. The fact that the overwhelming majority of the refugees in Ethiopia are from neighbouring countries, which share similarity across the border, makes the local contexts very important. Understanding the multiple different local contexts is also crucial for the design of interventions and the implementation of development cooperation projects.

2 Understanding social cohesion

The concept of social cohesion was first defined in the 15thcentury by Ibn-Khaldun, an Arab historiographer. He introduced the idea of *asabiyyah*, which can be translated as 'group feeling' or 'social cohesion', defined as a mix of unity and group consciousness (Peterson & Hughey, 2004). In the 19thcentury, sociologists including Émile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies explored the concept of social cohesion from a perspective of solidarity, shared loyalty and interpersonal bonds. Later in the 1990s, the concept became a focus among policy makers, governments and international institutions. Building on the work of Durkheim, many academics have created simple definitions of social cohesion that focus on three main concepts: trust, cooperation or participation, and a sense of belonging or inclusive identity (Peterson& Hughey, 2004; Chan et al, 2006).

In the recent literature relating to socioeconomic development, social cohesion is used in a variety of ways. Depending on the organisation, its focus and the context within which it is studied, the literature shows a flexible approach to the concept. For instance, according to the UN Development Programme (UNDP, 2009, p 14), social cohesion involves "tolerance of, and respect for diversity (in terms of religion, ethnicity, economic situation, political preferences, sexuality, gender and age), both institutionally and individually". A decade later, UNDP re-emphasised the definition, this time as a vertical relation through "trust in government" and participation and peace, "collectively toward a shared vision of sustainable peace and common development goals" (UNDP, 2020, p 16).In a 2022 report, the World Bank defined social cohesion as "a sense of shared purpose, trust and willingness to cooperate among members of a given group, between members of different groups, and between people and the state" (World Bank, 2022:1). The most common definition used is that of Chan et al (2006, p 290), who characterise social cohesion as "the vertical and horizontal relations among members of society and the state that hold society together, characterized by a set of attitudes and behavioural manifestations that includes trust, an inclusive identity and cooperation for the common good". A common thread running through these definitions is the sense that social cohesion is a multifaceted concept that has collective attributes and behaviours characterised by "positive social relations, a sense of identification or belonging, and an orientation towards the common good" (Moustakas, 2023, p.1028).

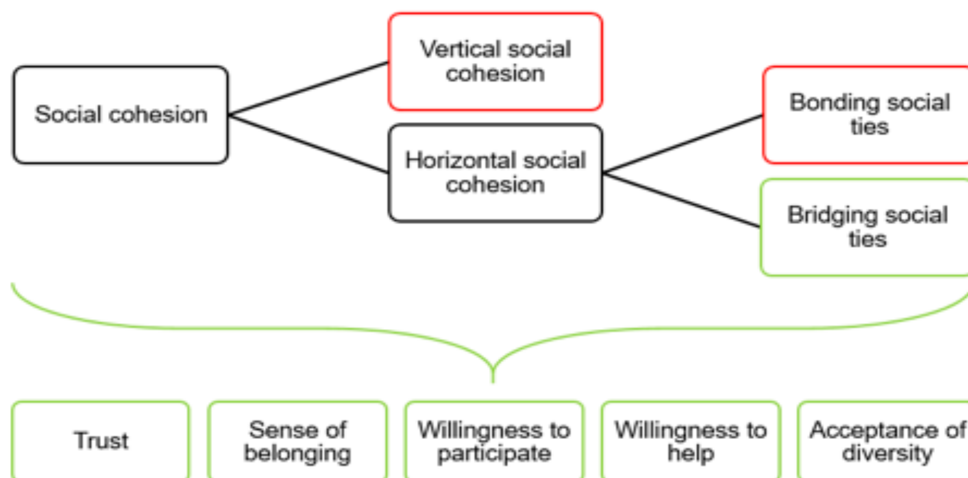
These characteristics can be divided horizontally and vertically, based on different types of social relations (Chan et al, 2006). Horizontal characteristics refer to intergroup and intragroup social cohesion, relationships between different types of actors that constitute a society, and behaviours and attitudes of individuals and social groups. Vertical social cohesion describes relationships between individuals and institutions, or state and society, particularly in terms of how a state distributes goods and resources among different groups of people (Delhey et al, 2016). According to the Social Cohesion Index (SCI) (Burns et al, 2018), these relationships are also referred to as *bonding* (relationships within groups in a society), *bridging* (relationships across groups within a society), and *linking* (relationships between individuals and state institutions). Another index, the Relational Capability Index (RCI) (Giraud et al, 2013), focuses on integration into networks (referring to socioeconomic integration and access to employment, services and information), private relations (referring to socio-cultural integration, closeness of family ties, existence of close friends, emotional and financial support), and civic commitments (referring to civic and political integration, participation in collective actions, voting behaviour and performed solidarity). In this report we are broadly informed by Chan's definitions and analyse social cohesion in terms of horizontal intra- and intergroup relations and as the groups' relationship vertically with the state. Put loosely, we understand social cohesion as the quality of

relations, or "positive relations among individuals and groups (the horizontal dimension) and between society and the state (the vertical dimension)" (Fletcher et al, 2023, p 1).

Across both the horizontal and vertical dimensions and in all the indices that measure social cohesion, there are commonly used indicators. The core indicators found in almost all conceptualisations of social cohesion are:

1) *Trust as a central feature*: this includes interpersonal and intergroup trust; trust in institutions, trust in family, relatives, and neighbours, and trust in specific groups; the presence of mutual trust and confidence in other individuals that could booster interpersonal and institutional trust; and individuals' "confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events" (Giddens, 1990, p 34).
2) *Collective action norms*: voluntary cooperation towards a common public good, "directed at interests that transcend those of the individuals involved" (van Oorschot & Komter, 1998, p 7), and "willingness to subordinate personal needs under the welfare of the social environment" (Schiefer and Noll, 2016, p 589).
3) *Belongingness*: feelings of belonging and social inclusion through shared identity, shared norms and values, and feelings of acceptance in society.
4) *Inclusive identity*: acceptance and tolerance of diversity, recognition of others' rights to belong, avoidance of culture of impunity in the system, which is a precondition for the coexistence of different social identities on an individual and societal level.
5) *Civic engagement and shared loyalty*: active civic and political participation, civic cooperation, provision of good governance and eradication of corruption, and equitable representation, respect for the law, community service, volunteering and approval of social support measures (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Conceptualisation of social cohesion



Source: Adapted from Sonnenfeld et al (2021).

2.1 Why social cohesion?

Having a high degree of social cohesion contributes measurably to economic growth and investment, stable democracy and good governance, environmental sustainability, social stability, solidarity and social harmony, health, peace and security, and general quality of life. It contributes to more resilient societies both collectively and individually. In countries such as Ethiopia, inequality (social, economic and political), lack of interaction and social ties, relative unfamiliarity among groups, poverty and low socioeconomic status all negatively affect social cohesion. In addition, diversity has been considered to have an effect on social cohesion. Diversity, including of ethnicity, language and religion, which is relevant in the Ethiopian case, may notably negatively affect the quality, intensity and scale of group contacts and intergroup relations, and thus social cohesion. Therefore, social cohesion can play an important role in fostering greater inclusivity and tolerance of diversity and multiculturalism, and in promoting stronger conflict management and resolution.

Recent reports have strongly indicated the need for social cohesion. Among others, a 2020UNDP publication stated that "Strengthening social cohesion has become an imperative of the 21stcentury" (UNDP, 2020, p 10). According to the report, "As we move into the 2020s, widespread concern exists about worsening conditions of conflict that threaten respect for diversity, inclusivity and fundamental human rights" (UNDP, 2020, p 11). With worsening inter-ethnic conflicts and religious controversy, Ethiopia provides a good example of where the UNDP's cautionary message is considered very seriously. From our engagement with informants from the government, religious institutions and NGOs we understand that there are serious concerns about the damage to the social fabric that binds Ethiopian societies (horizontally) and about trust between these societies and the state (vertically) as a result of the recent and ongoing conflicts. Thus, every office we visited and stakeholder we discussed with indicated that they are in a desperate search for solutions to societal fragmentation and the growing polarisation currently taking place in the country. The present study, therefore, is considered crucial and timely, with great potential to support practical interventions.

