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January 2023



# Conflict and displacement in Ethiopia: the case of Benishangul- Gumuz Regional State and Konso Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region

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This report was prepared by Fekadu Adugna and Ketema Debala.

This report was prepared with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or the EU Trust Fund for Africa.

Suggested citation: Adugna, F., and Debala, K. January 2023. 'Conflict and displacement in Ethiopia: the case of Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State and Konso Zone, Southern

Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region.' London: EU Trust Fund for Africa (Horn of Africa Window) Research and Evidence Facility.

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Funded by the European Union  
Emergency Trust Fund for Africa.

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# List of acronyms

ANE	Action for the Needy in Ethiopia
BGRS	Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State
CSA	Central Statistical Agency
DASSC	Development and Social Service Commission
DRMC	Disaster Risk Management Commission
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office
EEAS	European External Action Service
EPO	Ethiopian Peace Observatory
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ERCS	Ethiopian Red Cross Society
FGD	Focus group discussion
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDPs	Internally displaced people
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KDA	Konso Development Association
KII	Key informant interview
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	(UN) Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OLA	Oromo Liberation Army
PIE	Plan International Ethiopia
PIN	Peoples in Need
SNNPRS	South Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UAG	Unidentified armed group

# Executive summary

Since 2017, Ethiopia has been experiencing internal displacement as a result of violent conflict and natural disasters. The magnitude of these internal displacements is unprecedented in the country's history. The aim of this study is to investigate the causes of the current conflict in Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State (BGRS) and the Konso Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) and thereby to examine the short- and long-term humanitarian responses, as well as durable solutions to these crises. The two areas were selected based on the continuing conflict-induced displacement there. The study drew on existing literature, including academic, journalistic, grey literature, and other sources. It also relied on a short period of fieldwork in the two purposively selected study areas – Assosa Zone in BGRS and Konso Zone in SNNPR. In both study sites, in-depth interviews with internally displaced people (IDPs), host community members and experts, focus group discussions (FGDs), informal discussions and observations were used. IDPs and the host community were interviewed in and around camps, urban centres and villages where the two live together. The experts comprised government officials, civil servants, local and international NGOs and UN organisations.

The study found that, while the politicisation of ethnic identity and competition over territory are common in all the regions, there are also features that vary across regions. Territorial claims and counterclaims against a background of intensive politicisation of ethnicity have been the major problems in the conflicts. The magnitude of the contestations, the historical depth of the problem and the kinds of actor involved are crucial. In SNNPRS, the claims and counterclaims have taken the form of demands for ethnic identity recognition and self-administration. This has caused a regional emphasis on the making and unmaking of administrative units. As a result, controversies over administrative units have become essential features of the conflicts in the SNNPRS in general and Konso in particular.

The political factors causing displacement in Konso are of two types. The first is the claim for a separate administrative unit named Gumayde special district by a particular, multi-ethnic group of people. This group was not only disappointed by the sudden decision to dissolve the Segen Area Peoples' Zone (SAPZ) but also rejected incorporation into Konso Zone. In this cause, claimants for Gumayde have organised their own armed group to attack Konso Zone and those who oppose their demands for an administrative unit. In this way, regardless of their number, the Gumaydes have managed to attack and displace the majority Konso, who oppose their demands. The second factor is the contestation over territory around administrative borders, and displacement of those who are considered 'outsiders'. Thus the Alle displaced the Konso, whom they accuse of encroaching on their territory. By destroying the latter's assets, the Alle farmers want to discourage the displaced Konso from returning to their villages. The displacement factors therefore involve not just those in the conflict hotspots, but the political intentions behind the displacement of the minority from the contested territory.

In BGRS, territorial claims have multiple dimensions, ranging from disputes over regional boundaries with neighbouring regional states; competition over land and natural resources within the region; and historical and symbolic contestations over territory and power between



'indigenous' and 'non-indigenous' inhabitants of the region. Differences in land use between the Gumuz and non-Gumuz, issues of demography and political representation, memories of historical and structural exclusion of the Gumuz by the non-Gumuz, and the involvement of multiple actors, including groups from Amhara, Oromia and Tigray, have complicated the problem. The conflict in BGRS may also have attracted 'hidden' foreign actors thanks to controversy over the Grand Renaissance Dam on the Nile. These foreign actors are allegedly supporting the primary actors (indigenous inhabitants) in the conflict.

As a result of these multiple conflicts, the past five years have seen the highest ever number of internal displacements, in a magnitude unprecedented in the history of each region and the country at large. In BGRS, for example, close to half a million people – about half the region's population – have been displaced. Geographically, all three zones of the region and 17 out of 23 districts (comprising 71% of the region's districts), have been affected by conflict and displacement. Beyond the figure for IDPs, the displacement situation in BGRS is complex and requires a very focused response. The complexity primarily lies in the diversity of the IDPs in terms of their ethnic identity and their place of origin. They come from many different backgrounds – most are from Amhara, Gumuz and Oromia. While the majority have been displaced from and hosted within the region, a significant number have fled to the neighbouring Amhara and Oromia regional states. In Konso Zone, where three out of four *woredas* (districts) have been affected by displacement, a third of its population has been displaced in the past two years. In contrast to BGRS, the IDPs and the host community in Konso Zone share ethnic, clan and linguistic commonality. They also share a belief that the conflict that displaced the IDPs was between the Konso and ethnic 'Others'. In fact, regardless of the practical difficulty they face, the host communities have not only been sympathetic to the IDPs but also very emotional about the problems they are facing.

The conflicts and displacements have caused the loss of many lives, disruption to livelihoods for millions of IDPs and host community members, and tremendous infrastructural damage; many IDPs complain that they do not get sufficient food from humanitarian organisations. They live in a situation of limbo – livelihood insecurity and uncertainty about the next steps in their lives, including where and whether to return, as they are considered 'outsiders' in the places from which they have been displaced. The resources of the host communities have been exhausted in the process of supporting the IDPs. In BGRS the host community complained that competition over scarce resources, including daily wage labour, has been affecting their lives and the relationship between the IDPs and host community is deteriorating.

In BGRS, the non-Gumuz displaced population fled to towns and communal spaces such as schools, *kebele* (ward) offices, clinics and so on, while many IDPs belonging to the Gumuz community fled to the bush and are staying in remote, inaccessible rural areas,<sup>1</sup> demonstrating the difference between the historically marginalised Gumuz and the 'settlers' in terms of their relationship with the state. For the Gumuz, regardless of the political changes in the post-1991 era, the towns and communal places are still dominated by 'non-indigenous' groups who enjoy better access to media. This has caused an imbalance in the coverage of the displacement situation in the region, with the displacement of the Gumuz far less covered. In the case of Konso, however, the population is facing the interlinked, trifurcated problems of conflict,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Ethiopia complex crisis' [available at [https://www.acaps.org/country/ethiopia/crisis/complex-crisis?acaps\\_mode=slow&show\\_mode=1](https://www.acaps.org/country/ethiopia/crisis/complex-crisis?acaps_mode=slow&show_mode=1)]. Accessed 28 December 2021.

displacement and drought. Most of the IDPs have lost all their assets: their houses were burnt down and their livestock either stolen, dead from drought and starvation or sold as the households struggled for survival.

Ethiopia formulated a national policy and strategy for disaster risk management in 2013 and the Ethiopian Disaster Risk Management Commission (DRMC) is now entrusted with the responsibility for coordinating issues of risk and emergency response to disasters and recovery. This does not cover matters related to conflict, however. The Commission has been working as a focal point to coordinate protection and assistance at the national level with other government bodies and international donors of humanitarian assistance and with regional focal points. Ethiopia ratified the African Union (AU) Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (also called the Kampala Convention, KC), in 2020 amid the ongoing massive internal displacement in the country. This has been widely acknowledged as a significant achievement for Ethiopia. However, there are two interrelated problems. The first is that no specific legal framework explicitly governing all types of IDPs has been formulated as a result of and following the ratification of the KC. Ethiopia follows a federal system of governance, with multilevel authorities responsible for handling IDP issues. However, there is no clear legal framework imposing a responsibility to protect and assist IDPs on the Regional States and local governments: the latter two being situated closer to the IDPs, they would be able to provide better service. Second, Ethiopia's existing policy and strategy documents focus on disaster risk management, which tends to cover the natural-disaster factors of displacement rather than human-made or conflict-induced displacements. Hence, an intervention is needed to urge the Ethiopian government to formulate comprehensive policy and strategy documents indicating how the multilevel government structures should work with the concerned national and international organisations.

Moreover, Ethiopia has also established an Inter-Ministerial Taskforce (IMTF), part of the Ministry of Justice, led by the Ministry of Peace. The Taskforce is comprised of different ministries, including those of Peace, Health, Water, Energy & Irrigation, Education, Agriculture and Transport, and of the Attorney General and the Disaster Risk Management Commission (DRMC). The Taskforce has a mandate not only to evaluate the situation of IDPs and to find ways to return displaced people to their places of origin but also to ensure sustainable peace for returnees with the relevant regional states, and with other national and international humanitarian assistance agencies. The regional DRMC both in BGRS and the SNNPRS has created councils, and technical and working groups for dealing with IDP issues in the regions. The councils run meetings with high-level executives and partners, chaired by the presidents of the regions. In Konso, the zonal DRM office based in the Bureau of Agriculture is more engaged than the regional one in actively working with different government sectors and humanitarian organisations.

Currently, there are several UN bodies, international NGOs (INGOs) and local NGOs based in Assosa, the capital of BGRS, and Karat, the capital of Konso Zone, engaging in emergency humanitarian activities. Nonetheless, the response to IDPs in both states [has not been enough for two reasons: 1) resource constraints, since the IDP problems are spread across the country and resources are over-stretched; and 2) access constraints, ie even with the resources available, insecurity causes problems in accessing certain areas. A good example

in this regard is Kamashi Zone in BGRS, which has been inaccessible to humanitarian organisations.

The study found that the overwhelming majority of IDPs would opt for safe and voluntary return to their place of origin. However, returning IDPs and measures for durable solutions are contingent upon several other factors, the most important being an end to the violent conflict that displaced them. So far, in both BGRS and Konso Zone, the return of IDPs has produced a terrible outcome. In Konso, for example, two rounds have been tried, with big investments in rebuilding people's livelihoods. The return was voluntary, and both the government and humanitarian organisations had supported the process through rebuilding individual households and public infrastructure. However, on both occasions, the return took place without ensuring peace and security in the areas whence people had been displaced; each time, they were entirely displaced following the outbreak of another round of conflict, causing another round of life and economic costs. Something similar happened in Sedal *woreda* in Kamashi Zone. In Metekel, since July 2022 progress has been reported, with the return of many thousands of IDPs following local reconciliation processes between the Gumuz and the settler communities. However, this reconciliation has not included the armed groups operating in the region and, with the resumption of the war in Tigray towards the end of August 2022, there were reports of frustration among the returnees. In other words, pursuant to Article 11 of the Kampala Convention on satisfactory conditions for voluntary return, the state organs have barely supported IDPs in making a free and informed choice on whether to return or not, based on a sufficient assessment of the situation.

Thus, taking account of these findings, this small study recommends a retargeting or designing of displacement impact-oriented multi-sectoral programmes and projects in both IDP hosting areas and people's places of origin. These should include reconciliation, livelihood support, reconstruction of shelters and public infrastructure, rehabilitation, psychosocial support, continuous dialogue, and peace education, as well as the development of clear legal and institutional frameworks for finding durable solutions to internal displacement. The areas of intervention for the relevant bodies in general and the EU in particular are summarised as follows.

- Support the development of clear policy, law and institutional frameworks at the national and local levels for bringing durable solutions to conflict and displacement.
- Support conflict resolution and peace-building efforts.
- Provide mental health and psychosocial support to IDPs and IDP hosting/return areas.
- Extend livelihood support to restore productivity.
- Reconstruct shelters, public services and basic infrastructure.
- Give priority to women, children, disabled persons and other vulnerable groups in emergency and rehabilitation.
- Target young people in peace building and reconstruction of regions affected by conflict and displacement.



# 1 Overview of conflict and displacement in Ethiopia

## 1.1. Introduction

Ethiopia's history of state building has been marked by violent conflicts and the remarkable challenges of creating a multi-ethnic state (Keller, 2005). In the past few years, the country has faced an unprecedented increase in violent conflict. Since the change of government in 2018, the magnitude and the intensity of the violence, the associated human costs, and the subsequent internal displacement have been notable.

Following the conflict that started around the borders of Oromia and Somali Regional States in 2017, new conflicts erupted in the areas of Gedeo–Guji, Oromia–Benishangul-Gumuz, the border areas of Amhara–Benishangul and the Konso Zone and its neighbouring districts. The nature of these conflicts is complex and mainly linked to identity politics, the burden of historical pasts, and competition over resources, mainly territory. There is also a growing tendency towards the proliferation of armed groups in different regions such as Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Amhara and in the Segen area of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS), which includes the Konso Zone.

The growing number and intensity of the conflicts have created an unprecedented level of conflict-induced internal displacement in Ethiopia over the past five years. For instance, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) dramatically increased from 296,000 in 2016, to nearly three million in 2018.<sup>2</sup> This dramatic rise continued, as more than 5.1 million new displacements were recorded in 2021, which was, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), the highest annual figure ever recorded for a single country.<sup>3</sup> The number further rose to 5,582,000 in March 2022.<sup>4</sup> Given such severe conflict and displacement in Ethiopia, the overall objectives of this study are to examine the implications of the different ongoing conflicts for displacement and to look at the ways in which the short- and long-term humanitarian needs of IDPs are being provided for. The study also considers the prospects for promoting and achieving durable solutions in a safe, voluntary, dignified and comprehensive manner.

