

Ethiopia – Tigray Conflict

MARCH 31, 2021

SITUATION AT A GLANCE

6 MILLION	4.5 MILLION	4 MILLION	2.3 MILLION	62,255
Estimated Population of Tigray Region <i>GoE – 2017</i>	People in Tigray Requiring Humanitarian Assistance <i>UN – March 2021</i>	Estimated Number of People in Urgent Need of Food Assistance <i>Food Security Cluster – January 2021</i>	People Targeted Through the Northern Ethiopia HRP <i>UN – December 2020</i>	Ethiopian Refugees Arriving in Eastern Sudan Since November <i>UNHCR – March 2021</i>

- The conflict in Tigray will likely result in Emergency levels of acute food insecurity in central and eastern areas of the region through at least September, according to FEWS NET.
- From March 19 to 21, Senator Christopher Coons travelled to Ethiopia to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Tigray with GoE officials, including PM Abiy Ahmed.
- On March 22, DART members joined a USG trip to Mekele to meet with government officials and humanitarian partners, as well as observe stark conditions at an IDP site.
- Through the USAID/BHA-supported, CRS-led JEOP, REST had reached approximately 1.2 million people in five of Tigray’s six zones with emergency food assistance as of March 29.



TOTAL U.S. GOVERNMENT HUMANITARIAN FUNDING For the Tigray Response in FY 2021 and FY 2020	USAID/BHA ^{1,2}	\$112,947,625
	State/PRM ³	\$17,135,000 ⁴
	Total	\$130,082,625⁵

¹ USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA)
² USAID/BHA FY 2020 funding includes emergency food assistance from the former Office of Food for Peace and non-food humanitarian assistance from the former Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance.
³ U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (State/PRM). In addition, State/PRM provided \$22,633,000 toward the Tigray Response in the region.
⁴ Funding in this fact sheet includes assistance to refugees residing in Tigray, which is also reported in the USAID/BHA Ethiopia fact sheet as part of the Ethiopia Complex Emergency.
⁵ This total includes \$326,361 in FY 2020 supplemental funding through USAID/BHA for coronavirus disease (COVID-19) preparedness and response activities.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Humanitarian Needs in Tigray Increase Amid Access Limitations

Nearly five months since conflict erupted in northern Ethiopia's Tigray Region, hostilities involving the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), and other armed elements continue to generate and exacerbate humanitarian needs and displace populations. Volatile security conditions in Central, North Western, South Eastern, and Southern zones are rendering some populations inaccessible to humanitarian actors. Meanwhile, relief actors continue to report large population influxes from Tigray's Western Zone—controlled by authorities from neighboring Amhara Region since November 2020—into North Western Zone's Shire town, with hundreds of thousands of people displaced or expelled by armed actors. Furthermore, the presence of Amharan forces is reportedly restricting humanitarian access into Western Zone, amid reports of protection violations.

Following the Government of Ethiopia (GoE)'s implementation of a notification system for international humanitarian staff travel to Tigray, relief actors have begun increasing their presence and activities in the region. However, other impediments to the expansion of response efforts persist, with continued disruptions to communications services and electricity, as well as lack of emergency communications equipment, undermining the efforts of humanitarian actors to expand operations into areas outside major cities and towns, where humanitarian needs are likely most severe. The USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) in Ethiopia and U.S. Government (USG) leadership continue to engage the GoE on allowing the importation of emergency communications equipment.

Central and Eastern Tigray Face Emergency Levels of Food Insecurity

The ongoing conflict continues to adversely affect food security in Tigray. High levels of displacement, decreased economic activity, restrictions on population movements, and other factors limiting household access to food and income sources are projected to result in Emergency—IPC 4—levels of acute food insecurity in central and eastern areas of Tigray through at least September, with associated high levels of acute malnutrition and excess mortality, according to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET).⁶ FEWS NET anticipates that populations in areas of the region less affected by the conflict will continue to face Crisis—IPC 3—and Stressed—IPC 2—levels of acute food insecurity through September, due to relatively higher levels of economic activity and household food production. In response to growing emergency food needs in Tigray, USAID/BHA partners are continuing to scale up the distribution of food rations and nutrition commodities to conflict-affected populations.