Among the areas of practical intervention is the Ethiopian National Dialogue. The Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission was established in 2021 by the federal government. It has 11 commissioners and a grand objective of forging a 'national consensus' in a country ravaged by multiple crises. Currently, the Commission is working on identifying representatives from every *woreda*(district) to identify agenda points for a national-level discussion. Members of the Commission asserted that it contributes to the creation of social cohesion by building consensus within groups, between groups, and between groups and the state. In its introduction, the Proclamation establishing the Commission (1265/2021), states that "there are differences of opinions and disagreements among various political and opinion leaders and also segments of society in Ethiopia on the most fundamental national issues and it is a necessity to resolve the differences and disagreements through broad based inclusive public dialogue that engenders national consensus". It further states that one of its major objectives is to "establish a system of deliberations that will improve the relationship among the different segments of the population as well as between the public and the Government so as to enable the creation of [a] new political dispensation that is marked by mutual trust". This mandate can be seen as an attempt to improve both the horizontal and vertical relationships.

In addition, relevant recent international frameworks, such as the 2016 Global Compact on Refugees and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), have reaffirmed the recognition of and commitment towards increasing local integration in first asylum countries, largely in the Global South, as a durable solution. Large financial resources have been made available to major hosting countries to facilitate the development of opportunities for local integration of refugees. In light of this, however, to successfully implement these frameworks and their call for local integration, there needs

to be a context-specific understanding of the issue, which is why our study attempts to provide a brief glimpse of social cohesion in Ethiopia, focusing not only on conflict but also on displacement.

3 Social cohesion in conflict and displacement

There is no consensus on the impact of conflict and displacement on social cohesion. Some studies argue that conflicts increase social cohesion, while others claim the opposite. In their broad literature review, Fiedler and Rohles (2021, p 50) explain that studies looking at psychology and trauma explain how "war can contribute to more cooperation and trust because experiencing violence can lead to a realisation that associational life, participation and collective action is intrinsically valuable". Bauer et al (2016, p 250) also argue that "people exposed to war violence tend to behave more cooperatively after war". On the other hand, as we argue in this paper, "conflict-affected communities are often marked by high levels of fragmentation, sharp divisions between identity groups and deep distrust in state institutions. Mass violence fractures societal bonds and impacts prospects for peace well after the direct violence has ended" (Fletcher et. al. 2023, p 1).

Thus, conflict may exacerbate political, social and economic differences, disrupting previous balances of tolerance, social acceptance and cohesion. Lack of social cohesion may also result in conflict by increasing social tension and crime. Mistrust between society and government, in addition to other existing social, economic and political problems within society, may also escalate conflict. On the other hand, conflict may also increase social cohesion; the postwar context and experience may lead to a positive re-evaluation of life, to active socio-political relations and to increased cooperation to improve personal safety and deal with hardship.

The study of social cohesion in the context of forced displacement gained prominence following the Syrian refugee response (Holloway & Sturridge, 2022; Albarosa & Elsner, 2022).[3] However, social cohesion is also related to processes of social integration, coexistence and inclusion (Holloway & Sturridge, 2022) and local solidarity (Tufa et al, 2020). In the context of displacement, these concepts have often been used to assess the integration between displaced communities and host communities.

Recently, the concept of 'opportunity structures' has emerged in the literature as a new lens for examining how the setting of displaced and receiving societies may influence relationships between displaced people and local communities. According to Phillimore (2021, p 1952), opportunity structures are a "set of resources, arrangements and pathways that can facilitate or block integration".

Holloway and Sturridge (2022) summarised six factors affecting the relationship between the displaced and hosting communities. These are: (1) competition over scarce resources; (2) ethnic,

[3] Since the Syrian refugee crisis started in 2011, more than 14 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes, while 7.2 million of them remain internally displaced. Around 5.5 million Syrian refugees live in five neighbouring countries –Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt (UNHCR, 2024b).

religious and linguistic allegiances; (3) the role of aid and assistance in social relations; (4) the scale, speed and duration of displacement; (5) spatial living configurations, in particular whether refugees reside in closed camps, open settlements or are integrated into urban settings; and (6) the amount and quality of contact between communities. We have adopted the first four, which are highly pertinent to the Ethiopian situation. In addition, we suggest two additional factors which are crucial in the Ethiopian context. These are intensified local identity politics and politicisation of refugee and violent conflict.

Figure 2: Approach to social cohesion in displacement

Source: adopted from Holloway and Sturridge (2022).

However, where forced displacement and conflict are concerned, it should be noted that the groups involved are not static or homogeneous; this is critical in understanding social cohesion. The different forms of victimisation, the dynamic nature of conflict and displacement, and mixed evidence on the latter's impact on social cohesion make a uniform analysis challenging, highlighting the importance of contextualisation.

4 Methodology

Our study was conducted based on expert interviews and literature reviews from 20 October to 20 December 2023. The experts interviewed were broadly divided into two. The first group consisted of Ethiopian local actors: government officials, NGO staff, leaders of religious institutions, think-tank analysts and academics. This group generally emphasised the national political level. Their concern was the political fragmentation and polarisation that they see going on in the country; they discussed how advancing the agenda of social cohesion might contribute to peaceful coexistence among the various Ethiopian societies.

The second category included international actors working in the areas of displacement: UN and NGO staff, embassy departments dealing with forced displacement and migration, academics researching displacement, etc. Most of the interviewees in this group had not worked directly on social cohesion, but they could link their work to different variants of it (local integration, economic inclusion, social protection) between the displaced and host communities. We selected cases from displacement-affected communities for analysis of social cohesion in different contexts. Refugees were selected from the three biggest refugee groups in Ethiopia: South Sudanese in Gambella, Somalis in Somali Region and Eritreans in Addis Ababa and Afar. The IDP examples were mainly drawn from the Somali, Oromia, Konso, Tigray and Benishangul-Gumuz areas.

4.1 Research questions

The study explores the following key questions:

1) Which definition of social cohesion is most useful in the Ethiopian context?
2) What is the current situation in the country? What are the main underlying causes (and triggering factors) leading to a lack of social cohesion in Ethiopia? Which factors determine or contribute to social cohesion in different areas of the country? How has the context evolved over the past five years (since the current government came to power in 2018)? Which social/ethnic groups and geographical areas are most affected and why? What are the main current issues and challenges related to social equity and social justice?
3) Which groups – religious leaders, business associations, NGOs, women or youth – are playing or can play a key role to improve social cohesion?
4) What have been the positive experiences in Ethiopia (EU-funded or not) during the past two decades from which we can learn from in seeking to (re)build social cohesion? Are there traditional mechanisms for social cohesion? What can be learned from these and be adapted to support new interventions in social cohesion?
5) How could the EU, the Ethiopian government –in particular, its Ministry of Peace and any other ministries with social cohesion mandates –and civil society organisations (CSOs) and religious groups, be involved in promoting social cohesion in Ethiopia? What would be the best short- and long-term strategies?

4.2 Data collection methods

Guided by the above research questions, a qualitative research design was used to obtain accurate and reliable data through key informant interviews. Information was gathered through over 30

interviews with government officials (Refugees and Returnees Services – RRS, Ministry of Peace, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Ethiopian National Dialogue and Addis Ababa Police), staff from different research and think-tank groups (Addis Ababa University, Jigjiga University, Bahir Dar University, Mekelle University, Gambella University and independent researchers), humanitarian and development actors (GIZ, Cities Alliance, ECHO, Disaster Risk Management Bureau of Somali Region, Good Neighbours and World Bank), the UN (UNHCR, UNDP),faith-based organisations (Ethiopian inter-religious council, the Evangelical Churches Fellowship Ethiopia (ECFE) and Mahibere Kidusan), as well as the migration department of the Netherlands Embassy. In most cases our focus was to understand our interviewees' experiences and/or views with respect to social cohesion. The EU Delegation to Ethiopia assisted the researchers by identifying relevant implementing partners currently working in different areas of the country, who were contacted to provide their views on social cohesion in their area(s) of intervention and what could be done to promote it.