The report commences with a brief presentation of cases of recent and ongoing conflict in different parts of the country (excluding the northern conflict), in order to examine the complexities, commonalities and differences in their drivers and dynamics. However, the focus of the study is on Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State (BGRS) and Konso Zone in the

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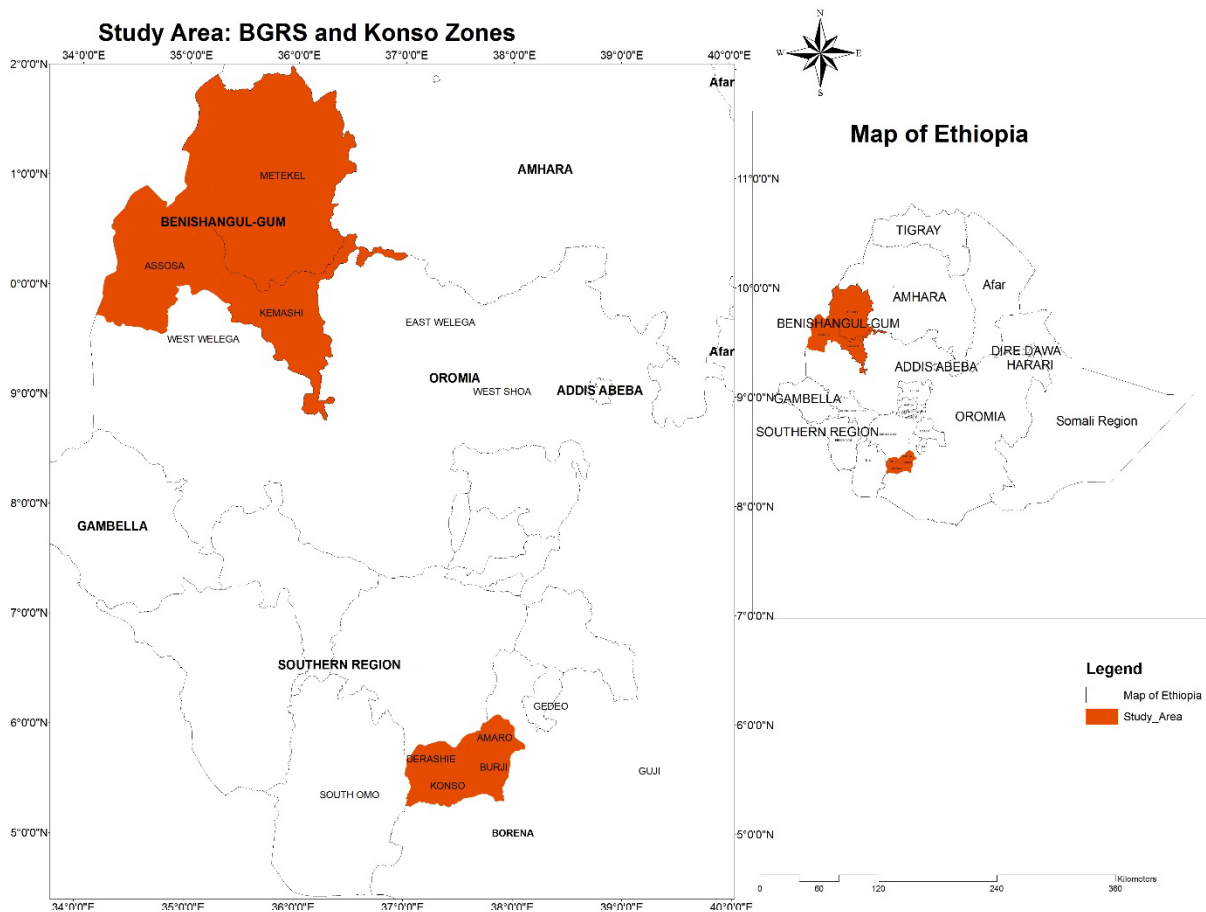
2 IDMC, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/ethiopia/2019>.

3 IDMC, Ethiopia, 2021, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/ethiopia>

4 UNHCR, 'Response to IDPs in Ethiopia'. Fact Sheet, January to March 2022.

SNNPRS, where we conducted an empirical study (see Figure 1). Thus, by focusing on the two study regions, the report discusses the magnitude of internal displacement, its effects on IDPs and host communities, and the responses by multiple actors, before forwarding recommendations on how to address the problem sustainably.

**Figure 1: Map of the study sites**



## 1.2. Methods of the study

The research was guided by two overarching and overlapping questions that influence one another. The first question focused around understanding the drivers of the conflicts and their differential impacts on the displacement of people. The second dealt with the current policies and practices of the Ethiopian government, as well as those of the AU, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and relevant members of the humanitarian and development organisations in responding to internal displacement. Some of the policies and practices are assessed *vis-à-vis* the AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (known as the Kampala Convention, KC).

The empirical study was conducted in two regions: Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State (BGRS) and Konso Zone, SNNPRS. The two areas were selected based on the continuing conflict-induced displacement in the regions. In BGRS, fieldwork was only possible in Assosa Zone, as this was the only zone accessible as a result of security concerns. We purposively selected two IDP camps in Bambasi *woreda* (district), mainly based on their accessibility and

the diversity of the IDPs there. All IDPs hosted in Bambasi came from outside the *woreda*. Most of them came from about five *woredas* – Babo Gambel, Gulliso, Qondala, Begi and Mendi – in West Wollega, Oromia and two *woredas* in BGRS – Sedal *woreda* in Kamashi Zone and Moa-Komo special *woreda*. In SNNPRS, the study focused on Konso Zone and its neighbouring *woredas*. In Konso two IDP camps were selected in Segen Zuria *woreda*; we also interviewed urban IDPs in Karat town and IDPs living temporarily integrated in host communities.

The study team discussed with European External Action Service (EEAS) Addis Ababa and European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) staff members before departing for fieldwork. In both regions, the team started field research with in-depth discussions with Disaster Risk Management Commission (DRMC) offices. This gave the team an entry point and helped us in understanding the magnitude of the problems and in mapping who was doing what (UN agencies, international and local NGOs and other humanitarian organisations). Discussions were held with four UN agencies: the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (Unicef). Other international organisations working in the regions, such as Peoples in Need (PIN), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) were also consulted. There were also consultations with local humanitarian organisations such as the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS), Konso Development Association (KDA), Action for the Needy in Ethiopia (ANE) and Plan International, Ethiopia, etc. Several government offices are also actively working with humanitarian agencies in responding to displacement. Key informants were drawn from Regional and Zonal-level security, health, water and education agencies, as well as Women, Children and Youth Bureaus; these were also instrumental in providing the information herein. Above all, the empirical data came from IDPs (hosted in camps and urban centres, and those living with the host community) and the host communities themselves.

In terms of tools, we primarily used in-depth interviews with IDPs and host communities and key informant interviews (KIIs) with experts. Focus group discussions (FGDs), informal discussions and observations were also utilised. The project team spent 16 days in Assosa Zone, BGRS and Konso Zone. We conducted over 50 interviews with experts, IDPs and host communities. We also held six FGDs with IDPs and host communities and three virtual discussions with experts at EEAS Addis Ababa and ECHO.

## 2 Drivers of conflict in Ethiopia

The conflicts taking place in different parts of Ethiopia are complex, multidimensional and multi-layered, and involve multiple actors. Some are protracted and others are new. Some are recurrent and others are sporadic. Although the politicisation of ethnicity and mobilisation of the parties in conflict along ethnic lines appear a common feature of the conflicts in all regional states, there are differences in the driving factors, actors and dynamics across regions.

The post-1991 ethno-territorial-based administrative arrangement in Ethiopia has generally been taken as a major contextual factor in the various conflicts in the country. The study has broadly identified two major reasons for conflicts in different parts of Ethiopia: territorial claims and counterclaims, and border disputes; and the (re)structuring of administrative units. These two factors are overlapping and at times reinforce each other. They also vary in their manifestations, based on the contexts of the different regional states. These drivers of conflict and the subsequent displacements are explained by using regional cases, where conflicts and displacements have been evident in the past five years. Territorial claims and border disputes have been the major factors and characterising features of conflict in Ethiopia since the early 1990s (Kefale, 2009; Adugna 2011; Feyissa, 2015, Regassa, 2007). Almost every region has some form of territorial and border dispute with its neighbouring region. The three examples of the most protracted and violent conflicts caused by territorial claims and border disputes used in this study are the areas of: 1) Afar–Somali; 2) Oromia–Somali; and 3) Gedeo-Guji (SNNPR–Oromia). The subsequent sections first briefly discuss these three cases based on the available literature.

### 2.1 Afar-Somali conflict

The pastoral lowland areas bordering the Afar and Somali Regional States are known for their intractable conflicts over scarce pastoral resources (Yesuf, 1997). Conflict between the Afar and the Issa Somali has historically been one of the most violent in the Middle Awash Valley of Ethiopia, dating back to the late 19th century. In the past several decades, the conflict has been on the increase in scale and frequency, as the ratio of human and livestock populations to grazing and browsing resources continues to rise (Mohammed, 2010; Feyissa, 2015).

The post-1991 ethnic-based federal arrangement has transformed the longstanding competition over pasture and water into a clearly defined dispute over territory by taking the form of interregional territorial claims (Mohammed, 2010; Markakis, 2003). In this regard, the dispute between Afar Regional State and Somali Regional State, and the local violence have concentrated on three contested *kebeles*:<sup>5</sup> Garba-Ise, Undhufo and Adaytu. The *kebeles* are inhabited by the Somali Issa clan, while the Afar claim historical ownership over them. These contestations are manifested in terms of political entitlement over these areas from historical and demographic perspectives, respectively (Feyissa, 2015). The contested *kebeles* have

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<sup>5</sup> A *kebele* is the lowest territorial administrative unit in Ethiopia.

three crucial resources that are a source of violent conflict: the Awash River, the Addis Ababa–Djibouti highway and the Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway. The Awash River is critical for the Afar and Somali Regional State pastoralists, while the Addis Ababa–Djibouti transport corridor entertains 90% of Ethiopia’s import and export trade. The Somali have historically controlled these strategic places and want to join the neighbouring Somali Regional State, but the Afar Regional State strongly opposes this.<sup>6</sup>

Since 2018, violent conflict over these *kebeles* has increased greatly. In December 2018, a dispute in Undhufo *kebele* turned violent and bloody when Afar regional police intervened to break up a demonstration by local Issa, in which they attempted to pull down the Afar Regional State flag and replace it with that of the Somali Regional State. The demonstrators demanded that the administration of the special *kebeles* be incorporated into Somali Regional State. According to the Ethiopian Peace Observatory (EPO), the violence in 2019 left more than 30 people dead, and it further escalated in 2021. According to EPO, citing two global news channels in 2021,<sup>7</sup> an estimated 100 fatalities were recorded.<sup>8</sup> More clashes occurred in the context of heightened political tensions during the run-up to the national elections in 2021. In July of that year, according to a Somali scholar writing in *Ethiopian Insights*, over 300 Somalis were killed by Afar militias (Ismail, 2022). Any time violent conflict happens, the Somali youth block the transportation lines, thereby causing fuel shortages, in order to put pressure on the federal government.<sup>9</sup>

In May 2022, the president of Afar Regional State visited Jigjiga, the capital of Somali Regional State, and the two regions, with the participation of the Minister of Peace, agreed to pull their special police from the contested *kebeles* as a step towards ending the recurring conflicts.<sup>10</sup> However, within two months of the agreement, and as recently as 11 August 2022, violence erupted again between Afar and Somali armed forces (militias and Liyu Police) in Undhufo, Danlahelay and other disputed locations.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2 Oromi- Somali conflict

Like the conflict between Afar and Somali Regional State, the Oromia–Somali conflict has also primarily emanated from disputes over territory (Adugna, 2011; Beyene, 2022). Again, like the Afar–Somali conflict, conflict between Oromo and Somali pastoralists has long historical antecedents, well pre-dating the post-1991 political context, and it had already developed into suspicion between the political elites of the two groups. The post-1991 ethno-territorial federalism has contributed to clearly and officially defining the disputed territories. This has also expanded the magnitude of the territorial claims and counterclaims. Since then, nationalist politics has come to significantly shape local struggles throughout the Oromia–Somali borderlands. The two regional states share a border of more than 1,400 kilometres, and their inhabitants follow multiple ways of life, ie there are agro-pastoralists, pastoralists and

<sup>6</sup> ‘Afar–Somali border conflict – Ethiopia Peace Observatory’ (acleddata.com).

<sup>7</sup> It cited the BBC, 6 April 2021 and Al Jazeera, 7 April 2021.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Afar–Somali border conflict – Ethiopia Peace Observatory’ (acleddata.com)’.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Protesters close road, rail links between Djibouti, Addis Ababa – official’. Reuters.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Afar, Somali regions to remove special forces from conflict areas’ (borkena.com).

<sup>11</sup> *Ethiopia Peace Observatory Weekly*, 6–12 August 2022 [EN/AM] – Ethiopia, ReliefWeb.



town dwellers. They have all been affected by territorial claims and counterclaims via violent intercommunal conflicts leading to continuous displacements of people (Temesgen, 2018; Muluneh et al, 2019). The conflict reached its climax in September 2017, when over one million people around the Oromia–Somali borders and from the urban centres inside Somali Region were displaced. Many of these are still living in IDP camps. Mimicking the Ethiopia–Eritrean border war (Tekeste & Tronvoll, 2000), the Somali National Regional State evicted and expelled more than 75,000 Oromo, mostly from Jigjiga city (Adugna et al, 2018). Besides displacement, the violence has resulted in the death of many people, including women and children (Jeylan et al, 2017). Many schools have been closed. Hospitals and clinics were attacked, and patients were forced to leave health centres. Villages were totally deserted as their inhabitants fled from the conflict (Adugna et al, 2018).