Senator Coons Meets With PM Abiy Regarding Humanitarian Issues

At the request of U.S. President Joseph R. Biden, U.S. Senator Christopher Coons travelled to Ethiopia to meet with GoE officials regarding the humanitarian crisis in Tigray from March 19 to 21. During the trip, Senator Coons met with Prime Minister (PM) of Ethiopia Abiy Ahmed and other senior officials to advocate for the cessation of hostilities in the region and unhindered humanitarian access to conflict-affected populations, as well as express concern regarding reports of human rights abuses and protection violations occurring in Tigray, international media report. Following the trip, PM Abiy rejected calls for a unilateral ceasefire in the region, which would increase access to populations in need of humanitarian assistance; however, he publicly acknowledged for the first time that troops from neighboring Eritrea had entered Tigray during the conflict. Subsequently, on March 26, the Government of Eritrea publicly announced that it would withdraw Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) troops from areas

⁶ The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a multi-partner initiative that developed a standardized scale to classify the severity and magnitude of food insecurity. The IPC scale, which is comparable across countries and time, ranges from Minimal—IPC 1—to Famine—IPC 5—for acute food insecurity.

of Tigray near the Ethiopia–Eritrea border, with the GoE indicating that the ENDF would secure the areas, international media report. The presence and activities of EDF elements in Tigray has inhibited relief activities and disrupted critical services, the UN reports, while international media indicate that Eritrean forces have committed protection violations against civilians in the region. The DART continues to track humanitarian access issues in areas of Tigray occupied by EDF elements.

DART Members Travel to Mekele With USG Delegation

On March 22, a USG delegation—led by U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia Geeta Pasi and including DART members and embassy personnel—travelled to Tigray’s regional capital of Mekele to meet with key stakeholders, including government, military, and civil-society representatives, as well as USAID/BHA partners. The delegation visited a school in the city, where approximately 6,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were sheltering, to observe humanitarian conditions and engage with newly displaced populations. Local authorities identified food, health, livelihoods, protection, shelter, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) assistance as urgent needs among displaced populations. The DART is working to scale up efforts to respond to the needs of displaced and conflict-affected populations.

Military Use of Civilian Infrastructure Impedes Resumption of Services

Parties to the conflict in Tigray continue to utilize civilian and humanitarian assets for military purposes, posing risks to civilians and impeding the resumption of basic services, including health and education, the UN reports. For example, armed soldiers were occupying nearly 20 percent of the nearly 110 health facilities visited by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) between mid-December and early March, with at least one facility being used as a military base, while at least 70 percent of the facilities visited by MSF had been completely looted and 30 percent had incurred some damage. In addition, the UN recently received confirmed reports of armed actors threatening health personnel attempting to return to work. Furthermore, attacks against education facilities and the continued occupation of schools by armed actors are preventing the resumption of education in many areas, according to the UN.

UNHCR Visits Hitsats and Shimelba Refugee Camps

On March 18, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and State/PRM partner the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) conducted a joint visit to Hitsats and Shimelba refugee camps, which had been inaccessible to the UN since November, and North Western Zone’s Shiraro town. The assessment confirmed earlier reports that humanitarian facilities in the camps had been looted and damaged during hostilities, rendering them inoperable. UNHCR estimates that of the approximately 20,000 Eritrean refugees who resided in Hitsats and Shimelba prior to the start of the conflict, more than 7,000 individuals have relocated to Adi Harush and Mai Aini refugee camps, where they are sheltering with other refugees and in schools or other communal facilities. UNHCR continues to work to scale up services available at Adi Harush and Mai Aini.

Refugees Flee Conflict in Tigray as Tensions Raise Protection Risks

Nearly 62,300 refugees had fled Ethiopia into eastern Sudan as of March 23, though the number of new refugees arriving into Sudan has decreased in recent weeks, reportedly due to conflict and armed actor activity in areas near the Ethiopia–Sudan border, according to UNHCR. The UN recently expressed concern regarding escalating tensions related to Al Fashaga, a contested area of land between Ethiopia and Sudan; while the dispute has not directly affected humanitarian operations in Ethiopia to date, military forces have blocked people fleeing Tigray from crossing the border into Sudan in recent weeks. An escalation in tensions could endanger nearly 21,000 Ethiopian refugees sheltering at two sites in Sudan, whose close proximity to armed forces has raised protection concerns, according to UNHCR.