4.3 Limitations

The study had three limitations: First, data came from interviews with experts instead of via fieldwork. The complex and multifaceted nature of factors affecting social cohesion and forced displacements in Ethiopia requires further research among selected people and communities. Second, social cohesion and displacement are emerging areas of study and the literature is limited. Third, the study was conducted towards the end of2023, when many people were on holiday breaks. The solution to this was to try to conduct some online interviews. However, this proved difficult, as some informants were not accessible and several either declined to be interviewed or wanted to remain anonymous, as they did not have permission to speak on the record from their offices. Christmas season is a time when religious leaders and politicians promote social cohesion. In this regard, data collected on the topic could be suspected of bias. However, the fact that the study is based on expert interviews and a literature review, rather than on the views of ordinary people, significantly reduces any such bias.

5 Social fragmentation and the polarisation of Ethiopian societies

5.1 Ethnicity, territorialisation and inter-ethnic conflict

The role of ethnicity in the Ethiopian political landscape has been debated since the 1960s, when many political parties and fronts were organised along ethnic lines. The coming to power of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991 and the 1995 Constitution institutionalised ethnicity through the concept of ethnic federalism, which actually increased ethnic political salience. Depending on the size of the population, ethnic groups are given regional, provincial or district statuses. Article 39(1) of the Constitution, further, states that "Every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession". However, the definitions of the terms 'nation', 'nationality' and 'people' are still vague and are often used interchangeably to refer to ethnic groups.

As a result of the institutionalisation of ethnicity in Ethiopia, ethnic identity has become a resource on its own and its politics have become more important than ever before. Formal ethnic recognition has been used to establish an administrative unit such as a region, zone, special *woreda* or *woreda*,[4] which brings resources down to the local level. Demands for ethnic recognition have been widespread, particularly in the highly diverse southwest of the country, where the former Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) has been divided into four different regions.

Ethiopian federalism has also equated ethnic identity with politico-administrative borders, which has caused violent competition between ethnic groups over territory and its boundaries. Most of the regional states' borders are contested with their neighbours. Conflict over the Oromia–Somali border, for instance, caused the displacement of over one million inhabitants in 2017 and 2018. In most of the regions the pattern of displacement is that the displaced flee to the neighbouring region where they belong ethnically. The Oromia–SNNPR (Guji-Gedio) conflict also displaced close to a million people in 2018. Benishangul-Gumuzhas faced similar problems with Amhara and Oromia regions (Adugna & Wakjira, 2022). Territorial boundary disputes between Amhara and Tigray regional states have been a pending critical factor in the implementation of the Pretoria Cessation of Hostilities (CoH)agreement signed in 2022 between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

Antagonistic historical narratives are another factor related to ethnicity. The Ethiopian elites have been advancing competing narratives of nation building since the 1960s (Merera, 2003); the contestation has mainly been between advocates of pan-Ethiopian nationalism and those favouring ethno-nationalism. This has been manifested and kept alive in the dispute over public spaces and fighting over historical symbols (Tegbaru, 2023). Good examples are the Oromo and Amhara elites, who fight over flags, different statues erected in the country and the political system. The Oromo accept the currently existing national flag (green, yellow and red with a star in the middle), while many among the Amhara elite have campaigned to remove the star from the tricolour, associating it with

A *woreda* is an administrative structure accountable to a zone, which is accountable to the Regional State. A special *woreda* is somewhat equivalent to a zone, as it is accountable to the Regional State. A special *woreda* is usually granted to minority ethnic groups located within a region dominated by another ethnic group or groups.

the TPLF. The Oromo ethno-nationalist elite are against statues that symbolise Imperial Ethiopia, while the Amhara elite, who hold pan-Ethiopian views, are in favour of them. Most of the Amhara elite opposed the ethnicity-based federal system and the constitution on which the post-1991 government was formed. Most of the Oromo ethno-nationalist elite, on the other hand, support the identity-based administrative set-up and accept the constitution that is the foundation of the administrative set-up.

In the summer of 2016, the longstanding suspicion and competition between the Oromo and Amhara elites in Ethiopian politics shifted in a dramatic turn of events when Amhara demonstrators in Gondar showed support for the Oromo protesters, mainly thanks to a convergence of their interest in removing the TPLF from power. One of the placards carried by the Amhara demonstrators in Gondar in summer 2016 read: “The blood flowing in Oromia is our blood too”. The Oromo youth from different parts of Oromia responded by visiting the Amhara regional capital, Bahir Dar, where they participated in a campaign to clear water hyacinth plants from Lake Tana with a motto “*Xaana Keenya*” – “Our Tana”. These positive public discourses and events soon spread through the media. Oromia regional officials accompanied by the Abba Gadas (customary Oromo leaders) and Oromo artists, visited Bahir Dar in what was called the Oro–Mara (Oromo–Amhara) Alliance. The visit was meant to build an alliance between the Oromo and Amhara elites, in other words creating an alliance between the Oromo People’s Democratic Organisation (OPDO) and the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) in the EPRDF. It was chiefly this alliance that contributed to ending the dominance of the TPLF within the EPRDF government.

Immediately following the change of government in 2018, however, the relationship between Amhara and Oromo switched once again from mutual support to suspicion. This was observed initially in the changes in public rhetoric. With the dramatic end to Tigrayan hegemony in the federal government, Oromo and Amhara nationalists started to compete for office at the federal level. When Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed formed his first cabinet, Amhara activists and media complained about perceived Amhara under-representation and the dominance of Oromo in the Addis Ababa administration. Since then, competition, antagonism and violent discourse have become increasingly common – the competing nation-building project has returned and it is characterised by more violent views. In some towns in Oromia, such as Adama, Asella and Goba, Oromo and Amhara youth have quarrelled over the flag when the Amhara nationalist elites publicly carried the tricolour without its star, symbolising their resistance to the post-1991 political set-up. The fighting over historical symbols has continued and a mob in Harar town dismantled a statue of Ras Mokonnen, father of Emperor Haile Sellassie, and former governor of Hararghe Province.

In reaction, more imperial statues were built in Amhara Region, including one of Emperor Menelikin Debre Birhan, North Shewa. In response, statues of Oromo ethno-nationalist figures were built in different parts of Oromia. A good example was a statue built for Haji Adam Sado, an Oromo nationalist and member of the 1960s Bale Oromo movement in Goba town in Bale Zone. These struggles over the visual manifestation of identity and history have become epicentres of contradictions, affecting the quality of social relations between the elites of the two major ethnic groups. This has significantly eroded the social fabric that facilitates social cohesion.

The impact of conflicts on social cohesion is highly complex given the multi-layered, multidimensional and multifaceted local histories in the country. However, the assumption that conflict increases social cohesiveness within groups, but decreases it across groups, is simplistic in the Ethiopian context. There are two reasons for this.

First, conflicts have several layers – the ‘in-group’ and the ‘out-group’ are fluid and dynamic. Alignments change in terms of both vertical and horizontal relationships. In the Agaw–Amhara–Gumuz triangle (including Metekel), for instance, between 2019 and 2022, the first two regions formed an

alliance against armed groups from Gumuz. The conflict was framed in racial terms as a fight between the 'red' highlanders (Agaw, Amhara and the federal government) and the 'black' lowlanders (Gumuz rebels). On the other hand, the Amhara militia, also called the *Fano* (and which included Agaw members), was fighting Tigray on the side of the Ethiopian government. Since June 2023 these alliances have totally shifted. The intense conflict has moved from Metekel and Tigray to Amhara Region, where major fighting is being waged between the Amhara militia and the Ethiopian federal government. The horizontal (local) alliances have also changed, with government-trained militias from ethnic Agaw and Gumuz groups now fighting the Amhara rebels.