### 2.3 Gedeo- Guji conflict

Unlike the Afar–Somali and Oromo–Somali cases described above, the Gedeo–Guji conflict has less historical depth. To the contrary, the historical relationship between the two peoples had been quite friendly, with claims to common ancestry, a wide presence of intermarriage and many rituals in common (Jima, 2000; Grindaker, 2020). During the imperial and Derg regimes, both Gedeo and Guji were put under the same provincial administration – Sidamo province. In the post-1991 period the Gedeo were included in SNNPRS and the Guji in Oromia, based on their ethnicity. A dispute over where to demarcate the border between the two and ethno-territorial contestation between them led to violent conflicts in 1995 and 1998 (Regassa 2007; Dagne, 2013, p 223).

With the coming to power of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in April 2018, the previously suppressed intergroup conflicts erupted after about two decades of relative stability (Yarnell, 2018; Semir, 2019). Said conflict is considered a recurring one in the sense that the underlying cause of the conflict in 2018 – claims and counterclaims over territory and the clear demarcation of the boundary between Gedeo Zone and West Guji Zone – resurfaced after two decades as the same old grievance that remained unresolved at its roots.

The 2018 conflict has become well publicised, especially in the media, not because it had a different driver, nor because of the human and economic cost, but rather because of the magnitude of the displacement – close to a million people, nearly half of all the IDPs in Ethiopia at that time, were displaced.<sup>12</sup> As discussed below (section 5.1), the government handling of the displacement also contributed to its notoriety.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/iom-flash-appeal-ethiopia-gedeo-west-gujijul-dec2018.pdf>.

# 3 Conflict in Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State

Territorial claims and counterclaims have been a primary driving force of conflict in BGRS. These claims have multiple dimensions. They include disputes around borders with the neighbouring Amhara and Oromia Regional States; disputes regarding control over land and natural resources within the region; and historical and symbolic contestations over territory between ‘indigenous’ and ‘non-indigenous’ inhabitants of the region, as well as the influence of the tension between Ethiopia and Sudan.

## 3.1. Territorial claims between BGRS and its neighbours

Administratively, BGRS is constituted of three zones – Assosa, Kamashi and Metekel – and a special *wereda* (Mao Komo). Assosa zone is bordered by Oromia in the south and southeast, and Sudan to the north. Metekel borders the Amhara region in the north and northwest and Sudan to the north. Kamashi is surrounded by Oromia Region on three sides.<sup>13</sup>

In the pre-1991 period, the areas north of the Blue Nile such as Metekel and Pawe formed part of Gojjam province, while the areas south of the Blue Nile River, including Assosa, Kamashi and Mao Komo were part of the Wollega province. Given this historical antecedent, the separation of BGRS from these two administrative entities provoked much violence (Vaughan & Mesfin, 2020), which turned into an interregional border dispute between BGRS and Amhara as well as Oromia. Given the ethnic-based nature of the regional states, the conflicts were also inter-ethnic. These conflicts had to do with territorial claims around their regional borders. There has never been a clear administrative border and the disagreements over the existing one have been the cause of conflicts several times.

Territorial contestation with Amhara Regional State seems to have started very early. At the initial stage of the federalisation process, there was a proposal that the BGRS region share a boundary with Tigray. It is based on this proposal that areas like Metema and Qwara were assumed to be part of the local Gumuz’s territory. However, this idea was dropped, and the two areas were included within Amhara Regional State. Furthermore, during the transition period (1991–94), it was reported that there were conflicts between the Amhara and Gumuz around these borders (Woldeselassie, 2004, p 261).

Similarly, during the early design of the regional states in 1992, BGRS was declared to share a boundary with Gambella. The Oromia region contested this, and the issue was later resolved by a referendum in 1994, with the majority of the inhabitants of Begi district, which is located in the triangle between BGRS, Gambella and Oromia and bordering Sudan, voting in favour of joining the Oromia region. Consequently, the BGRS no longer shares a boundary with Gambella region in the South (Asnake, 2009). However, contrary to the referendum results, Article 3 of BGRS’s 2002 revised Constitution states that the region shares a boundary with Gambella region in the south. Interestingly, when regional states have failed to respect

<sup>13</sup> Physical & Socio-Economic Profile of Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State, 2012.

referendum results, the federal government has not reacted. It behaved similarly in the case of the Gedeo–Guji and Oromia–Somali conflicts discussed above. This has led to continued tension between the two regions and shows the lack of consensus on the placement of interregional boundary demarcations. The territorial contestation further resurfaced in 2008 when it expanded to other zones, with violent conflicts erupting and resulting in the loss of many lives and the destruction of hundreds of houses around the contested boundary, especially in the Belo Jeganfoy *woreda* in Kamashi Zone, bordering East Wollega (cf Ameyu, 2017).

Exacerbating the conflict issues, on 26 September 2018 high-ranking BGRS officials were ambushed and killed in Oromia near the regional border between West Wollega and Kamashi Zone, which had already experienced tensions arising from various territorial claims. This happened following the ousting of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), at a time when the security apparatus was overstretched thanks to conflicts around the Oromia–Somali border and between the Gedeo and Guji (MSF, 2019). In two months, 250,000 people from Kamashi and the border areas of East and West Wollega Zones were displaced.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.2 Claims to political inclusion and territorial entitlement

Besides claims and counterclaims around its borders, the conflict in BGRS has also been caused by disputes between ‘indigenous’ and ‘non-indigenous’ people or ‘settlers’ over political inclusion and territorial entitlements. The federal dispensation has introduced new state–society and inter-ethnic group relationships in BGRS. The once marginalised communities in regions such as Benishangul-Gumuz have become politically empowered, and the previously dominant groups or ‘settler’ communities suddenly lost their dominant positions (Kefale, 2009; Vaughan, 2007). The BGRS constitution (2002) empowers five indigenous ethnic groups, namely the Benishangul (previously called Bertha),<sup>15</sup> Gumuz, Mao, Komo and Shinasha, as constitutionally recognised ‘owners’ of the region.<sup>16</sup> The ‘non-indigenous’ elites largely decried the ethnicisation of the region on account of their demographic size and settlements before the formation of the new region, BGRS (Kefale, 2009; Vaughan, 2007). As per the 2007 Census, these ‘owner’ ethnic groups altogether comprise about 57% of the population of BGNRS, while the ‘non-indigenous’ constitute 43%, of which the Amhara and Oromo are the two biggest groups.

The current violent conflict and displacement are taking place mainly in the Gumuz-dominated zones of Metekel and Kamashi. In Metekel, the Gumuz are, relatively, the largest group, comprising about 38% of the population of the zone, while the Shinasha account for 22%. Other groups like Amhara, Agaw and Oromo account for 18%, 12% and 11%, respectively. Altogether, the indigenous groups account for about 60% of the Zone, whereas the remaining 40% is comprised of the ‘other’ or ‘settler’ groups, mainly Amhara, Agew and Oromo (CSA, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> See <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Operational-plan-for-rapid-response-to-Kamashi-and-Assosa-8.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> The BGRS council has officially abandoned the name ‘Bertha’ and endorsed the ethnic group name ‘Benishangul’ in March 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Article 2 of the 2002 revised BGRS Constitution.

On the other hand, the demographic size of the ‘non-indigenous’ community is a source of fear for the Gumuz political elites, because it could endanger their political empowerment and economic security in the region (Dagnachew, 2020). Indeed, the two biggest ‘non-indigenous’ groups, the Amhara and Agaw, have lodged competing claims over territorial ownership in Metekel. The major violent conflicts in the past three years have primarily been between the Gumuz and Amhara. While the Gumuz are one of the dominant political groups in the regional state, the Amhara are supported by the broader Amhara nationalist community, the media, the neighbouring Amhara Regional State’s security forces and other Amhara armed groups. According to a key informant:<sup>17</sup>

If you take Metekel, for example, the key driver of conflict stems from the narrative that ‘Metekel is ours, not theirs’. For Amhara nationalists, Metekel was part of the Gojjam province. It was TPLF that deliberately put Metekel under BGRS in order to weaken Amhara. That being the case, as for the nationalists, since TPLF is no more in control of the centre, Metekel should be restored and annexed to Amhara Regional State boundary. The Gumuz elites strikingly oppose this and do not accept this narrative and territorial claim from Amhara and struggle to keep territorial autonomy over Metekel zone. For Gumuz, the territorial contest of Qey [red] people over Metekel is tantamount to bringing back the historical marginalisation of Gumuz as slaves and landless people.

This KII extract reveals the complexity of the problem, combining and invoking the historical marginalisation of the Gumuz, contestation over Metekel and the emerging Amhara ethnic nationalism, whose adherents claim to have taken the territory following the removal of the TPLF from central power in Addis Ababa.

Further, to the South of the Nile, in Kamashi, and according to the 2007 Census, the Gumuz account for about 60% of the population of this Zone, the largest proportion, while the Oromo constitute about 25%, followed by the Amhara, who account for 12% of the population. In Kamashi violence has mainly occurred between the Gumuz and Oromo. However, this pattern can sometimes rapidly change. For instance, according to informants, in 2018, the conflict in Kamashi was clearly between the indigenous Gumuz and the Oromo. In the past two years, however, there has been an unclear alignment between the Gumuz rebel group and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). As a result, relations between the Oromo and Gumuz seem better, while at the same time violence between the Gumuz and Amhara has intensified.

### 3.3 Historical marginalisation, resettlement and land in Benishangul-Gumuz

The contestation over territory and inter-group relationships in BGRS is very much shaped by historical memories of unequal relationships in the region (Woldesellassie, 2004; Muluneh, 2019; Vaughan & Mesfin, 2020). Until the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in 1935, Benishangul and Gumuz had suffered from intensive raiding for slaves to be used for labour domestically and sold abroad (Ahmed, 1995). The legacy of that history is the proliferation of derogatory terms like *Shanqilla* (black people only fit for slavery), ‘primitive’ and ‘sub-human’, which were used to designate the Gumuz people, leaving them with bitter memories (Nyssen, 2021;

<sup>17</sup> KII with Mr Atinafu, Asossa, 24 August 2022.

Abdusamad, 1995). Thus, historical grievances as a result of marginalisation and inhumane treatment in the hands of the highlanders have played a role in the shaping of the inter-ethnic relations in the region.<sup>18</sup>

The other historical factor relates to state resettlement programmes. Many people were brought in the 1970s and 1980s from the famine-stricken northern parts of Ethiopia (Wollo and Tigray provinces) to the present Benishangul-Gumuz region through the (then government) Derg's resettlement programmes (Amare, 2013). Accordingly, over 100,000 people came and settled in two sites in Metekel, Pawe and Beles (Markakis, 2011, p 226). However, this resulted in the displacement of over 18,000 Gumuz people from their land (Woldesellassie, 2004). According to Markakis, at the same time, about 55 resettlement sites were established in Assosa and Bambasi (Markakis, 2011, p 226). In this way, the resettlement policy not only changed the ethnic composition of Assosa, Metekel and the surrounding area, but also reduced the host communities (Benishangul and Gumuz) to secondary status (Vaughan, 2007; Amare, 2013). This can be witnessed in the socioeconomic differences between the indigenous people and the settlers. While the settlers are better educated and dominate urban businesses, very few people among the indigenous groups, especially the Gumuz, have had a higher education or managed to integrate into urban life. The memory of complex structural and historical processes has contributed to the present violent interactions between the ethnic groups dwelling in the region.

### 3.4 Land, investments, and conflict

The role of land in the present violent conflict in BGRS is complex. The Gumuz practice shifting cultivation, which needs an extensive land-use plan different from the intensive agriculture practised by the neighbouring Amhara and Oromo (Ayenew, 2020). The Gumuz's land-use system is also in dissonance with the perceptions of development policy makers. The Derg's resettlement programme was planned with a perception of the region as 'underutilised', 'no man's land' or 'free land' (Vaughan & Mesfin, 2020). The same perception continued during the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) period, when government targeted the region for acquisition of land for large-scale investment. The central government invited domestic and foreign investors to BGRS and Gambella, declaring the availability of hundreds of thousands of hectares of free and underutilised land (Tsegaye, 2017; Fana, 2016). In 2010, the federal government intensified large-scale development schemes such as mega-dams, irrigation systems, sugarcane plantations and agribusinesses. Recently, BGRS has conducted a villagisation programme, which the Gumuz consider another strategy to facilitate land-lease for investors, essentially not for changing the livelihood of the Gumuz for the better (Tsegaye 2017) Tsegaye (2017, p 705) quoted an informant as saying:

In any direction you go from this village, you will encounter investors' land. I was about to go back to my previous village, but one of the investors who has been there for the past two years has now taken over all our previous lands. We want our land. As a Gumuz, land is what we have. Now we are aware that

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<sup>18</sup> This historical condition led to the culture of killing highlanders, which had been a source of honour and privilege for the Gumuz: a Gumuz killer would be called *gunza* (which means 'manly' in Gumuz). As *gunza* is a symbol of honour and privilege, Gumuz women also encourage their husbands to attain this status (Dagnachew, 2020).



the campaign of collecting our people into big settlements along the main road is meant to take our lands and give it away to investors. Nobody cares about us ...What did these investors do for us since they came here? Nothing! What we have seen is destruction, nothing else.