KEY FIGURES



2 Million

People in Tigray targeted to receive USG emergency food assistance via the JEOP



1.2 Million

People in Tigray reached with USG emergency food assistance via the JEOP to date

U.S. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

In response to acute food needs across Tigray, USAID/BHA is supporting the Catholic Relief Services (CRS)-led Joint Emergency Operations Program (JEOP), as well as the UN World Food Program (WFP) and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to provide emergency food assistance—including commodities such as U.S.-sourced cereals, pulses, and vegetable oil—to vulnerable people in the region. Through JEOP, Relief Society of Tigray (REST) had reached more than 1.2 million people in 12 *woredas*—or districts—across five of Tigray’s six zones with two-month food rations since the beginning of the conflict, as of March 29. Due to increasing food needs among conflict-affected populations, the JEOP caseload in Tigray now includes clients of the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), a GoE social protection program targeting food-insecure households. Additionally, in response to nutrition needs in Tigray, USAID/BHA partner the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is distributing nutrition commodities—including quantities of High Energy Biscuits and ready-to-use therapeutic foods sufficient to meet the daily needs of up to 27,000 children younger than five years of age for two weeks—to conflict-affected populations.

HEALTH

With State/PRM support, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has distributed essential medicines and other medical supplies to violence-affected health facilities in Tigray as well as in northern Amhara, and has also supported people displaced by the conflict in Tigray. State/PRM additionally supports UNHCR to provide health assistance to refugees in Tigray, including those sheltering at Adi Harush and Mai Aini camps.

PROTECTION

In response to protection needs resulting from the conflict in Tigray, USAID/BHA supports the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and UNICEF, which conduct programs as humanitarian access restrictions and security conditions permit. IRC is expanding its protection services in Shire with USAID/BHA support, including by establishing gender-based violence and child protection referral pathways with service providers and disseminating information on sexual exploitation and available protection services to 1,600 IDPs sheltering in the town. In addition, State/PRM supports UNHCR to provide protection and other multi-sector assistance to refugees and IDPs.

SHELTER AND SETTLEMENTS

USAID/BHA supports shelter and settlements assistance to conflict-affected populations in Tigray—as well as in Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz regions—through the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Rapid Response Fund, as well as the Ethiopian Red Cross Society. USAID/BHA

partners are constructing emergency shelters in Mekele for people displaced by conflict and distributing relief commodity kits—including blankets, bed mats, and wash basins—to recently displaced individuals, among other activities. In addition, State/PRM supports UNHCR to provide shelter assistance to refugees and IDPs in Tigray.



140,000

People in Tigray reached with water trucking services by CRS through the UNICEF RRM

WASH

USAID/BHA and State/PRM fund the provision of critical WASH assistance throughout Tigray. USG humanitarian partners are distributing WASH supplies and other relief commodities to conflict-affected and displaced populations, as well as delivering equipment to support the rehabilitation of WASH infrastructure damaged by the conflict. USAID/BHA-supported water trucking services are assisting up to 94,000 people in Eastern Zone, while IRC has initiated water trucking services in and around Shire. Meanwhile, through the USAID/BHA-supported, UNICEF-led Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), CRS was reaching more than 140,000 people across Central, Eastern, and Western zones with emergency water services as of late January. In addition, through the RRM, CRS has reached an estimated 28,000 people with hygiene promotion campaigns.

CONTEXT IN BRIEF

- Following weeks of escalating tensions between regional and federal authorities, clashes erupted between the TPLF and the ENDF in several locations across Tigray on November 4. Although the GoE declared victory against the TPLF on November 28, security conditions remain volatile across Tigray, with active conflict continuing to endanger populations in affected areas. Insecurity and its effects on livelihoods, markets, and the availability of services have generated and exacerbated humanitarian needs among local populations in the region, endangering and displacing populations within Tigray, into other regions of Ethiopia, and into adjacent areas of eastern Sudan.
- On November 17, 2020, Michael A. Raynor—U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia until January 2021—redeclared a disaster for Ethiopia for FY 2021 due to the continued humanitarian needs resulting from the complex emergency—including the conflict in Tigray—and the impact of ongoing climate, conflict, food insecurity, and health shocks on vulnerable populations. Separately, on October 16, 2020, Ambassador Raynor redeclared a disaster for Ethiopia due to the sustained widespread impacts of desert locust infestations in the country.
- On March 1, 2021, USAID activated a DART to lead USG humanitarian response efforts to the crisis in Tigray. USAID also stood up a Washington, D.C.-based Response Management Team to support the DART.