Second, conflict has challenged in-group cohesiveness. Since 2018 in all regional states (or among major ethnic groups) where rebels fighting the government are active, the government has managed to organise or reinforce the existing militia structure, using its own parallel militia with the special duty of countering the rebels. In Oromia, the OLA is countered by the *Gaachanasirnaa* (the shield of the system). In Amhara, the *Fano* is countered by *adimabetagn* (those who deal with local rebels), in Benishangul-Gumuz, the government trained its own 'Gumuz militia' against the Gumuz rebels. In each of these cases, rebel groups are fighting not only against the regular army but also against the local militia, who belong to the same ethnic groups and are from the same locality as them. This has made local conflict patterns very complex, as the violence is directed horizontally within and between ethnic groups, and vertically with the regional and federal government. As a result, conflict has contributed to disruption of in-group social bonds and has weakened the social fabric that bridges relations with neighbouring ethnic groups. It has also increased local mistrust of the state.

A UN staff member based in Tigray, interviewed for this study, argues this point differently with respect to that region. For him, Tigrayans have developed not only resilience but also social cohesiveness through their shared experience of the civil war fought from 1975 to 1991 and from the more recent 2020–22 war, as well as through the associated experiences of displacement and postwar recovery. According to this UN staffer, Tigrayan society showed unprecedented local solidarity and resilience in the two-year war and siege. By his account, the federal government was also not able to form a local militia similar to those it had created in Amhara and Oromia. Even in the postwar situation, while there might be disagreements among those supporting the regional government, the people have maintained harmonious relations and continued offering support to the large IDP community, regardless of the heavy economic pressures they face. This argument of Tigrayan exceptionalism needs further study.

5.2 Religious tension and conflict

Ethiopia's religious composition is dominated by Ethiopian Orthodox Christians (43.5%), followed by Muslims (34%) and Protestant Christians (18.5%), according to the latest available central statistics (CSA,2007). This distribution has undoubtedly changed significantly since 2007. At present and throughout history, although religion has had the power to bring people of different backgrounds together, conflicts tied to the politicisation of religious institutions have also been observed in different parts of the country.

The government has been blamed by religious leaders for the fragmentation of religious institutions through, for example, its expropriation of land, prosecution of religious leaders and restrictions on public activities. The government has involved religious leaders in political discourses during mobilisation for war. As an informant from the inter-religious council put it, "Religious institutions are not independent entities; their autonomy has been taken by the government".

Reactions to perceived government influence have led to increased tensions. Religious tensions and conflicts have broken out over the renegotiation of public space between religious institutions and

the government, the concept of religious fundamentalism, and religious freedom. For instance, tension arose between Muslim elites and the government when the latter accused the former of religious fundamentalism. The increase in religious plurality has also itself contributed in some instances to generating conflict.

The perceived threat of the politicisation of Islam by the state led to violent clashes between security forces and followers in different parts of the country. The resurgence of the Takfir wal Hijra in Jimma in 2005 and 2006 saw the movement take a radical position towards the Ethiopian state, with its members refusing to hold ID cards or pay taxes. This was given as evidence of the political Islamic movement that later took the form of violent resistance. In a similar manner, in 2022 and 2023, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) was also accused of promoting radical religious ideas that threatened the state's political power and caused it to react by imprisoning followers and religious leaders. As a result, public protests have been held opposing state intervention in the affairs of the country's religious institutions, some of which have turned into violent clashes with security forces.

During the war in the north, for example, evangelical worshippers from Tigray region were excommunicated in several churches in Addis Ababa because of their alleged links with the TPLF. Similar trends were also observed in the Orthodox Church. The current ruling party, the Prosperity Party (PP), has been accused of following evangelical teachings because of the religious affiliation of its leader. Evangelicals have also been accused – mainly by opposition media –of preaching the "PP gospel".

The EOTC has also been the subject of controversy following the signing of the CoH peace deal in Pretoria in November 2022. The controversy started over an internal split within the EOTC which saw the establishment of the Oromia Orthodox Clergy in early 2023, and the formation of a separate Tigray Orthodox Church. Top members of the EOTC were quoted in the media condemning the prime minister. In fact, one Orthodox bishop based in the US was heard during a public ceremony calling for the murder of the prime minister. This has intensified controversy and negatively affected the historical relationship between the Orthodox Church and the state in Ethiopia.

Beyond conflict between the state and religious institutions, tensions have also existed between the religions. For example, the perception of the Protestant church as a latecomer, together with the significant spread of Protestant Christianity, mainly among the younger generation, has led to tensions with the EOTC. Public rioting and condemnation and the production of polemical literature and audiovisual materials directed against the other religion has aggravated the divide, leading to tensions and, sometimes, violent conflict. Such conflict has also been observed between Muslims and EOTC followers. Inter-religious relations in Ethiopia have deteriorated in recent decades, with an increase in skirmishes and violent clashes, mainly as a result of competition over public space connected to the construction of mosques or churches, as well as to celebrations of religious holidays.

It is important to note that these clashes have mostly been of a local nature, and the level of violence has been relatively low, despite religiously coordinated efforts at augmenting tensions. At present, antagonistic inter- and intra-religious relations have significantly decreased the role religion could or used to play in Ethiopia in building social cohesion.

5.3 Declining values of customary institutions

In traditional societies, customary institutions are important factors in social relationships within and across groups. Each group has its own customary governance, conflict resolution mechanisms, value systems and norms. However, such values are also shared with other groups across cultural

boundaries, helping smooth inter-ethnic relationships (Hebo & Sirna, forthcoming). Bonds of friendship had been common across most ethnic (regional) borders. Such networks play an important role in conflict prevention, facilitating ethnic relations, intermarriages and cross-cultural tolerance (Tsega, 2022).

However, recently inter-communal conflicts, antagonistic and competing national narratives and controversies, and tensions within religious institutions have all contributed to a decline in the values of customary institutions. Different levels of the Ethiopian government have co-opted the customary institutional authorities to win their support in a polarised community. This has undermined the legitimacy and influence of such institutions, affecting their credibility and roles. For instance, in Somali Regional State, clan leaders have been organised into Guurti (associations of clan leaders) and many of them have left their rural villages and started to live in Jigjiga. They are paid by the regional state, so that, according to our informants, they cannot challenge the government. In Oromia, the council of Abba Gadas has been established and is supported by the Oromia regional government. As a result, the influence of these important institutions has weakened when dealing with issues of in-group cohesion and relations across ethnic boundaries, for instance dealing with the consequences of conflict.

5.4 Displacement and societal fragmentation

Another factor of social fragmentation in Ethiopia is large-scale displacement, as a result of emergencies linked mainly to conflict (internal and in neighbouring countries) but also to the adverse impacts of climate change (drought and floods), which have subsequently had an impact on competition for available resources. As mentioned in the background section, the country has been hosting 4.4 million IDPs as of June 2023 and 963,181 refugees, mostly from South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan (UNHCR, 2023). This number includes new arrivals from the recent clashes in Somalia and Sudan. It also includes Eritreans suffering from secondary displacement in Ethiopia as a result of the northern conflict that displaced some100,000 Eritrean refugees who were being hosted in camps in the Tigray region.

Displacement is often a result of disrupted social relations at the place of origin and may also potentially cause further disruption of social cohesion in relation to the hosting community and the state. The presence of displaced people “is often associated with social disruption, tension, grievance, social fragmentation and economic upheaval” (World Bank, 2018, p41). Forced displacement can also amplify social tensions as a result of population influx, often in large numbers, and pressure on existing infrastructure and services. Putnam’s constrict theory argues that diversity may negatively affect social interactions and reduce both in-group and out-group solidarity, and thus weaken social cohesion. Individuals are argued to have better interactions with those with whom they share similar characteristics (Wickes et al, 2016).