To the disappointment of the Gumuz, almost all the investors are non-Gumuz – highlander Ethiopians and foreigners – adding to their economic marginalisation. A closer look into the issue reveals that the Gumuz’s hostility towards the land acquisitions has arisen not only because they face threats of dispossession and displacement but also because they feel excluded from the opportunities and benefits brought by the development schemes (Dagnachew, 2020). Because the Gumuz are considered incompetent in agriculture and other wage labour, both the private agri-investors and big state-owned companies bring in labourers from the neighbouring regions.

Moreover, the neighbours’ imagination of the region, particularly Metekel area, resonates with the state’s longstanding false perception of the region. Many people from Amhara migrated to Metekel on the assumption that free and abundant land was available for incomers. Although the current migration appears spontaneous and individually based, members of the Gumuz community believe there to have been a coordinated wave of migration to Metekel in order to increase and change the demographic balance of the zone, which would later justify territorial ownership for non-Gumuz, something they strongly resent (Nyssen, 2021).

### 3.5 The influence of Sudan

The multidimensional factors of conflict in Benishangul have been augmented by the recent tension between Ethiopia and Sudan. The two countries have longstanding disputes over territory around their borders in the Fashaga triangle and their relationship soured towards the end of 2020 when Sudan invaded the contested territory. Ethiopia has also faced opposition from Sudan and Egypt over the large dam (known as the Great Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia) it is building in BGRS about 40 km from the Ethiopia–Sudan border. Ethiopian government officials accuse Sudan of supporting the Gumuz fighters operating in BGRS by giving them training grounds and logistical assistance. The fact that the Ethiopian Gumuz share kinship relations with the Gumuz in Sudan makes the efforts of the Ethiopian government to control the porous border very difficult.

## 4 Conflict in Konso Zone

While the drivers of conflict between Afar–Somali and Oromia–Somali regional states, in Gedeo and in BGRS have been attributed to claims and counterclaims over territory along the regional state borders, the conflicts in Konso Zone and its neighbouring districts are different in two ways:

- They have primarily been caused by controversies over administrative units, demands for recognition of ethnic groups and the SNNPRS's frequent restructuring of the administrative units. Controversy is commonly triggered by the elite's claims of statehood at different levels.<sup>19</sup>
- While contestations over resources, mainly land, in the above-mentioned regions, are visible along regional state borders, in SNNPRS competition takes place between districts or zones within the regional state, mostly organised along ethnic lines.

Establishing an administrative unit is a source of money, such as capital budget, for the elite and a source of employment for the youth. It is also a means of getting work contracts for businesspeople. Having an administrative unit contributes to the development of urban centres. Thus, it attracts support from the broader community members, albeit commonly started by the elite, and it is usually easy to mobilise members of the relevant ethnic group wherever such demands are raised.

SNNPRS is one of the regions where the complication of organising administrative units along ethno-territorial lines has become a severe problem. During the transitional period (1991–94), southern Ethiopia, which later became SNNPRS, was divided into five separate regions – Regions Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten and Eleven. In 1995, the five regions were combined to form the SNNPRS. This regional state was vertically structured as zone, *liyu woreda* (special district), *woreda* (district) and *kebeles*.

### 4.1 The making and unmaking of 'statehood' in the Segen Area

In the mid-1990s, the Konso and three of their neighbouring ethnic groups living around the Segen River, namely the Dirashe, Amaro and Burji, were granted special district (*liyu woreda*) status. This allowed them to become self-governing, semi-autonomous ethnic units (Watson, 2002). The special districts are directly accountable to the regional state, while the ordinary districts are accountable to the zone within which they are geographically constituted. With this designation, the four special districts were relatively peaceful, enjoying their autonomy as 'mini states' within a state (cf Watson, 2020). In the designation of the administrative units, resources play an important role. Regional states allocate the budget they receive from the federal sState to zones and special districts as per the general provision on budget expenditure. In the SNNPRS context, where the zones and special districts are established based on ethno-territorial administration, groups with administrative status, for instance a *liyu*

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<sup>19</sup> There is a constitutional provision that grants recognition to ethnic groups and allows autonomy upon request. While the regional states of Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Tigray and Somali have dominant ethnic groups, the others are multi-ethnic.

*woreda* level, get a better opportunity to control the resources than those who do not have this status (Adugna, 2014; Baylis, 2004). This, of course, encourages more groups to request self-administration, thereby becoming the primary reason for conflict in the region. One such example is the case of the Alle.

## 4.2 The Alle's quest for identity and district status

The first challenge to the Konso special district's internal stability came from the Alle ethnic group. The Alle are a minority ethnic group inhabiting the neighbouring Konso and Dirashe zones. They are culturally and linguistically close to both. The Konso, Dirashe and Alle speak closely related Cushitic languages, and most of them share a historical ethno-genesis. Indeed, their clans are all related. All the Konso clans are also found in Dirashe and Alle, and the three have an equal number of clans. They all claim their original homeland in Liban (in present-day Borana, Oromia region) (Hallpike, 1972).

In 1995, when the major ethnic groups were assigned an administrative status, 17 *kebeles* inhabited by the Alle remained part of the Konso and Dirashe special districts: ten of them assigned to the former, seven to the latter. Given the similarities in language and names of their clans, the Alle's difference from their two neighbours could have been undermined by political actors. However, in the highly politicised environment where local opportunities such as employment were distributed based on ethnic favouritism, the Alle started a quest for recognition as a distinct ethnic group and for the constitutional right to self-administration. They filed this officially at the SNNPRS council and House of Federation in 2001. This left them in an uneasy situation with their two neighbours (the Konso and Dirashe), and the conflict gradually turned violent (Yared, 2017).

In 2008, after the conflict became very violent, with increased human casualties, the regional government declared its acceptance of the decade-long Alle quest for ethnic recognition, clearing the way to self-administration. In December 2010, the SNNPRS council granted the newly recognised Alle ethnic group district status – they had managed to upgrade themselves from a minority status in Konso and Dirashe special districts to establishing their own district through violent conflict (Firew, 2012; Bantayehu, 2016).

Unfortunately, the recognition of the Alle and granting of district status did not stop conflict with the Konso. Rather, the Alle demanded a clear demarcation of their boundary with Konso Zone, which was mainly intended to contain Konso farmers' expansion into their district. The Alle population complain that the Konso are continuously expanding and occupying farmland in their district. One typical example mentioned by many informants was the frequent conflict over usage of the Kukuba-Sala forestland. Kukuba-Sala was a protected forest area located around the border of the two districts now cleared and destroyed by land-hungry farmers (Bantayehu, 2016). An informant from Alle explains:

Kukupa-Saala [sic] land is our land. Konso people know that it is our land. But they argue that land belongs to the one who cultivates it. They use an expansionist strategy. They have occupied the land of several neighbouring ethnic groups. The number of farmers from Konso is increasing from time to time. They have cleared and are continuing to clear the forest. Had the government defined our border we would not have fought each other. We are

brothers and sisters, but the reason for our conflict is Kukupa-Saala land.

The Alle felt that the administration of Konso Zone was systematically obstructing the boundary demarcation.<sup>20</sup> This dispute grew violent, displacing close to 8,000 Konso farmers living in Alle district whose assets have been burnt to the ground. In the summer of 2022, when farmers were supposed to be cultivating crops, several *kebeles* around the border between Konso Zone and Alle district were deserted. The Konso have faced a severe scarcity of land as a result of land degradation and rapid population growth (Dejene, 2012). The topography of Konso district is partly semi-arid lowland and partly mountainous. In the mountainous areas, the Konso have a long history and well developed culture of terracing the hills to restore the fertility and productivity of the soil (Watson, 2002), while the lowlands, which they inhabited relatively late, have suffered from drought.

Demands for ethnic recognition and self-administration have not been uncommon in SNNPRS. Unfortunately, in most cases these demands have been accompanied by violent conflict. In 2018, when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power, most of the demographically major ethnic groups in the region, including the Wolayita, Gurage, Kefa, Gedeo and Gamo, demanded statehood – in other words, to be upgraded from zone to regional state (Bereket, 2020). In 2021, a new regional state – the Southwest Ethiopia Region constituting a cluster of ethnic groups including the Kefa – was established.

The federal government suggested the establishment of two more regions by putting the ethnic groups into clusters. One cluster, called the 'South Ethiopia State', where the Konso and their neighbours will be included, is under formation. It will include the Wolayita, Gamo and Gedeo among its major ethnic groups, alongside the Konso and their neighbours, as well as the more than a dozen ethnic groups in South Omo. The Wolayita, the biggest ethnic group in the planned new state, have been calling for a separate Wolayita Regional State, opposing their inclusion in the cluster. During August 2020, the security forces killed 21 protesters and arrested leaders of the movement for statehood, including the Wolayita zone administrator (Etenesh, 2022).

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with an expert at SNNPRS Peace and Security office, Hawassa, 25 August 2022.

Figure 2: Map of Segen Area People's Zone



Source: UN OCHA, 2009.

### 4.3 Dissolving of the special districts and the ensuing disputes

In 2011, the SNNPRS downgraded the administrative units of Konso, Dirashe, Amaro and Burji from special district to ordinary district and formed a new administrative zone called the Segen Area Peoples' Zone (SAPZ) to oversee them. The official justification was to address problems around governance, administrative inefficiency and the recurrent inter-ethnic violence. Justifying how merging the administrative units would solve conflict, an official argued:

If you see the history, language, culture and even their music ... the ethnic communities that make up the SAPZ astonishingly possess many things in common. Thus, bringing these ethnic communities under one umbrella means easily avoiding the frequent conflicts. (Quoted in Yared, 2017, p 15)

This argument of commonality of culture as a guarantee of peace was not realistic. Many of the groups fighting in southern Ethiopia have very closely related cultural practices and customs. But the decision was top-down, and taken without proper consultation with the people concerned (Temesgen, 2010; Firew, 2012; Bantayehu, 2019). It was a big disappointment to most of the people and the local elite, who had enjoyed the local semi-autonomous status as a special district. A member of the Konso elite we interviewed quoted an article from the SNNPRS constitution, noting how the merging of the districts contradicted it. The article reads: "The Nations, Nationalities or Peoples in the region [SNNP] shall have their own Zonal or Special Woreda administration, delimited on the bases of the settlement



pattern, languages, identities and consent of the people concerned” (Art 45(2)). The merger was considered a shift in approach from promoting ethnic-based statehood among the Konso and their neighbours to creating a multi-ethnic zonal administration (Misganaw, 2014). With the merging, SAPZ had become the second most multi-ethnic zone in SNNPRS, next to South Omo.

#### 4.4 The Konso opposition to the SAPZ

The Konso’s dispute with the new SAPZ designation started with the selection of the administrative centre for the zone. In the preparations for the merger, the Konso hoped that Karat, their capital, would be selected as the administrative centre. Businessmen were told to expand their hotels, restaurants and guesthouses to accommodate the personnel who would be drawn to the new zone. However, the Dirashe elite had also claimed that their town, Gidole, should be the centre of the new zone. Unexpectedly, the SNNPRS selected Segen/Gumayde as the capital. Segen town, which had the worst infrastructure of all the capital towns of the former special districts and was the least accessible, was selected largely because of its geographical proximity to the other four districts. It is situated at the intersection of Konso Dirashe, Amaro and Burji, although it is politically part of Konso zone. However, according to a SNNPRS official, the selection of Gumayde was made mainly to neutralise competition between the Konso and Dirashe elites over hosting the zone. The Konso argued that Karat, which is located on the main road to South Omo, has a better infrastructure and accessibility than the surrounding towns. The Dirashe elite, on the other hand, argued that their town – Gidole – which had served as the capital of the historical Gardula sub-province during the imperial era, deserved to be the capital of the SAPZ (Yared, 2017; Bantayehu, 2016).

Three years after the establishment of the zone, in 2014, the Konso elite organised a petition opposing their inclusion in SAPZ and called for the establishment of a separate Konso zone. The regional government rejected the Konso’s demands, leading to protests. In 2016, over 55,000 people signed another round of petitions demanding the establishment of a separate Konso Zone. In response, government security forces killed many of the Konso elite and imprisoned hundreds, including a traditional leader (*Kaala*), for advocating Konso statehood. The prisoners were released in 2018 after the new prime minister came to power and pardoned political prisoners; this was followed by the dissolving of the zone.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4.5 Gumayde- Konso conflict, another restructuring and another conflict

In November 2018, the SNNPRS dissolved the SAPZ and granted the Konso zone status. The remaining ethnic groups (Dirashe, Amaro, Burji and Alle) were forced to assume their earlier special district status. However, the new (re)structuring of administrative units gave birth to another conflict: that between Konso Zone and Gumayde. The Gumayde, a name which had not cropped up in regional and national politics before the restructuring, are a new actor in the conflict.

Historically, there had been a Gumayde district until it was officially dissolved in 1995. Gumayde was a multi-ethnic district of 17 *kebeles* and it was dissolved when ethnicity, language and distinct territorial settlement were used as a guiding principle to form

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<sup>21</sup> Ethiopia Peace Observatory (acleddata.com).

administrative units. The multi-ethnic inhabitants were made to vote in a referendum on who they wanted to administer them among the ethno-territorial districts. Accordingly, nine *kebeles* joined Konso, four joined Burji, three joined Amaro and one joined Dirashe – most of them voted for the districts to which they belonged ethnically. Segen town has minorities who belong to none of these ethnic groups and who have been complaining that they remain disfranchised in the ethnic-based administration. The formation of the SAPZ and selection of Segen/Gumayde as its centre had suddenly brought a short-lived hope of reviving the historical Gumayde.