USG HUMANITARIAN FUNDING FOR THE TIGRAY CONFLICT RESPONSE IN FY 2021¹

IMPLEMENTING PARTNER	ACTIVITY	LOCATION	AMOUNT
USAID/BHA			
CRS	Food Assistance-57,120 Metric Tons (MT) of U.S. In Kind Food Aid	Central Zone, Eastern Zone, North Western Zone, South Eastern Zone, Southern Zone, Mekele	\$29,992,763
OCHA	Humanitarian Coordination, Information Management, and Assessments (HCIMA)	North Western Zone, Mekele	\$300,000
	Program Support		\$52,520
TOTAL USAID/BHA FUNDING			\$30,345,283
STATE/PRM			
ICRC	Multi-Sector Assistance	Region-wide	\$4,640,000
UNHCR	Multi-Sector Assistance	Region-wide	\$12,495,000
TOTAL STATE/PRM FUNDING			\$17,135,000
TOTAL USG HUMANITARIAN FUNDING FOR THE TIGRAY CONFLICT RESPONSE IN FY 2021			\$47,480,283

USG HUMANITARIAN FUNDING FOR THE TIGRAY CONFLICT RESPONSE IN FY 2020

IMPLEMENTING PARTNER	ACTIVITY	LOCATION	AMOUNT
USAID/BHA			
CRS	Food Assistance—Cash Transfers, 33,690 MT of U.S. In-Kind Food Aid	Eastern Zone, Mekele, North Western Zone	\$68,000,000
	Health, WASH	Region-wide	\$215,250
Ethiopian Red Cross Society	Shelter and Settlements; WASH	Western Zone	\$695,341
iMMAP	HCIMA	Mekele	\$47,405
IOM	Shelter and Settlements	Central Zone, Mekele, North Western Zone	\$676,639
IRC	Protection, WASH	North Western Zone	\$579,783
	Nutrition	Mekele	\$42,823
Pathfinder International	Health	North Western Zone, Western Zone	\$111,111
REST	Food Assistance—Cash Vouchers	Central Zone, Eastern Zone, South Eastern Zone, Southern Zone	\$4,109,593
UNICEF	Nutrition	Region-wide	\$124,397
WFP	Food Assistance—Local, Regional, and International Procurement	North Western Zone	\$8,000,000
TOTAL USAID/BHA FUNDING			\$82,602,342
TOTAL USG HUMANITARIAN FUNDING FOR THE TIGRAY CONFLICT RESPONSE IN FY 2020²			\$82,602,342

TOTAL USG HUMANITARIAN FUNDING FOR THE TIGRAY CONFLICT RESPONSE IN FYs 2020–2021			\$130,082,625
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¹ Year of funding indicates the date of commitment or obligation, not appropriation, of funds. Funding figures reflect publicly announced funding as of March 18, 2021.

² This total represents funding previously reported on the Ethiopia FY 2020 Fact Sheet #4 and East Africa FY 2020 Development & Disaster Risk Reduction Fact Sheet, both dated September 30, 2020. This funding was redirected to address new humanitarian needs stemming from the conflict in Tigray.

PUBLIC DONATION INFORMATION

- The most effective way people can assist relief efforts is by making cash contributions to humanitarian organizations that are conducting relief operations. A list of humanitarian organizations that are accepting cash donations for disaster responses around the world can be found at [interaction.org](https://www.interaction.org).

- USAID encourages cash donations because they allow aid professionals to procure the exact items needed (often in the affected region); reduce the burden on scarce resources (such as transportation routes, staff time, and warehouse space); can be transferred very quickly and without transportation costs; support the economy of the disaster-stricken region; and ensure culturally, dietarily, and environmentally appropriate assistance.
- More information can be found at:
 - USAID Center for International Disaster Information: cidi.org
 - Information on relief activities of the humanitarian community can be found at reliefweb.int.

USAID/BHA bulletins appear on the USAID website at [usaaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/where-we-work](https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/where-we-work)