6 Defining social cohesion in displacement situation

In the past ten years, even though there has been little or no visible progress around interventions in social cohesion, the existing literature has shown a noticeable improvement in humanitarian and development actors' awareness of the way projects and programmes may affect relations among displaced and host communities (Holloway & Sturridge, 2022; World Bank, 2018). In the course of our research, many project-implementing and funding bodies (UN agencies, NGOs, faith-based organisations, government offices) informed us that they were consciously focusing on trying to build harmony between the displaced and their hosts.[5] Regional bodies, such as the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have also been working on projects that focus on economic inclusion and building harmonious relationships between the displaced and the host community (IGAD, 2024). In fact, this has become a global trend and a project's 'conflict sensitivity' has been part of EU funding criteria. Moreover, the EU's foreign policy instruments have included social cohesion among their objectives[6]. However, many of these have not articulated the concept and have used different terminologies without necessarily referring to 'social cohesion'. For instance, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission uses the phrase 'safety and security' by approaching the relationship between the displaced and their hosts from a human rights perspective.

Currently, many stakeholders, encouraged both by global initiatives such as the Global Compact and the CRRF and by national pledges, in addition to being pressed by the need to build harmonious relations between the displaced and hosts, have either started implementing or are planning to implement inclusive service provision for displaced people and host communities in their programmes. They are taking an approach to 'displacement-affected communities' rather than just to displaced persons (see Table 1). Some actually suggest using social cohesion as one of the cross-cutting issues in their programmes, similar to the way that 'gender' and 'disabilities' are used. Nevertheless, there are observable variations among the stakeholders in terms of conceptualisations and approaches to social cohesion.

Table 1: Definitions of social cohesion by different organisation working on displacement in Ethiopia

Organisation	**Definitions of social cohesion**
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	UNHCR focuses on horizontal cohesion and "the ties which hold people together within a community". It also narrows the parameters of these ties to the level of interaction, shared cultural or religious interests and the ability to minimise inequalities and avoid marginalisation (UNHCR et al, 2018, in Holloway &Sturridge (2022: 12)

[5] In the Global North, most of the research around social integration has been conducted on individual migrants' integration into host communities (Ager & Strang, 2008).
[6] Dedicated EU foreign policy instruments, such as EU (FPI) ex-IfS/IcSP, have social cohesion as an objective. See, for example, EU (2020).

World Food Programme (WFP)	WFP emphasises horizontal cohesion and prioritises the absence of "conflict before it turns violent, thus promoting peace and security" (WFP, 2021, in Holloway &Sturridge (2022: 12))
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and International Rescue Committee (IRC)	Both organisations highlight horizontal cohesion and rely on Fonseca et al's (2019) definition of social cohesion as comprising collective identity, mutual support and the absence of overt violence (Ahmed et al, 2021 in Holloway & Sturridge (2022: 12)
Mercy Corps	Mercy Corps defines "[social cohesion as] a sense of shared purpose and trust among members of a given group or locality and the willingness of those group members to engage and cooperate with each other to survive and prosper" (Kim et al, 2020)

Source: Adapted from Holloway &Sturridge (2022:12).

7 'Context matters': factors affecting social cohesion in displacement

The fact that a majority of refugees are hosted in places neighbouring their countries of origin – often where they have ethnic ties – makes understanding contexts crucial. Ethiopia hosts refugees from several neighbouring countries who each have specific socio-cultural and religious connections to the regions where they are hosted. Most of the IDPs in Ethiopia are hosted in regions they would consider 'their own', where they feel they belong ethnically or where they share socio-cultural similarities. However, these social connections (social bonds), such as similarities in language, religion and cultural practices, are often complicated by complex historical, political and resource issues. This makes understanding the displaced–host setting crucial to the implementation of social cohesion programmes. A good example is the situation of Eritrean refugees. Most such refugees share language, religion and cultural practices with Tigrayans, yet the relationship between the two has not been smooth. This is further complicated by resource constraints among the hosting communities. Thus, understanding the variation in social cohesion on the ground calls for consideration of local contexts. Particularly in a situation where the research is meant to improve social cohesion through community-based interventions, analysis should be focused on local and regional settings or at the level of social groups (Kim et al, 2020). In the following sections, we examine displacement and social cohesion, starting with the three major refugee groups and proceeding to IDPs, using the above indicators and factors affecting social cohesion in displacement situations.

7.1 Sound bonds: ethnic allegiance and historical factors

The presence of strong social bonds, such as sharing similar kinship, language and religion, helps facilitate social cohesion between displaced and host communities. Betts et al (2022, p 3) suggest that "ethno-linguistic proximity between refugee and host populations is associated with more positive attitudes" towards each other. Two illustrative examples of this are the Somali and Afar. The Somali are the second largest refugee population in Ethiopia, and Somali Region is the second largest refugee hosting region in the country. It hosts close to 300,000 refugees and over a million climate- and conflict-induced IDPs. Among the humanitarian community, the region is known for its best practices both horizontally (strong displaced–host relationships) and vertically (the interactions of the displaced and host communities with the regional state).

In this regard, the displaced and the host communities usually capitalise on their shared ethnicity: "We are all Somali. We have common language, religion, and culture. They are our brothers and sisters. There are no differences between refugees and hosts" (Betts et al, 2022, p 25). Besides shared ethnic identity and cultural bonds, the displacement-affected communities share a long history of displacement and vulnerability, which contributes to local solidarity. Many of the communities presently hosting refugees were themselves refugees in Somalia in the 1970s and 1980s (Hammond, 2014). Of course, nomadic and transhumant pastoralism, where mobility is the way of life, have always facilitated interactions.

The regional state has also played a positive role in building a harmonious relationship between the displaced and hosts. It has done so through its active engagement in the implementation of the CRRF and by promoting durable solutions for IDPs. An informant from the host community around Hilaweyn refugee camp in Dollo Ado described how the former president of Somali Regional State, Abdille Umar, contributed to this: "[He said] 'the refugees are our Somali people, don't disturb them'. He prohibited discrimination and exclusion of refugees in this zone. His order is one of the major reasons why refugees and hosts are living peacefully and well here. He also provided land to refugees" (Betts et al, 2022, p 25).

The findings of a study conducted on local integration in Afar between 2019 and 2021 (see Tufa et al, 2020) had a striking similarity with the Somali experience. Asked about refugee–host community relationships, local NGOs and government officials emphasised "Afar is Afar" regardless of their political status. Such an attitude shows the role of social bonds, mainly ethnic solidarity, in achieving successful local integration and greater social cohesion. Aisha, a 21-year-old Afar woman from Eritrea, married with a two-year-old daughter, explains: "Some Afar who want to do business, like my father, go to the *woreda* to get a work permit and an ID. He is a clan leader, and he has lived with the [Ethiopian] Afar community, so he does not have any problems finding a job. As long as you are Afar, there is no problem. It does not matter whether you are Eritrean or Ethiopian" (Tufa et al, 2021, p 21). As she noted, Aisha's father managed to get a work permit before the 2019 revised refugee proclamation (No 1110/2019) that in principle allows refugees to access jobs and to receive a refugee Identity Card (ID).[7] The ID card she mentioned is not a refugee ID card, but a residence ID for an Ethiopian citizen. Besides their ethnic bond, the Afar also use discourses of victimhood across the three countries that their territory trisects (Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti) as a basis for solidarity. They consider themselves to be political minorities who have been historically subjugated by all three states. This shows how much social bonds based on ethnic allegiances and compounded by discourses of similar historical and political experiences can lead to local horizontal and vertical social cohesion. Other factors, such as the availability of, or competition over, resources and the way aid and services are provided (inclusively or separately targeted) either reinforce or impede these relationships.

7.1 Intensified local identity politics

In a context where the regional state hosting refugees is ethnically heterogeneous, social cohesion in the displacement-affected communities is often directly affected by local politics.[8] Given the intensification of ethnic-based politics in Ethiopia, refugees who share an ethnic identity with one of the competing local ethnic groups may become part of the problem. A conspicuous case in this regard is the refugee–host relationship in Gambella, a region hosting the largest refugee population in Ethiopia. Gambella hosts close to 400,000 refugees, mainly from South Sudan (UNHCR, 2023), and has a local population of around 450,000. Gambella is also the site of one of the oldest refugee camp in the country. Pugnido Camp has been hosting South Sudanese refugees since 1993. The two competing ethnic groups in Gambella Region are the Anyua and the Nuer; the majority of the refugees from South Sudan belong to the latter group. The involvement of both Nuer and Anyua refugees in local political matters has contributed to local tensions.