The dissolution of the SAPZ ended the hopes and aspirations of the multi-ethnic elite of Gumayde, who immediately proceeded to request a special district separate from the newly established Konso Zone. The dispute between the supporters of the Gumayde elite's demands for a special district and those who supported inclusion in Konso Zone quickly turned violent. The violence intensified in November 2020 following the start of the war in Tigray, which created a vacuum in the security situation as the national defence forces evacuated the area to reinforce its fighting forces in the north. According to the *Addis Standard*,<sup>22</sup> as a result of this conflict, in November 2020, 94,586 people were displaced, around 1,000 houses were burned down and over 70 individuals were killed in an attack by armed groups from Gumayde.<sup>23</sup> The conflict and displacement have continued for the past two years. According to a report from Konso Zone DRMC, close to 10,000 houses were either burnt or destroyed. The burning of so many houses, together with indiscriminate killings, starkly illustrates the level of the violence, which is unprecedented in the history of the region. In April 2022, an unidentified armed group based in Gumayde allegedly killed over 90 members of the SNNPRS special police forces and government officials, and a significant part of the region is currently not accessible because of the security situation.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Addis Standard*, 23 November 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Ethiopian Peace Observatory, 23 November 2020.

<sup>24</sup> *Ethiopian Reporter*, 7 August 2022.

# 5 Dynamics of displacement in Ethiopia

In this section we will discuss the dynamics of conflict-induced displacement, with a focus on BGRS and Konso Zone. The magnitude of the displacement and its consequences for IDPs and the host community shows the complexity of the problem. Finally, we will try to analyse the durable solutions proposed to the displacement and put forward some recommendations.

## 5.1 Magnitude, situation and consequences of displacement

The magnitude of displacement in Ethiopia in the past five years is unprecedented in the country's history. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), in 2018 and 2021 Ethiopia registered the highest annual figure for IDPs.<sup>25</sup> The Oromo–Somali conflict, followed by those between Gedeo and Guji and Benishangul-Gumuz were the main causes of the highest recorded internal displacement in 2018.<sup>26</sup>

The highest internal displacement record, in 2021, was primarily a result of the war in the north and of various conflicts in multiple places such as Benishangul-Gumuz, western Oromia and Konso Zone. The number of IDPs further increased and, as of March 2022, an estimated 5,582,000 persons were displaced within the country as a result of armed conflicts and natural disasters. In the first quarter of 2022, some 2,848,000 IDPs, in Amhara, Afar and Tigray regions returned to their place of origin in search of durable solutions.<sup>27</sup> The sections below discuss the situation of displacement in Benishangul-Gumuz and Konso in detail.

### *Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State*

All the three zones and 17 of the 23 districts which make up 71% of the districts in the region have been affected by conflict and displacement in BSGRS. Close to half the region's total population have been displaced. Beyond the figure of IDPs, the displacement situation in the region is quite complex, primarily thanks to the diversity of the IDPs in terms of their ethnic identity and their place of origin. They have diverse ethnic backgrounds, mostly Amhara, Gumuz and Oromo. While the majority have been displaced from the region and hosted within it, a significant number have fled to the neighbouring Amhara and Oromia regional states. At the same time, there are also many IDPs displaced from Oromia and being hosted in BGRS.

A massive displacement of people in BGRS erupted following the killing of high-ranking BGRS officials on 26 September 2018 around the border between Oromia and BGRS. The attack triggered four years of displacement in western Ethiopia. In December 2018, 250,000 people from Kamashi and the border areas of East and West Wollega Zones were displaced.<sup>28</sup> In

<sup>25</sup> IDMC (2019).

<sup>26</sup> Report\_-displacement-and-humanitarian-response-in-ethiopia\_-challenges-and-dilemmas-in-complex-crises.pdf.

<sup>27</sup> Response to Internal Displacement in Ethiopia Fact Sheet - January to March 2022 - Ethiopia | ReliefWeb

<sup>28</sup> See: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Operational-plan-for-rapid-response-to->

February 2019, the number increased to 273,338.<sup>29</sup> During the second half of 2020, the conflict was expanded to Metekel Zone, north of the Abay River. Between July 2020 and January 2021, inter-communal violence left over 101,000 people displaced from several districts of Metekel Zone.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, about 150,000 people were displaced as a result of attacks by an armed group (OCHA, 2021).

Generally, although different reports show different figures, as of August 2022, the total estimate of IDPs in BGRS was 469,609 (according to the regional DRMC). Of these, 266,178 were in Metekel, 137,575 in Kamashi, 45,838 in Assosa and 20,018 in Mao-Komo special *woreda* (see Table 1). Some 77,975 of them are children under five years old, while 20,135 are lactating or pregnant women. About 60% of the displacement occurred in Metekel zone, 30% in Kamashi Zone and 10 % in Assosa Zone and Moe Komo special *woreda*.<sup>31</sup> A recent study by Tsegay (2022) indicates that about 30% of the Metekel population was displaced more than once between 2018 and 2021. Of the displaced population, over 140,000 have fled to Amhara and Oromia regions, while the remainder is hosted within BGRS itself.

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Kamashi-and-Assosa-Assosa 8.pdf.

<sup>29</sup> Shelter & NFI Ethiopia, 'Shelter and non-food assessment of East and West Wollega Zone, Oromia Regional State', 26 February 2019.

<sup>30</sup> [OCHA](#), 1 October 2021.

<sup>31</sup> DRMC, KII, Asossa, 15 August 2022.

**Table1: Number of IDPs by zones and districts in BGRS (estimated figures, May– August 2022)**

Zone	District/ woreda	No of IDP households	No of IDPs/ individuals	Children below 5 years	Lactating and pregnant women
Metekel	Wenbera	5321	26723	4570	1672
	Mandura	10051	48907	9125	1484
	Dangur	12845	54729	10680	2003
	Guba	2760	11905	2206	1048
	Dibate	12923	64906	11908	2249
	Bullen	7635	54280	9281	2980
	Pawe	1156	4728	808	389
	<b>Total</b>	<b>56,691</b>	<b>266,178</b>	<b>48,578</b>	<b>11,825</b>
Kamashi	Sedal	2581	17436	3825	1118
	Zai/Yasso	7721	36984	3267	1583
	Dembe	2225	15733	3581	787
	Kamashi	1335	21108	1799	108
	Mijiga	9922	46314	4707	1800
	<b>Total</b>	<b>23,784</b>	<b>137,575</b>	<b>17,179</b>	<b>5,396</b>
Assosa	Sherkole	556	6401	1805	155
	Bambasi	3852	11797	1546	533
	Buldigilu	2899	21131	1896	286
	Assosa	1308	6509	3081	980
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8615</b>	<b>45838</b>	<b>8328</b>	<b>1954</b>
Mao-Komo specia lworeda	Mao-Komo	3227	20018	3423	824

Source: BGRS DRMC, August 2022.

From 2020 onwards, conflict spread to several western Oromia zones, namely West and East Wollega, Horo Guduru Wollega and West Shawa.<sup>32</sup> According to a snapshot report by OCHA (2022b), about 500,000 people are displaced in East and West Wollega zones of Western Oromia. This figure includes those displaced multiple times from Kamashi zone since 2018.<sup>33</sup> This, in turn, besides the rise in conflict-induced displacements in western Oromia, has caused obstruction to the movement of supplies, including fuel for relief operations for the many thousands of IDPs and refugees in BGRS.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of infrastructure, the BGRS regional DRMC recorded, among others, that 287 schools had been destroyed. Of these, 29 were high schools, while 258 were primary and elementary schools.<sup>35</sup> In addition, 189 health centres and health posts, and 139 animal health posts have been destroyed, and 1390 water schemes have become dysfunctional.

### *Konso Zone*

Out of the three *woredas* and one cluster in Konso Zone, two *woredas* (Segen Zuria, Karat Zuria) and one cluster (Kolme Cluster) are affected by the conflict and displacement. Only Kana *woreda*, which is in neighbouring Oromia, is outside the reach of the conflict. Unfortunately, this district is severely affected by the ongoing drought, and cannot support any IDPs. In terms of numbers, 94,074 people have been displaced, which is about one-third of the zone's total population; most of them have been displaced up to three times. Further, as of August 2022, about 190,000 people, nearly two-thirds of the population of the zone, need urgent food aid as a result of drought.

Differently from the IDPs in BGRS, the IDPs in Konso Zone are less diverse in their ethnic background and their place of origin. Almost all of them are ethnic Konso who were displaced either from within Konso Zone or from the neighbouring districts. The zone's DRM office recorded IDP numbers and the districts where they are located, as shown in Table 2.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid; and OCHA, 'ETHIOPIA Situation Report', last updated 22 July 2022.

<sup>33</sup> *DTM Rapid Response Assessment in East and West Wallaga, Round 2*, 1–30 April 2019.

<sup>34</sup> OCHA, 'Access snapshot, Western Oromia (Oromia Region): overview of reported incidents (January 2021–April 2022)', p <sup>34</sup> Besides the IDPs, there are 70,000 refugees, mostly from Sudan and South Sudan, living in the region. In February 2022, violence spread to two camps (Tongo and Gure Shambola) in Mao Komo special *woreda* of BG, causing 20,000 refugees to flee the camp for Assosa town. Now an alternative camp has been established to host them in Tsore, Assosa *woreda*.

<sup>35</sup> Regional Education Bureau, Asossa, 'Concept Note for Assessing Devastated Schools in Conflicted areas of BGRS', 17 June 2022.



**Table 2: Numbers and location of IDPs in Konso Zone**

Place	Sex		Other variables			Total
	Men	Women	Children under 5	Breast-feeding mothers	Pregnant women	
Segen zuria <i>woreda</i>	23,903	24,625	5,194	18,34	11,65	56,721
Karat zuria <i>woreda</i>	13,303	13,091	17,46	908	358	29,406
Kolme cluster	2,710	2,948	827	812	650	7,947

Source: Konso Zone DRM Office, August 2022.

In the past two years, displacement has taken place three times. During the first two rounds of displacement, most IDPs were sent to communal places such as schools, health posts, government offices, etc. These people returned to their villages in two subsequent rounds, but they have been displaced repeatedly after suffering losses of more assets. The zone DRM recorded that over 15,000 houses were burnt and destroyed in the three rounds of conflicts. The last round of displacement took place in April 2022, when another round of conflict erupted and displaced an estimated 68,000 people. According to our IDP informants and the zonal DRM officials, almost all the current displacements were of those who had been displaced previously and returned to their villages without appropriate consideration of the security conditions.

The overwhelming majority of the latest IDPs are hosted in seven collection centres located in the districts from where they have been displaced. Close to 2,000 of them are officially registered as IDPs and have been integrated into villages to live with community members. For this purpose, 79 houses were rented in Karat town. However, many IDPs have not been captured by the DRM registration, or by humanitarian organisation emergency support. Good examples are civil servants and people who, instead of coming to collection and registration centres, fled to different places seeking wage labour and agricultural land in different locations. While a small number of urban refugees in Karat town has been recognised, those who fled to Arbaminch, for instance, have not been registered. They live in the informal settlements on wage labour, begging or on community support. Our informant noted:

Displacement is new for us ... Many people who do not want to come to this place [IDP collection centre] and do not have relatives in the surrounding villages just left the area for the lowlands such as the remote areas of Borana, mainly Moyale, in Oromia, looking for wage labour. Many others have gone to Bana Tsemay *woreda* in the South Omo zone, where they sought land through sharecropping arrangements.

Because of the complications caused by the continuous insecurity and drought, many IDPs in Konso are not sure if they can return to their villages and productive life in the near future. As a result, many IDPs, including the host community itself, have left the zone for various different

locations.

In terms of infrastructure, the violence also destroyed health facilities and schools, and other service sectors. This in turn will affect the response to the drought situation in the area. Around ten schools and five health centres have either been burnt down, destroyed or looted. Official DRM records show that 10,430 students are out of school.

## 5.2 Political dynamics in the area

As discussed above, each locality affected by conflict and displacement has its own political dynamics. The most important feature of the recent displacement is that it does not just affect people who live in the conflict areas, but also those who are politically labelled ‘outsiders’ by the local inhabitants (Dereje & Lietaert, 2022). When conflicts start, certain categories of people primarily defined along ethnic lines are forced to flee the areas they have lived in for decades. This started in 2017, when the Somali Regional State under President Mohammed Umar displaced hundreds of thousands of Oromos who used to live in the region but were labelled ethnic ‘Others’– those who do not belong there. Similarly, in 2018, hundreds of thousands of Gedeo were forced to flee the two Guji Zones of Southern Oromia. With the above discussion as a background, we now turn to the displacement situations in the two regions covered by this research.

### *Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State*

In BGRS, following the 2018 ambush of high-ranking officials travelling in Western Oromia, the Oromos residing in Kamashi Zone were targeted. Thousands of the Oromo, most of them engaged in farming in Kamashi, were labelled a ‘non-indigenous’ group and forced to flee to the neighbouring Oromia zones. Thus, regardless of how long they had lived there, they were considered outsiders. Similarly, many Amhara hosted in Bambasi camp have been displaced from Western Wollega, where they were resettled through a government resettlement scheme in the 1980s. Thus, they are considered outsiders by the community from which they are displaced, and this complicates the response to displacement.

In Metekel, too, the politically dominant Gumuz displaced the ‘non-indigenous’ ethnic groups with whom they had been in competition over resources. As the conflict started, many thousand Amhara and Agaw fled to Amhara Regional State. However, the political dynamic in Metekel is different thanks to the history of resettlement outlined above. It is a region with a significant presence of ‘non-indigenous’ communities able to withstand challenges from the ‘indigenous’ community – the Gumuz. Thus, in Metekel, both the ‘non-indigenous’ Amhara, Agaw and Oromo and the indigenous Gumuz have been displaced.

An interesting difference between the two is that, while the non-Gumuz population displaced tends to flee to towns and communal spaces such as schools, *kebeles* offices, clinics, etc, many IDPs belonging to the Gumuz community have fled to the bush and are staying in remote, inaccessible rural areas.<sup>36</sup> This shows the difference between the historically marginalised Gumuz and the settlers in terms of their relationship with the state. For the Gumuz, regardless of the political changes in the post-1991 era, the towns and communal

<sup>36</sup> [Ethiopia complex crisis – ACAPS, 28 December 2021](https://www.acaps.org/country/ethiopia/crisis/complex-crisis?acaps_mode=slow&show_mode=1).  
[https://www.acaps.org/country/ethiopia/crisis/complex-crisis?acaps\\_mode=slow&show\\_mode=1](https://www.acaps.org/country/ethiopia/crisis/complex-crisis?acaps_mode=slow&show_mode=1).

places are still dominated by the ‘non-indigenous’ groups who enjoy better access to the media. This has caused an imbalance in the coverage of the displacement situation in the region, with the displacement of the Gumuz far less covered in the media.

### *Konso Zone and its neighbours*

The political factors that caused displacement in Konso are of two types. First, a group of people with a common political interest – rejection of their inclusion in Konso Zone and a demand for establishment of their administration, named Gumayde special district – organised their own armed group and attacked those who did not subscribe to their objectives. They are people who have been disappointed and frustrated with the SNNPRS for its sudden decision to dissolve the SAPZ, directly affecting their lives. The Gumayde, are a demographically smaller group than the Konso, but they have managed to attack and displace the majority Konso who opposed their demands. Regardless of their number, the multi-ethnic group demanding the establishment of Gumayde special district are well connected to the business community in the surrounding urban centres, to political actors at national level, to the media (including opposition media based abroad) and the diaspora community.

The second factor is the common problem of contestation over territory around administrative borders and displacement of those who are considered outsiders. Accordingly, the Alle displaced the Konso, whom they accuse of encroaching on their territory. It seems that the actors are intentionally displacing each other. One informant said: “I had one hut and two granaries. My hut was completely burned down. The granaries were destroyed. They even cut down thirteen moringa trees I had in my garden. They intentionally did not want to see me again in that area.”<sup>37</sup>

By destroying their assets, the Alle farmers want to discourage the displaced Konso from returning to the village. Thus, the factors for displacement are not just the presence of ‘outsiders’ in the conflict hotspots, but the political intentions in the displacement of the minority from the contested territory.

## **5.3 Consequences of conflict-induced displacement**

In this section, we discuss the consequence of the conflict and displacement from the perspectives of the IDPs and host communities in both regions.

### *Benishangul-Gumuz*

Displacement has caused disruptions to the livelihoods of many thousands of IDPs in BGRS. Most of them witnessed their villages being burnt down and had to flee to save their lives and children. One of our FGD participants in Bambasi collection centre described what happened to his family at the time of his displacement as follows: “The armed groups killed my son. They also killed my daughter’s son and my son-in-law. How could I return to such a place where ... I couldn’t imagine going back and remember all these incidents.”<sup>38</sup> Such a portrayal of the situation of displacement is common. Many IDPs have been traumatised. The conflict and displacement have had a tremendous impact on their mental health, which requires further

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Sukumayle, an IDP, 16 August 2022.

<sup>38</sup> FGD with male IDPs, 01 Bambasi camp, 17 August 2022.

study.

Now these displaced people live in a collection centre on emergency support. Many of them complain that they do not get sufficient food from humanitarian organisations. However, what is even more difficult is that their lives are in limbo – they are uncertain about their future. Some of them are uncertain about the next step in their life, including where to return (or whether to return) as they are considered ‘outsiders’ in the places from where they have been displaced. An in-depth interview with another IDP in Bambasi illustrates this point:

Originally, I was resettled from South Wollo with my families to Gulliso [West Wollega]. I was eleven years old by then. I am 51 years old now. I married and got eight children – six sons and two daughters there ... My eldest son graduated from Injibara University, while my second son is currently attending his education at Assosa University.... I migrated and settled there during my childhood. Now I learnt that I do not belong there. But I do not want my children to pass through the same life course as I am. I do not want to see my children resettling in another new area where they may remain landless. Therefore, given the security situation is improved, we want return to our home in Gulliso.<sup>39</sup>

This complex setting of displacement in BGRS and western Oromia primarily illustrates the IDPs’ most difficult situation – displaced from where they settled as migrants. On the one hand, return may not be easy, as they feel different and are considered alien by the community from which they have been displaced. On the other hand, they cannot be certain to get land if they pursue another round of resettlement. Besides showing the severity of the problem, this also demonstrates the potential challenges in addressing it, as discussed below.

The effect of displacement is also visibly distressing for the host community. An FGD participant started our discussions saying<sup>40</sup>:

We are all displaced people. From day one of the arrival of the IDPs, we have been under state of fear and frustration ... Despite our empathy to the IDPs presuming that we could also be subjected to such a problem ... one should not deny that IDPs brought problems to us in Bambasi.

The “fear and frustration” the informant alludes to relates to livelihoods rather than security issues. The participants complained that the longer the IDPs remained camped there, the more their resources continue to deplete. For example, IDPs have no alternative energy sources. They collect firewood not only for cooking and lighting their shelters, but also for generating income. Another informant described the challenge that hosting communities face succinctly as follows: “We, Bambasi community, fed the IDPs for two months uninterruptedly. The problem, however, is that some members of IDPs are already cutting down our banana and mangoes trees. They cut our bamboo trees and sell it in the market.”

The IDPs also compete over scarce daily wage labour. According to the host community

<sup>39</sup> Interview, Mr Imam Mohammed, IDP Chair Committee, 01 IDP Centre, Bambasi, 17 August 2022.

<sup>40</sup> FGD with IDP hosting members of the local community, 18 August 2022, Bambasi town

members, desperate members of the IDP community usually accept any daily wage rates they are offered. This has affected members of the host community, who used to work for relatively good rates before the coming of the IDPs. In Bambasi, the host community is already under pressure from having hosted refugees for several years. Established in 2012, Bambasi refugee camp hosts over 16,000 refugees. In addition, the host community accuses the IDPs of putting pressure on the already scarce service provisions, giving rise to a shortage of medicine, increases in the price of goods, etc. Another FGD participant in Bambasi had the following to say regarding the consequences of hosting IDPs:<sup>41</sup>

Diversity is not new to us. We even hosted refugees who came all the way crossing border from Sudan and South Sudan. But this time our resources are being depleted. Living cost is increasing at an alarming rate, which we as Bambasi community have never seen before. Before the coming of IDPs, we could buy Sorghum for about a maximum of 1,000 [ETB]. Now, it has reached more than double. Previously, if you have 1,500 ETB, you could buy a lamb at times of holidays. Now, a single lamb costs you about 4,000 ETB. Again, prior to the coming of IDPs, the rent of a single room for housing was 150 ETB. Now, after the coming of IDPs, the same room costs up to 700 ETB. Moreover, our girls fear coming out and collecting firewood as they used to do. The poor and vulnerable members of the host community couldn't bear the burden.

The above extract shows the fatigue the host community is feeling in hosting displacement-affected people. Based on our discussions and interviews with local community hosts in Bambasi, it is clear that conflicts are arising between the community and the IDPs because of the competition over firewood, the daily labour market, price inflation, shortages of water supply services, and shortages and increased costs of health care services and medicines. The participants compared the cost of living before and after the coming of IDPs to their areas and argued that the poor and vulnerable households of Bambasi couldn't lead a decent life because their previous petty income-generating activities had been taken by the IDPs. We heard of instances of clashes between individuals from the IDP and host communities over who should fetch water first and who would do so later.

### *Konso Zone*

In Konso, the IDPs are facing interlinked trifurcated problems of conflict, displacement and drought. According to our informants at the Zone Peace and Security Office, hundreds have lost their lives, and several of those we met have lost their loved ones. We met Gani in Karat town, whose husband was killed by armed men in front of her at their house in Segen town. She could not bury his body as she had to run to save her own life. She could not narrate what had happened to her because of the pain and the severe traumatic stress she was suffering. On top of that, she was facing serious problems paying the rent on her house and buying food in the town where she was hosted.

Most IDPs have lost all their assets. Their houses were burnt or destroyed. Their livestock were stolen, died of drought and starvation, or were sold as the households struggled for

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<sup>41</sup> FGD with IDP-hosting members of the local community, 18 August 2022, Bambasi town.

survival. Civil servants and other Segen town dwellers, who were relatively better off, fled to Karat town. Geresu was among them. He used to rent several houses in Segen town. He witnessed several of the houses in his neighbourhood being burnt down, and he only just managed to escape with his family. In May 2022, he left his family in Karat and moved to a lowland area where he rented land and cultivated sorghum, which failed as a result of drought. Now he is back and lives in a shanty area of Karat town as a destitute IDP with seven children. He complained to us that “NGOs support only those who live in the IDP camps. We are not considered IDPs ... In the town we are forced to purchase a jerry can of water [20 litres] for 80 birr. No one understands us.” Many IDPs told us that they had fled to urban centres hoping that the situation would soon improve. Now, as the problem has continued for two years, they have become exhausted and desperate.

Drought has contributed to complicating the situation of the IDPs. In summer 2020, production failed by 74% in Konso Zone and 98% in the neighbouring Burji special district.<sup>42</sup> Thus, most IDPs have very little alternative than to wait for humanitarian organisation hand-outs; indeed, close to two-thirds of the host community are also waiting for emergency food aid. According to a recent assessment, children in the host community have been dying of malnutrition.<sup>43</sup> In addition, humanitarian actors were worried about an outbreak of malaria and measles in a situation of existing malnutrition.<sup>44</sup> In this connection, our informant said:

Whether we stay in this camp or return to our village, it is all the same. All our assets have been burnt down and destroyed. Now, even if peace will be restored, we have nothing left to lead our household. To cultivate there is no rain. Even these people who are hosting us are starving due to the drought.

As the informant vividly said, the situation is desperate both for the IDPs and for host community members. In Konso, in contrast to BGRS, the IDPs and the host community share ethnic, clan and linguistic commonality. They also share a belief that the conflict that displaced the IDPs was a conflict between the Konso and ethnic ‘Others’. Thus, regardless of the practical difficulties they face, the host communities have not only been sympathetic to the IDPs but also very emotional about the problems they are facing. The host community had supported the IDPs for months without additional support from humanitarian organisations. However, after two years of conflict, displacement and drought, the pressure on the host community seems unbearable. Oldisha, an old man of around 70 years, who hosted two households for months, told us the situation is as follows:

Two households stayed with me for two months. One household has five members and the other has eight members. Then they have got plastic sheet and I gave them a space to establish temporary shelter ... In the beginning I had grain. We shared and consumed together what I had. Then support from the government arrived. Now I also need support from the government. We have impoverished one another.<sup>45</sup>

We have repeatedly heard the phrase “we have impoverished one another”, which means

<sup>42</sup> Discussion with UNOCHA, 24 August 2022.

<sup>43</sup> KII with official, Konso Development Association, 19 September 2022.

<sup>44</sup> Discussion with UNOCHA, 24 August 2022.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Oldisha, 21 August 2022.



sharing the already very scarce resources, mainly food, with the IDPs has exhausted the host community's resources, contributing to their starvation. In Lultu, an IDP collection centre in Segen Zuria district, members of the host community told us that a spring they use could not also be used by IDPs. Reportedly, in August 2022 the spring had almost dried up and, with an ongoing drought, the problem has worsened: both the IDPs and the host community depend on humanitarian organisations tracking and rationing water. Several schools in the IDP hosting areas have suspended their conventional activities for several months in order to accommodate IDPs. Another informant also made a similar comment:

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.<sup>46</sup>

The return of IDPs the informant is calling for might not be possible in the short term because of the security situation. Humanitarian organisations need to understand the situation of the host community and expand their supplies of aid. So far, given the shortage of supplies, these organisations have given priority to IDPs, although the host community's resources are also exhausted as a result of the support they are giving the latter.

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Gebino, host community member, 19 August 2022.

# 6 Responses to displacement: government and other actors involved

## 6.1 Government of Ethiopia

Ethiopia formulated a national policy and strategy for disaster risk management in 2013.<sup>47</sup> The National Disaster Risk Management Commission, now renamed the Ethiopian Disaster Risk Management (EDRM), has been entrusted with responsibility for coordinating issues of risk and emergency response to disasters, and recovery. The Commission has been working as a focal point to coordinate protection and assistance at national levels with other governmental bodies, international donors of humanitarian assistance, and with regional focal points. The NDRM policy and strategy of Ethiopia (2013) provides a variety of directives, including but not limited to: a Disaster Risk Management System, an Early Warning System, Official Disaster Declaration System, resource mobilisation mechanisms, and information and communication.

In addition, Ethiopia ratified the KC in 2020 amid the ongoing massive internal displacement in the country.<sup>48</sup> This was widely acknowledged as a significant achievement for a country that must manage such a massive internal displacement within its boundaries.<sup>49</sup> The ratification of the convention also affirmed the government's concern for and responsibility to respond to the unprecedented number of IDPs in the country.

Because of the complex and multidimensional nature of the problems associated with internal displacement, a single government institution at a single level cannot handle the challenges that IDPs face today. Therefore, the issues of DRM and responding to IDP demands fall under different sectors. In order to bridge the institutional gap in handling the complex problems of IDPs, Ethiopia has established a Ministerial Taskforce led by the Ministry of Peace. The Taskforce comprises different ministries, including those of Peace, Health, Water, Energy & Irrigation, Education, Agriculture and Transport, as well as the Attorney General and the DRMC. The task force is responsible not only for evaluating the situation of IDPs and finding ways to return displaced people to their original places but also to ensure a sustainable peace for returnees with the relevant regional states, and other national and international humanitarian assistance agencies (Abdi, 2020).