The Anyua complain that refugees have caused a demographic change to the region, increasingly swelling the numbers of the Nuer. In several districts hosting refugee camps, the host population is

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[7] In practice, only refugees who are taking part in joint projects (participating refugees and hosts) have managed to get work permits.

[8] In fact, in some circumstances the socio-political developments in places of origin continue to be relevant in refugees' multiple relationships in places of displacement.

much smaller than the refugee population; the majority of the refugees are Nuer and the surrounding host population are the Anyua. On a number of occasions, when tensions between the two refugee groups have risen, the minority Anyua refugees have fled the camps to join their local kin. The politics of demography have intensified debates over the distribution of power in local-level administrations.

A major incident between Anyua and Nuer took place in June 2022 when the Gambella Liberation Front (GLF), allegedly a Nuer-dominated organisation, supported by the OLA, entered Gambella town. This caused the relationship between the refugees and hosts to immediately deteriorate. It became difficult and unsafe for the Nuer refugees to leave their camps and for any Anyua, including staff of different organisations, to enter the camps. In 2023, 30 refugees reportedly died of hunger or were killed in an attack when they tried to leave their camps looking for food after aid was suspended by USAID and WFP in relation to the allegations that food was being diverted discussed in the introduction above. In this case, the refugee–host community relationship is a reflection of the politics that guides the local communities' relationship. In other words, in Gambella, refugees not only suffered from hunger, their vulnerability in local relationships was also reinforced.

Given that, potentially, they stand to lose considerable power, the Anyua elite, which dominates the Gambella regional government, is extremely sensitive to and suspicious of the discourse around local integration of refugees, even though this is part of the Ethiopian government's official policy position. This suspicion discourages partners working on displacement in the region, including the UN, NGOs, government officials and researchers, from using the phrase 'local integration 'or referring to the CRRF, which promotes a whole of society approach to responding to displacement. Thus, in the case of Gambella, displacement has intensified the existing trust deficiency horizontally between the ethnic groups. Vertically, too, disputes have increased because displaced Nuer complain that the regional government is taking sides with the Anyua, while the local Anyua community accuse the federal government and several actors working with refugees of a lack of understanding of their complex local political and social contexts. In this situation, the long history of displacement of refugees to Gambella Region, complicated by local power politics, has caused a deterioration in social cohesion.

7.3 Politicisation and violent conflict

Displaced populations may be politicised as part of the domestic politics within Ethiopia and through its international relations. A striking example in this regard is the plight of Eritrean refugees. In 2010, an out-of-camp policy (OCP) was designed especially for Eritrean refugees, allowing them to integrate into the communities within which they were settled. The justification for the policy was that Eritrean refugees enjoy historical, linguistic, religious and ethnic commonalities with mainstream highland Ethiopian cultures, particularly Tigrayans, and with the lowland Afar (Tufa et al, 2021). Thanks to their demographic characteristics, most of them being young, male and single, the refugees were expected to be able to become self-reliant. The Eritrean government had until 2018 been accusing the Ethiopian government of encouraging Eritrean youth to leave their country and had considered the OCP as evidence of that objective.

However, the fact that Tigrinya-speaking Eritreans share a similar language, culture and religion with Tigray has not helped much in enabling social cohesion. Warming relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and their cooperation against the Tigray regional forces in the recent conflict, hardened attitudes towards the Eritrean refugees. As a result of the war in Tigray (2020–22), which destroyed the refugee camps in the region, many people, fearing for their lives, moved southwards towards Addis Ababa, where the number of Eritrean refugees has increased threefold. In the capital, there is widespread and growing prejudice against Eritrean refugees, who are seen as contributing to

skyrocketing house rents, inflation and insecurity in certain neighbourhoods. Some people accuse them of participating in local politics and espionage. There have also been reports of Eritrean refugees having been detained and expelled to Eritrea by Ethiopian law enforcement agencies (Reliefweb, 2023).

On the other hand, at family and individual level, there are frequent interactions between Eritrean refugees and the host communities. Indeed, many refugees have entered into business using licences obtained by Ethiopian citizens through their personal networks (Tufa et al, 2021). The RRS, the main government body on refugee governance, claims that it is working to promote tolerance, addressing prejudice through its several urban projects. The office encourages refugees and host communities to conduct a dialogue on matters of great importance to their peaceful coexistence. However, the negative public discourse and the securitisation of refugees is contributing to mistrust between the latter and the host community and is limiting the efforts of the government to promote economic inclusion and build social cohesion.

7.4 Duration and magnitude of displacement

The duration of displacement – how protracted the displacement has been – is important in the relationship between the displaced and host communities. Here our analysis focuses on IDPs. Most IDPs in Ethiopia, except for a very few, have fled from inter-ethnic conflict and are hosted by the regional state with which they share ethnic ties. This makes internal displacement in Ethiopia mostly interregional. As ethnicity appeals to the group members' emotions, IDPs are usually received warmly without any restrictions. The local hosting community and the regional state allocate resources, and receptions are emotional. At the reception phase, displacement increases in-group social cohesion and often significantly strains relations with out-group(s). However, as the length of displacement extends, the emotional bonds weaken and the host community starts to feel the fatigue of hosting. For instance, in Konso, an informant from a host community stated:

> We tried to help them [the IDPs] as much as we could. But now it is beyond our capacity. So, we want them to return back to their place. I temporarily gave them a small plot of land to put their plastic sheet as a shelter on it. I hope that they will return to their village. Now they are begging for wood and grass…We had sufficient grain when they fled to our village. Now both of us are in a big problem. (Adugna & Wakjira, 2022, p 34)

Starting in 2018, Oromia Region resettled 86,000 IDPs from Somali Region as a result of conflict. Most of them resettled in the suburbs of 11cities in central Oromia with the support of the Oromo people. However, regardless of the emotional welcome at the beginning, demonstrating increased in-group social cohesion and the regional government's support, after some years negative labelling of the IDPs started. A recent study on those IDPs resettled in different parts of Oromia Regional State found that they were "facing discrimination, marginalization, and negative labelling from host communities and neighbouring community members based on their place of origin and status of displacement" (Endris et al, 2022). In the wake of this marginalisation, the Cities Alliance Adama project designed an intervention that finally managed to acquire land from the mayor, on which to open a marketplace in order to integrate the IDPs with the economy of the host community.[9]

[9] The Cities Alliance Adama, Ethiopia, project is part of the Cities Alliance Global Programme. Its work focuses on migration management in Adama as part of its global project on secondary cities in low-income countries and is supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

Similarly, in Somali Region, ethnic Somali IDPs displaced from Oromia have been hosted in Qoloji camp – about 80 km from Jigjiga. According to a local NGO director, at first the IDPs received a lot of support from the local Somali community and the regional government. However, after about five years, the IDPs started facing challenges in terms of being able to access firewood because of resistance from the local community. The IDPs were told not to construct their homes with more permanent materials such as corrugated iron, but only to use plastic sheets, as the local community was requesting that the IDPs be relocated. According to our informants, the IDPs complained that the regional government was not giving them the proper attention they had received at the beginning.

This shows the deterioration in the quality of the horizontal relationship between IDPs and host communities as the duration of displacement became extended, regardless of their common ethnicity. The vertical relationships between the government and both the IDPs and the host community were also negatively affected. Internal displacement is expected to last for only a short period of time; when it is protracted (without any development intervention in place) it harms local social cohesion.