Given Ethiopia's federal governance structure, multilevel authorities (local, regional and federal) are responsible for preventing internal displacement and for supporting and protecting IDPs. However, the existing legal and institutional frameworks dealing with IDPs are

<sup>47</sup> FDRE Disaster Risk Prevention and Preparedness Commission (2013). *National Policy and Strategy on Disaster Risk Management*, Addis Ababa.

<sup>48</sup> Proclamation No 1187/2020, African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa Ratification.

<sup>49</sup> 'UNHCR welcomes Ethiopia's ratification of Kampala Convention', <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/2/5e468f7d4/unhcr-welcomes-ethiopias-ratification-kampalaconvention.html>.

inadequate *vis-à-vis* their plight, which is challenging peace and stability in the country as a whole. This is because of a lack of proper enforcement of the existing legal protection frameworks, as well as a lack of a separate and comprehensive legal framework that primarily and explicitly deals with the protection of IDPs (Abdi, 2020). The regional DRMCs in both BGRS and SNNPRS have created a joint 'Disaster Risk Management Council'. The Council, chaired by the presidents of the regional states (chief administrator of the zone, in the case of Konso) constitutes a DRM Office and departments of agriculture, health, water, women and children's affairs and education, and technical and working groups to deal with IDP issues in the regions. At different levels (national, regional and zone) the DRMC oversees and coordinates the humanitarian organisations. Both in BGRS and Konso Zone, despite the apparent shortage of supplies as a result of aid being overstretched, the role the government is playing through DRM in coordinating emergency assistance has been appreciated by the stakeholders. Regardless of this, there is no regional policy framework for IDPs.

## 6.2 Humanitarian organisations

### *Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State*

In September 2018, when violent conflict started around the borders between BGRS and neighbouring western Oromia, there was not a single humanitarian organisation working in the area to support such a large population affected by displacement. This part of the country, Benishangul-Gumuz and Western Oromia, had been considered relatively peaceful and food self-sufficient, and thus had only rarely experienced the presence of humanitarian organisations. According to Médecins Sans Frontières, as late as April 2019, virtually no humanitarian actor was present in the Kamashi Zone of Benishangul-Gumuz (MSF, 2019, p 23).

Currently, there are many UN organisations, INGOs and local NGOs based in Assosa, the capital of BGRS, engaging in emergency humanitarian activities for both IDPs and refugees. According to information from BGRS's DRMC and the OCHA sub-regional office, there are 26 aid agencies and government counterparts in the region. As shown in Annex I, five of these are UN agencies, ten are International NGOs, seven are local NGOs and four are government counterparts.

The response operations of these organisations have so far been focused on emergency aid, which is divided into six clusters: protection/shelter, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Non-food Items (NFI), nutrition, health and education. Food items are provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) and distributed through the government, with the DRMC office in charge. The DRMC provides 15 kg wheat per person per month. However, distribution can be interrupted, sometimes for months, as a result of security problems in Western Oromia. This happened between January and April 2022 when the road between Assosa and Gimbi (capital city of Western Wollega zone) was closed because of the ongoing conflict.

Besides DRMC, UNOCHA has played a key role in coordinating the humanitarian organisations and in advocacy on behalf of IDPs through the relevant national and international partners. Information from DRMC shows that OCHA and DRMC lead the emergency shelter and NFI cluster, while the DRMC and Regional Bureau of Women, Children and Youth, along with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) lead the

protection cluster. The Regional Bureau of Education and the UN children's fund, Unicef, coordinate the emergency responses needed in education. Some local NGOs like ANE have had access to even the most insecure areas like Guba district in Metekel. ANE staff were willing to go with military escorts and local staff were assigned in each IDP collection centre, enabling them to be well connected even to insecure areas amid active conflict. However, not all affected areas have been reached. An informant compared the condition of IDPs in the three zones of BGRS as follows:<sup>50</sup>

Due to the advantage of access and relative peace in Assosa Zone, IDPs in Bambasi have got lifesaving supports from different aid agencies and government counterparts. The same cannot, however, be said when it comes to Kamashi, which is entirely inaccessible as we speak, and Metekel is now with slight improvement in terms of access.

### *Konso Zone*

Similarly to BGRS, Konso Zone was not among the regions where many humanitarian organisations operated before the conflict. The development wing of Mekane Yesus Church and Konso Development Association (KDA) were for a long time the two major NGOs working in the zone. Save the Children was also undertaking some operations. It was only after the displacement occurred that several other humanitarian organisations opened an office. Therefore, according to informants, most of the IDPs were hosted and supported logistically by the host community for weeks, some of them for months, until the ERCS, followed by other humanitarian organisations, arrived.

Currently, there are 15 NGOs participating in the emergency response. Two of them are UN organisations, seven are INGOs and six are local NGOs. As in BGRS, they mostly work on emergency responses divided into six clusters, such as protection/shelter, WASH, health, nutrition, NFI and cash. Recently, under the coordination of UNOCHA from its office in Hawassa, humanitarian organisations have been trying to lead each humanitarian activity cluster. For instance, IOM oversees protection and WASH, and PIN has proposed to lead the cash cluster, etc. If properly worked out, this would help to manage overlapping activities. As in BGRS, in Konso the DRM office is in charge of food distribution. We observed that the Konso Development Association (KDA), a local NGO, collects contributions from neighbouring zones and from the members of Konso ethnic groups living outside the zone, and distributes them to IDPs.

The response to IDPs both in BGRS and Konso Zone has not been enough for two reasons: 1) resource constraints, because the IDP problems are spread across the country and the available resources are overstretched; and 2) access constraints, ie even when resources are available, insecurity causes problems in accessing various areas. Good examples in this regard are Kamashi in BGRS and the Segen area in Konso Zone, both of which have been inaccessible to humanitarian organisations.

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<sup>50</sup> KII, Mr Asmeraw, ANE, Assosa, 17 August 2022.

# 7 Progress towards durable solutions and challenges

In both BGRS and Konso zone, IDPs are in emergency situations. Right now, the priority is for the IDPs to get sufficient humanitarian assistance – shelter, food, water – adequate financial and material resources. However, it is important to reflect on durable solutions.

## 7.1 Return (reintegration in the place of origin)

The overwhelming majority of IDPs in both study regions are opting for safe and voluntary return to their place of origin. In Konso, this option is less controversial – most IDPs, government officials and host communities all agree on return as a durable solution. In BGRS, while the overwhelming majority opt for return, a small number of them do not feel safe about returning.

Returning IDPs to their place of origin as a durable solution to displacement should be contingent upon several other factors, the most crucial being to end the violent conflict that displaced them. In both BGRS and Konso Zone, returning IDPs to their place of origin has had some terrible outcomes. In Konso return has been tried twice through a local customary reconciliation process between the communities. The return plan was to be accompanied by investments in rebuilding the livelihoods of the IDPs – construction of residential houses and creation of service sectors. However, the reconciliation process did not include the armed group accused of causing the displacement. The return plan was processed without ensuring peace and security in the areas from which IDPs had been displaced, and where they were entirely displaced with the outbreak of another round of conflict. Something similar had happened in Sedal *woreda* in Kamashi Zone. In both cases, a hasty and unwarranted return resulted in another round of conflict, which caused the loss of many lives and destruction of property. Article 9/2 of the Kampala Convention has barely been observed in either BGRS or Konso in terms of ensuring the necessary conditions of safety, dignity and security of IDPs during return.

A similar measure was taken regarding displacement in the Gedio–Guji conflict in April 2018. Following a peace-building conference organised by the regional and federal authorities, the government came up with the decision to quickly “facilitate the return of the IDPs to their respective areas of origin, within two weeks of the displacement<sup>51</sup>”. Consequently, a government-led return process commenced in mid-April 2018, and a substantial number of IDPs returned to their *woredas*. However, the resumption of hostilities and destruction of livelihoods in West Guji Zone in May and June 2018 once again displaced thousands of IDP returnees, forcing them to seek protection and assistance (UNHCR, 2022). Contrary to its previous position, the government quickly requested support from the international community

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[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/conflict\\_displacement\\_flash\\_updatat\\_9\\_may\\_2018\\_final.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/conflict_displacement_flash_updatat_9_may_2018_final.pdf)

to mitigate this second massive displacement.<sup>52</sup> This demonstrates the need to ensure the situation is safe before returning IDPs to their places of origin and the need to consult with them first. The Gedeo–Guji case also illustrates the challenges of rapid IDP return in that a number of aid agencies faced difficulties tracking IDPs once the return process had started. Thanks to a lack of clear registration of IDPs and the fluid nature of the problem, humanitarian engagement became difficult in return areas because the IDPs were mixed up with the host/local communities (OCHA, 2022).

In Metekel, since July 2022 progress has been reported, with the return of many thousands of IDPs thanks to the local reconciliation processes among the communities. However, reports of frustration among the returnees have been received because the reconciliation process did not include the armed groups that operate in the region, and as a result of the resumption of the war in Tigray towards the end of August 2022. Some returnees have reportedly left their villages again in fear of attack from armed groups.

After peace and reconciliation, the success of any return plan depends on whether the returnees are able to get access to their houses and land, and to reintegrate into the local community. While there is little fear among the Konso displaced from within Konso Zone, this would be a more serious concern for those Konso displaced from Alle district and the IDPs in BGRS, where there is a complex relationship between them and the place whence they were displaced.

## 7.2 Local integration

Neither region wants to consider local integration as a solution to IDPs. In BGRS, the complex political situation because of the diversity of the ethnic groups, and the tense relationship between the IDPs and the host community does not make local integration a preferred durable solution. In Konso, although the political situation – ethnic homogeneity and a harmonious relationship between the IDPs and hosts – might allow it, the desperate shortage of land in the Zone would not make this possible. If they cannot get land for cultivation, IDPs will not opt for local integration. So far, local integration of IDPs has been tried only in Somali Regional State, where the relationship between the host and the IDPs has been positive thanks to clan similarities and the absence of competition over resources. However, the IDPs have continued to depend on the livelihood support of the host communities in the region, who complain about the pressure of hosting the displaced (Abdirahman et al, 2021).

## 7.3 Integration elsewhere

Integration elsewhere as a durable solution is contingent on several factors. Among these are the willingness of the officials involved, willingness of the local community to provide land for building houses and for farming, and a positive relationship with the local community. Reactions from officials in Konso Zone and from the IDPs show that “there is no room for integration in another place. Absolutely, the Zone cannot afford to integrate in another place.”<sup>53</sup> The common justification is the shortage of productive land to accommodate the IDPs. In

<sup>52</sup>[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/conflict\\_displacement\\_flash\\_updatae\\_9\\_may\\_2018\\_final.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/conflict_displacement_flash_updatae_9_may_2018_final.pdf); and <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-violence/violence-in-southernethiopia-forces-more-than-800000-to-flee-idUSKBN1JU14W>.

<sup>53</sup> KII with Gebino, expert in the Konso Zone Peace and Security office, 15 August 2022.



BGRS, integration in other places could take place for a small number of people who may be accepted by communities with which they share a common ethnic background and where land is available. For instance, with the support of humanitarian organisations, BGRS is working to resettle 1,284 IDPs from Godare camp within Assosa Zone. These IDPs belong to the Benishangul/Berta ethnic group based in the area where they are going to integrate but were displaced from the neighbouring Kamashi Zone, where they do not feel safe to return. Their ethnic background may ease their integration in the place of resettlement within the zone dominated by the Benishangul ethnic group. Thus, this might not work for the majority of IDPs with diverse backgrounds and currently hosted in the region.

Experience from the 2018 Oromo displacement from Somali Regional State shows that most IDPs prefer to settle in Oromia Regional State. Based on this, the Oromia Regional State planned to resettle 86,000 IDPs; most of them were resettled in the suburbs of 11 cities in central Oromia (Jafer et al, 2022; Tola, 2019). A recent study on Oromia shows that these “IDPs are 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 Somali Regional State, which provides a great example of IDP relocation, “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). Thus, even in areas where the officials are willing to convince the locals to accept the relocated IDPs with whom they share ethnic or clan commonalities, accessing productive resources, mainly land, has been difficult.

## 8 Conclusion

In the past five years, Ethiopia has experienced unprecedented, intense, complex and multidimensional conflicts in many of its regions. Our study has identified two broad drivers of conflict: territorial claims and counterclaims; and continuous restructuring of administrative units to address elite demands for ethnic identity recognition and self-administration. These two are taking place in a situation of highly politicised ethnicity, and resource constraints. The two driving factors, which very much overlap and reinforce each other, show variations based on the regional contexts. The conflicts share commonalities across the regions: violent inter-communal conflicts between ethnic groups and organised attacks by armed groups, most of them formed or reinforced in the past few years. In most instances, the inter-communal conflicts and attacks by armed groups have involved mass killings and the destruction and burning down of property on a scale which was not common in the past.

This violence has resulted in the displacement of populations of a magnitude unprecedented in the history of each region and the country at large. Close to half of BGRS's and a third of Konso Zone's populations have been displaced in the past few years, and many of them have been displaced more than once. This, of course, has caused the overstretching of aid and, in both regions IDPs complain that the humanitarian assistance is not sufficient.

In both regions, state parties are making efforts to coordinate emergency responses and cooperate with international and national humanitarian organisations to properly support IDPs and vulnerable host community members. However, there is a lack of clear legal frameworks and policies, particularly at the regional and local government levels, to guide their work.