7.5 Competition over resources

The rate at which tensions rise is affected not only by the length of time that people are displaced, but also by the host community's perception of the likely impact of their hosting of displaced people. This is a function of the community's own sense of resource and livelihood security. In Southern Ethiopia, 79,000 people were displaced as a result of flooding in November 2023. The attempt of the displaced to migrate to Hamer *woreda* caused tension immediately, as the Hamer were worried that they would be unable to host such a large IDP population, given the scarce resource base they were living on.

Somali Region has been praised for its efforts to implement durable solutions programming for IDPs. The Regional Disaster Risk Management Bureau, with the support of UN organisations and international NGOs, has been working on the relocation of IDPs from het Qoloji and Millennium camps in Dire Dawa. Relocation has been designed and practised based on clan ties, on the assumption that resettling IDPs from the same clans strengthens social cohesion between IDPs and the local communities. However, "the relocated IDPs have land for houses but not for agricultural purposes because the host community has refused to provide additional land for productive use" (Abdirahman et al, 2021:21). Over 300 households relocated from Qoloji could not get land from their clan four years after their resettlement, regardless of the kinship ties they share. Among the Somali, land is the communal property of the clan, and it is considered strange to purchase one's clan's land. The inability of IDPs to access land thus created discontent between clan members.

Even in areas where officials are willing to convince the locals to accept the relocated IDPs with whom they share ethnic and clan commonalities, accessing productive resources, mainly land, has been difficult. In one incident, Siti Zone officials, who could not persuade the local communities to allocate land freely, were forced to purchase agricultural land for 90 IDP households relocated from Dire Dawa. The officials' intention was to help IDPs obtain land without negatively affecting the harmony of the clan to which both the IDPs and the host community belong.

7.6 The role of aid and assistance

Aid plays a crucial role in enabling or hindering social cohesion in two ways. First, our study shows that the presence or absence of aid and assistance for the displaced community is vital in its relations with local communities. IDPs have left behind all their property and belongings and therefore need support. Part of the reason for this erosion of relations comes from the fact that all concerned – IDPs, local hosts, government and NGOs providing support – have tended to approach internal displacement as

a short-term problem to be addressed through emergency interventions. As the displacement becomes more protracted, development interventions are needed to support the entire displacement-affected community. Failure to provide such support accelerates the breakdown in local social cohesion as everyone slides further into destitution. Most of the host communities are extremely poor and vulnerable to livelihood shocks. As a result, the positive experiences of local communities supporting IDPs often do not last long and the situation can easily become tense.

Second, the inclusivity or non-inclusivity of aid is also very important in fostering local relationships. Providing assistance separately to the displaced and neglecting the host community adversely affects social cohesion. As the selected cases discussed below show, the existing harmonious relationships between the displaced and the host communities occur where there is well planned, inclusive and sustained assistance.

8 Positive experiences of social cohesion in displacement

The cases we identified demonstrating positive experiences of social cohesion are not necessarily advanced or perfect. Rather, we believe they tend to show some positive experiences and trends in building social cohesion in displacement situations within the local contexts.

8.1 Inclusive economic activity in Dollo Ado

Inclusive livelihood projects in Dollo Ado have been an exemplary case of refugee involvement in livelihood and self-reliance activities, and of the private sector's biggest investment to support displacement-affected communities. The IKEA Foundation has built a 29-km-long irrigation scheme. The RRS and UNHCR selected 2,000 households (half from the refugee and half from the host community) and organised them into cooperatives. When the project started in 2012, there was no mention of social cohesion in the project's objectives. The Foundation's stated objective was that "Refugees will have diversified livelihood opportunities resulting in a global increase in household income through skills and vocational training, paid employment, agricultural programmes, livestock support, and business development" (Betts et al, 2019:10).

Currently, the project is the biggest livelihood project in Ethiopia where the displaced and the host community are working together. This has created a sense of shared purpose in the displacement-affected communities in Dollo Ado and contributed to social cohesion. In addition to the households organised into the cooperatives, many refugees and host communities have initiated sharecropping. The project came at a time when pastoral livelihoods were facing a crisis of viability after protracted drought, so the host community were also happy to share their land and engage in common projects with the refugees.

The Dollo Ado project has also been successful because it uses the structural opportunity required for building social cohesion in a displacement situation: the availability of resources (Ganale River for irrigation and infrastructural development), social bonds (shared ethnicity, language, religion, culture) and a shared history of displacement and other vulnerabilities. This harmonious relationship has been emphasised in the findings of a survey, where 91% of Dollo Ado informants responded that the relationship between the two groups was positive (Betts et al, 2022, p 28).

There was also noticeable support from UNHCR, the RRS (representing the federal government) and the Somali regional government. The presence of a strong social bond facilitating the sense of shared purpose was strongly complemented by the state's interest in supporting the project. Thus, the project also noticeably improved the relationship between the displacement-affected community and the organisations administering the refugee camp – UNHCR, the RRS and the Somali regional government.

8.2 Good Neighbors Ethiopia – Tsore Camp

Good Neighbors Ethiopia is one of the few NGOs that directly works on social cohesion between refugees and the host community at Tsore camp in Benishangul-Gumuz Region. The camp which, according to UNHCR (2023), hosts over 43,000 refugees mainly from South Sudan, was known for refugee–host community tensions, including killings on both sides. A social cohesion project established a farm by selecting 50 households from both the refugee and the host community. It organises music and sport events with the objective of creating opportunities for the interaction of refugees and hosts, and restoring the trust lost from the previous conflicts. The project was started only in January 2023 and thus this story shows the trend of the relationship between the refugees and the host after its start. When rations were suspended between May and November 2023, around 24,000 refugees, mainly young people, left the camps looking for wage labour and food and faced no security concerns from the host community. Wage labour in Benishangul-Gumuz is agricultural (ploughing, weeding, harvesting) on fields owned by the host community, and in mining. The practice of social cohesion in this project in the Tsore camp and its surroundings is advancing peaceful coexistence and a harmonious relationship between the refugees and host communities. This shows how much the project has built horizontal trust between them.

Refugees and host communities in Benishangul do not share social bonds based on ethnicity, language or religion. However, such social and economic interactions have created a bond that demonstrates that peaceful coexistence between hosts and refugees is possible if supported by resources and proper planning. The size of the engagement might be small and its implementation is not yet durable enough to speak about success; however, the project managers consider it to be a success story, given the previous history of the refugee camp.

8.3 Better employment opportunities for hosts and refugees in Kebribeyah

The success of the project 'Supporting Socio-economic and Better Employment Opportunities for Refugees and Host Communities' funded by the EU and implemented by Mercy Corps and the Danish Refugee Council in Kebribeyah, Somali Region, lies in its contextualisation of host–refugee relations. Kebribeyah refugee camp is over 30 years old. During its existence, many refugees have been resettled in the global North. Although it is difficult to obtain official figures, local sources estimate that close to 10,000 people might have resettled from Kebribeyah. Not only the refugees but also many individuals from the host community have managed to be resettled through marriage and kinship ties with refugees.

Under this project, Mercy Corps and the Danish Refugee Council supported 120 individuals and families able to mobilise some money from their diaspora relatives. The project put out a call for a business plan equally from refugees and the host community. The funding scheme was set up such that the project covers 50% of the capital needed to establish a small business of the applicant's choice, with the applicant covering the remaining 50%. However, it was mandatory for the applicant to mobilise 40% of the business capital from a diaspora relative. In other words, the capital needed to establish a business was to be mobilised through the project, the applicant and the applicant's diaspora relatives.

The strengths of the project are as follows. (1) The arrangement has benefited both the refugees and the host community. The refugees and the host share the same market and benefit from each other. (2) It had correctly identified available opportunity structures in the region, namely remittances and business. (3) Many of the beneficiaries are women and young people. In Somali Regional State,

particularly among the displacement-affected communities, women are the household breadwinners. They are very active in economic life and local networks. The women's involvement has usually been informal, as they did not have work permits. Similarly, in the refugee context many young people are unemployed, and many of them are given training that does not translate into jobs. According to the directives that have emerged following the 2019 Revised Refugee Proclamation, participation in such joint projects helps with getting a work permit. Thus, such an initiative was highly appreciated.