In terms of durable solutions, although most of the current activities focus on emergency aid, inadequately planned returns have subjected returnees to further insecurity and another round of attacks, with cases in both Konso Zone and BGRS. The returns were planned by local authorities and supported by humanitarian organisations. Some hasty consultations were also made with the IDPs, who were desperate to return to their villages. But the security assessments on which the decisions were based were made by the local authorities – thus the IDPs gave their consent to return without being fully informed. In other words, pursuant to Article 11 of the Kampala Convention on satisfactory conditions for voluntary return, state organs should support IDPs in making a free and informed choice on whether to return or not based on a sufficient assessment of the situation.

Finally, based on the findings, this study recommends the establishment of multi-sectoral programmes and projects in both IDP hosting areas and places of return. These should include reconciliation, livelihood support, reconstruction of shelters and public infrastructure, rehabilitation, psychosocial support, continuous dialogue, and peace education, as well as the development of clear legal and institutional frameworks for finding durable solutions to displacement. In what follows, the study provides some detailed recommendations and considerations for the EU.

## 9 Recommendations

The findings of this study support a call for the retargeting or designing of displacement-impact-oriented multi-sectoral programmes and projects in both IDP hosting areas and places of return. Their targets should include reconciliation and peace-building activities, livelihood support, rehabilitation, continuous community dialogue, and peace education. We present this as follows:

### 1. *Support conflict resolution and peace-building efforts*

- As the problem is conflict-induced displacement, its solution cannot be seen in isolation or independently of the overall national political instability in Ethiopia. This makes the solution to the BGRS and Konso Zone IDP crises contingent upon the resolution of the political conundrum in the country. A key informant reiterated that “the number one priority should be peace, the number two priority should be peace and the number three priority should also be peace”.<sup>54</sup> This calls for a comprehensive engagement in reconciliation and peace-building work. For example, most of the IDPs in Bambasi collection centres are from Western Wollega, where fighting is still going on. In this case, return cannot work as a durable solution without first securing peace and ensuring reconciliation between the IDPs and the communities who would receive them in their place of origin, which extends beyond the regional border. Thus, there is a need to adopt a strategic approach that understands, identifies and addresses the causes of conflict in order to achieve peace. There must be a negotiated settlement of how to settle IDP communities or households who have no return option.
- Supporting traditional and cultural mechanisms of conflict resolution, and reconciliation efforts at the local/community level, is useful. Encouraging results have been obtained in Metekel following the resolution of the conflict and reconciliation has been done at the local, community level. People are returning to their place of origin and displaced Gumuz are coming out from the bush. Population interaction has started in the markets. Nonetheless, local and community-level conflict-resolution efforts by themselves cannot bear fruit without supra-local dialogues. In Konso Zone, local reconciliation supported by the traditional authorities was conducted during the previous IDP return processes. However, this did not include the armed groups operating in the area, who caused another round of displacement. It is, therefore, important to support multilevel – federal, regional and local – and all-inclusive conflict-resolution and peace-building efforts.
- In particular, the EU needs to support the capacity-building activities of regional and local peace and conflict management bureaus and other institutions involved in conflict resolution and peace building, and in responses to IDP situations. It must ensure that these capacity-building activities are inclusive of women and youth.
- In the case of BGRS, where the conflicts have revealed international dimensions, bringing

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<sup>54</sup> KII with Mr Aseresahegn , Director, DRMC, Assosa, 15August 2022.

peace may also require high-level political engagement, including by regional institutions such as IGAD.

## *2. Extend livelihood support to restore productivity*

- Provided that the security of the areas to which the IDPs return is guaranteed and there is dialogue and reconciliation between the returnees and the communities at the place of return, ‘supported return’ could be a viable solution.
- Reconstruction of people’s livelihoods needs to focus on agriculture. Most of the IDPs come from a farming background. To this end, providing agricultural inputs including oxen, fertilisers, seeds and small hand-tools to displacement-affected farmers can contribute to the livelihood reconstruction efforts. Distribution of cash, and provision of small animals, as well as extension services that target returnees and the local population will contribute much.

Local development plans and projects to promote durable solutions for IDPs should include host communities and sending communities on their return. In doing so, the durable solution interventions need to focus on development programmes and projects targeting urban-to-rural linkages as well as interregional state connections in the conflict- and displacement-affected areas such as BGRS.

## *3. Reconstruction of shelters and public services*

- A significant number of IDPs’ homes have either been burnt to the ground or destroyed. Thus, there is a need for support for the rehabilitation of severely affected private and public services. All actors need to consider how to support the reconstruction of residential homes.
- Basic public services, including schools, health centres, water points and farmer training centres have been destroyed. Rebuilding or reconstructing devastated schools is one of the priorities. In this regard, for schooling to restart, there is an urgent need for scholastic materials and uniforms for IDP/returnee children; for school feeding programmes to encourage school attendance; and for peace-building and psychosocial support for both students and teachers.
- Rehabilitation of the damaged health facilities in the displacement-affected areas must take place, with the continuation of the provision of health care services and treatment in the areas of return ensured. In particular, support should include the provision of drugs and trauma kits to health institutions and the provision of ID cards to IDPs, so that they can access health services and insurance.
- Supporting the rehabilitation and maintenance of damaged water schemes and the construction of new water points in the conflict- and displacement-affected areas is equally important. To this end, humanitarian organisations such as ECHO could support the WASH cluster for water and sanitation service delivery as priorities.
- Local and zonal administrations affected by displacement must receive special attention in terms of budget allocation and disbursement of funds. This should be addressed both by donors and by the Ethiopian government.

- This should be addressed both by donors and the Government of Ethiopia. Two studies have been conducted on conflict recovery plans: by BGRS and Asossa University. The BGRS study found out that 38.5 billion birr [over USD 700 million] is needed to recover the region from the conflict, which is nearly six times the Region's annual budget. Asossa University's study "estimated that the region sustained 79.4 billion [about USD 1.5 billion] damage due to the the conflicts in the past years".<sup>55</sup> The recovery plan will be implemented in 17 districts situated in Metekel, Kamashi and Asossa Zones. This, of course, requires the support of stakeholders including EU.

#### *4. Women and other vulnerable groups should be given priority*

- As much as the resource capacity allows, vulnerable groups (children under five, lactating and pregnant women, people with disabilities, etc) should be given priority in terms of responses. Displacement affects women and women-headed households disproportionately. Women have less access to means of obtaining income than men. Because of their responsibility for caring for children and people with disabilities, they cannot travel to look for wage labour, which many men take as a coping mechanism in this moment of difficulty. Thus, based on the local contexts, women and other vulnerable groups should be given livelihood support, such as garden nurseries or small livestock.
- As victims of conflict, women should also take an active role in peace building. Thus, donors and government bodies should make sure that women and girls take part in reconciliation and conflict-prevention processes in their communities. To this end, the relevant bodies should contribute to building the capacity of women and girls and providing gender-awareness training to community members, among others.

#### *5. Mental health and psychosocial support*

- Conflict-induced displacement creates mental issues. Several IDPs have experienced psychological distress, feelings of separation, trauma and related problems as a result of loss of family members and property. Many IDPs have seen their loved ones killed. They have witnessed the burning down of their properties. IDPs are very much concerned about their future, while currently living in a desperate situation. All this has caused psychosocial and emotional problems, and we witnessed many psychiatric cases. Thus, it is crucial to ensure the centrality of psychosocial support for IDPs who are very much traumatised by what happened to them or to their relatives. In this regard, supporting capacity building for the provision of specialised mental health and psychological support for traumatised people are of paramount importance. It is therefore suggested that the EU and other donors join hands in supporting psychological and trauma-healing health centres and mobile clinics at district level, and referral and tertiary hospitals for severe cases.

#### *6. Support local NGOs*

- Durable solutions for displacement-affected communities will require strong collaboration among political, development, peace and security, and humanitarian actors. Local NGOs could play a significant role in such collaboration in terms of local connections and field

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<sup>55</sup> The Reporter, 17 September 2022.

operations for development projects. Local NGOs are locally connected. They know the context. Some of them have diverse staff reflecting the local or regional reality in which they operate. Some of these are providing lifesaving support in the supposedly inaccessible areas. They can do so because they have connections and have recruited staff from among the victims of the conflict there. Compared to UN agencies, who have security protocols and restrictions on travel, local NGOs can sometimes use military escorts to carry out lifesaving emergency support.

- Thus, as long as they get adequate funding, local NGOs can do better in terms of supporting IDPs where they are camped, upon their return and after return. If resources are channelled to local NGOs, they can provide direct assistance to the returnees and the most vulnerable members of the local community, and help them regain their livelihoods.
- The EU should also extend its support to the ERCS, as the latter is not only present and actively involved in terms of responding to the humanitarian needs of IDPs, but it also has wide recognition for its practical responses to urgent IDP matters. In so doing, the EU should also coordinate with other donors when responding to IDPs.

*7. Support the development of clear policy, law and institutional/structural frameworks for bringing durable solutions to IDPs*

- On the one hand, the formulation of DRMC policy and strategy has taken greater account of natural disasters than of the contemporary and unprecedented conflict-induced internal displacements in Ethiopia. On the other hand, despite Ethiopia's DRM policy frameworks, the DRM's structure is not as decentralised as it could be. At zone and *woreda* levels, DRM is subsumed under the Agriculture Office, with its own team leader. This structure and the budget allocated to the team do not match the magnitude of the current IDP problem.
- The fact that Ethiopia has ratified the Kampala Convention has been widely acknowledged as a significant achievement for the country. This is therefore the time to give domestic effect to the Convention through domestic legislation that clearly provides protection and assistance to IDPs and enables durable solutions to be worked out. The EU and other donors may need to support ongoing efforts to establish the legal frameworks on internal displacement and to assist capacity-building activities for implementing the laws at local and regional-state levels.
- Once the legislative frameworks are clearly established, the institutional and structural architectures will follow. At institutional and structural level, and emulating the case of the Somali Region of Ethiopia, there have been some attempts to establish a durable solutions working group in BGRS. However, because of the lack of an enabling environment, the working group is currently unable to do more than cope with emergencies.



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# Appendix 1:

**Table A1: Number of clusters and names of organisations involved in responding to IDP needs in BGRS**

No	Cluster	Number of organisations by cluster	Aid agency names	Government counterpart
1.	Protection	13	PIE, NRC, ANE, UNHCR, WVI, AAH, HAI, HI, UNICEF, MLWDA, I1D, FIDO, UNFPA	BoWCYA
2.	WASH	11	NRC, HI, ANE, UNICEF, PIE, FH, FIDO, COOPI, MCMDO, AAH	RWB
3.	ESNFI	8	ANE, HAI, ASDEPO, UCD, PIE, FH, COOPI, NRC	-
4.	Nutrition	8	UNICEF, AAH, PIE, MCMDO, ASDEPO, ANE(WFP), FIDO,	RHB
5.	Health	10	WHO, UNFPA, EMA, AAH, UNICEF, MCMDO, PIE, FIDO, ASDEPO	RHB
6.	Education	7	UNICEF, NRC, ASDEPO, PIE, I1D, ASDEPO	REB
7.	Food	1	-----	DRMC

*Note:* Agency names in grey are implementing organisations; those in blue are programme organisations.

*Source:* OCHA Sub-regional office, Assosa, August 2022.

## Key:

AAH: Action Against Hunger

ANE: Action for Needy Ethiopia

ASDEPO: Action for Social Development and Environmental Protection Organization

BoWCYA: Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs

COOPI: Cooperazione International

DRMC: Disaster Risk Management Commission

EMA: Ethiopian Midwifery Association

FIDO: Fayya Integrated Development Organization

HAI: Help Age International

HI: Humanity and Inclusion

HPA: Health Poverty Action

I1D: Imagine One Day

MLWDA: Mujejejuwa Loka Women Development Association

PIE: Plan International Ethiopia

RHB: Regional Health Bureau

UCD:Ultimate Concern for Derived

WVI: World Vision Ethiopia

Source: OCHA Sub-regional office, Assosa, August 2022.

**Table A2: Number of clusters and names of organisations involved in responding to IDP needs in Konzo Zone**

No	Cluster	Number of Organizations by cluster	Aid agency names	Government counterpart
1.	Protection	3	IOM, I1D, UNICEF,	BoWCYA
2.	WASH	5	IOM, SC, PIN, KDA, MSF	BoWME
3.	NFI	10	IOM, IRC, SC, I1D, PIN, KDA, EECMY-DASSC, ERC, CA, MC	BoANR
4.	Nutrition	3	SC, UNICEF, MSF	Health office (HO)
5.	Health	5	IOM, SC, UNICEF, MSF, MCMDO	HO
6.	Education	2	IOM, I1D	EO
7.	Food	1	KDA	BoANR
8.	Cash	5	IRC, SC, PIN, ECCA, ERC	-
9.	Rehabilitation	4	IRC, I1D, KDA, OWS	-
10.	Seeds	1	ECCA	BoANR

Source: Konso Zone DRMC.

Key:

- BoANR: Bureau of Agriculture and Natural Resource
- BoWCYA: Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs



- CA: Christian Aid
- ECCA: Ethiopian Clean Cooking Alliance Association
- EECMY-DASSC: Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Service Commission
- EO: Education Office
- ERC: Ethiopian Red Cross
- HO: Health Office
- I1D: Imagine 1 Day
- IOM: International Organization for Migration
- IRC: International Rescue Committee
- KDA: Konso Development Association
- MC: Mercy Corps
- MCMDO: Mothers and Children Multisectoral Development Organization
- MSF: Medecins Sans Frontiers
- OWS: Ogaden Welfare Society
- PIN: Peoples in Need
- SC: Save the Children
- UNICEF: United Nations Children Fund