In this situation an innovative project helped to strengthen the social cohesion in the locality where the refugees and their hosts had lived together for over three decades. Although the project could not continue beyond its first phase, it had encouraged many people to engage in business in the target area and had the power to improve the quality of relationships between the two communities.

8.4 Joint approach to durable solutions for IDPs

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UN Habitat are undertaking a joint four-year programme (December 2022 to October 2026) to strengthen the resilience of disaster-affected communities in Somali and Oromia regional states with funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The main objective of the joint programme is to support durable solutions for communities displaced by climate change and conflict.

What makes this project worth discussing as a positive experience is its approach, ie the joint implementation and inclusion of both the displaced and the hosts in the programme. Following the strategy designed by Somali Region, the project mainly focuses on the relocation and local integration of the displaced communities. The three entities are contributing their specific expertise to the joint programme: IOM is leading the community-based planning (community discussions, engaging the clan leaders, intention surveys and peace building); UN Habitat is working on spatial or site selections, including access to markets, water, education and health); and FAO is working on how to build a livelihood for the displaced community through involvement in agriculture.

The implementation of the project is at its early stage. We are interested in presenting the project as a learning case because, so far, the displacement-affected community has either not been properly consulted or site selections for the relocation or local integration have not been done properly. In addition, the community's engagement in livelihood activities has not been properly planned. UN Habitat is studying the local integration of Qoloji IDP camp, the biggest in Somali Region, which has been a protracted host to IDPs since 2016. In most parts of Ethiopia thus far, creating durable solutions for IDPs has entailed returning them to their place of origin, sometimes without ensuring their safety. Thus, this case is worth discussing and its success will be part of a future study.

9 Conclusions

Ethiopia is struggling with multiple conflicts, political polarisation and social fragmentation. Youth unemployment is high. Ethnic hostility, territorial claims and counter-claims, religious tensions and displacement are having a serious negative effect on the social fabric that binds the diverse groups and institutions. In this regard, the impact of conflict on social cohesion is clearly negative. Even the claim that conflict might increase in-group social cohesion is difficult to support with empirical evidence in the Ethiopian case. The ongoing tensions and conflicts in Ethiopia have negatively affected the relationships within and between ethnic groups. The same has happened in religious institutions. Tensions have arisen not only between religious institutions but also within them. The problems are not only horizontally between groups or institutions and individuals but also vertically between society and the state. The relationship between organised entities representing ethnic groups and the state and various religious institutions and the state is full of tensions. The quality of these relationships, which we have broadly defined as social cohesion, has been adversely affected.

To analyse the specific contexts of the relationship between IDPs and host communities we adopted the first four of the six factors of social cohesion in a displacement situation summarised by Holloway and Sturridge (2022). (See Section 3 above.) In addition, we suggest two additional factors which are important in the Ethiopian context: intensified local identity politics and politicisation of refugees and violent conflict. We have discussed each of these based on the local context. The intensification of identity politics in Ethiopia, and the fact that most refugees are hosted in regions where they share an ethnic identity with the host community, makes local contexts crucial to understanding relationships between the displaced and host communities.

In most cases social cohesion is strong in situations where the displaced and the host share the same social bonds (ethnicity, language, cultural practices and history). However, social bonds have proven insufficient in situations where resource scarcity has led to competition. The host communities are mostly as poor and vulnerable as the displaced; this makes the availability of external development assistance crucial in building social cohesion. Resources, mainly land, are crucial in the relationship between the displaced and the host community. A scarcity of productive land usually creates a sense of competition and negatively affects social cohesion, even in a situation where the displaced and the host share commonality.

The intensification of identity-based politics and conflicts has also severely affected the relationship between IDPs and host communities. In some areas such as Gambella, refugees have become part of the local identity politics through their shared ethnicity with one of the local ethnic groups. In other areas, such as Addis Ababa, where the majority of the refugees are Eritreans, the dynamic national politics and conflict have negatively affected refugees' relationship with the host community.

Recommendations

1. There is a need for more comprehensive study of social cohesion. This short report is based on a review of the literature and expert interviews. Ethiopia is in a very fragile situation. The country is struggling with multiple conflicts, political polarisation and social fragmentation. Violent and antagonistic discourses in the media are worrying – all negatively affect social cohesion. On the other hand, all the government offices we visited seemed open to professional advice, and this requires comprehensive qualitative and quantitative study.

2. There is a need to open a genuine space for dialogue at various levels, including regional and local. We recognise the work of the National Dialogue Commission. National-level elite dialogue may inform elites about each other's interest across ethnic lines. However, the local and camp settings should continuously support and deal with grievances between the displaced and the host community horizontally, and with misunderstandings between the displaced and their hosts and the different institutions, including the state. This would create opportunities to discuss protection, peace building, livelihoods, resilience and development.

3. Social cohesion, either directly or indirectly, should be considered a cross-cutting issue in any intervention. Projects and interventions should address the drivers of conflict or be based on conflict-sensitive analysis and a 'do no harm' approach, with an intended consequence of building social cohesion. The understanding is that conflict-sensitive analysis will trigger social cohesion activities.

4. There is a strong need for context-specific economic inclusion of the displaced communities. Our findings show that the quality of both horizontal and vertical relationships is strong in situations where social bonds (ethnic similarities and historically harmonious relationships) have been complemented by the economic inclusion of the displaced and the host communities. In situations of protracted displacement, which is increasingly common, the economic inclusion should be developmental. Too often the approach is piecemeal, short-term emergency support which leads to tensions when it ends or is unable to cover people's needs.

5. Our findings also clearly show the positive correlation between the regional states' political willingness to integrate displaced populations into the local economy and harmonious relations between the displaced and the host community. Somali Regional State has been an outstanding example in this regard. This could be replicated in other regional states based on their own contexts.

6. All interventions should include women and young people. Their role is crucial in social cohesion. Our findings show the extent to which women are the breadwinners within households, for instance among the Somali. They are very involved in livelihood activities and networks. Young people, on the other hand, are mostly unemployed and desperate. Thus, interventions should pay special attention to women and the young.

7. There is also a need for localisation: in other words, local initiatives based on knowledge of the local contexts should be encouraged and supported. Donors should increase funding for local partners and support them with capacity building instead of investing a lot of resources in international partners who are less knowledgeable about specific local contexts.

8. Positive usage of the media (particularly social media) should be cultivated. Stakeholders may need to have projects on social media that counter negative and polarised discourses, bringing together a team of diverse ethnic and religious origins to build trust by emphasising everyone's common interests.

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Appendix 1

Name and number of institutions from which informants were interviewed

Number	Institution	Number of individuals	Status
1.	Ministry of Peace	3	Government
2.	Refugees and Returnees Service	2	Government
3.	Ministry of Women and Social Affairs	1	Government
4.	Ethiopian Human Rights Commission	1	Government/independent
5.	Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission	1	Government/independent
6.	Disaster Risk Management Commission	1	Government
7.	Disaster Risk Management Bureau	2	Regional government
8.	Research Chair for Forced Displacement, Addis Ababa University	1	Public
9.	Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University	1	Public
10.	Department of Political Science, Addis Ababa University	1	Public
11.	Centre of Migration Studies, Jigjiga University	1	Public
12.	Bahir Dar University	1	Public
13.	Mekele University	2	Public
14.	Gambella University	2	Public
15.	Independent Research Think-tank	2	Independent
16.	Independent researcher	1	Private
17.	UNHCR	1	UN
18.	UNDP	1	UN
19.	GIZ	2	NGO/partner organisation
20.	Cities Alliance	2	NGO/partner organisation
21.	ECHO	1	EU
22.	Good Neighbours	1	NGO/partner organisation
23.	World Bank	1	World Bank
24.	Ethiopian Inter-religious Council	2	Faith-based organisation
25.	ECFE	1	Faith-based organisation
26.	Mahibere Kidusan	1	Faith-based organisation
27.	Netherlands embassy	1	Embassy
28.	Swiss embassy	1	Embassy