

# Ethiopia



## Quick facts

Number of IDPs	300,000 – 350,000
Percentage of total population	0.4%
Start of current displacement situation	2006
Peak number of IDPs (Year)	Undetermined
New displacement	200,000



Ethiopia has endured internal and international conflict for decades. The conflicts with Somalia during the cold war era and with Eritrea between 1998 and 2000 have had a long-term impact on the national economy and social stability. In 2009 inter-ethnic conflict and conflict between government armed forces and insurgency groups continued in some parts of the country. Various sources estimated the number of conflict-induced IDPs to be around 300,000 at the end of 2009.

The current government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi introduced radical changes to the constitution in the early 1990s, which transformed the hitherto centralised state into a federation of states based on ethnicity, in order to bring government closer to Ethiopia’s diverse ethnic groups and provide a check against regional imbalances. However, this transformation failed to bring the anticipated decentralisation of power, and the central government has retained its grip on power through political patronage.

Following the establishment of ethnic federalism, a wave of local conflicts gripped the country, as groups were encouraged to settle old disputes or claim territory they felt was rightfully theirs following disputed demarcation of ethnic boundaries. Constitutional mechanisms and the federal government’s management proved insufficient to resolve these conflicts, and the Committee on the Elimination of the Racial Discrimination (CERD) recommended in August 2009 that greater efforts be made to address the roots causes of ethnic conflicts.

In February 2009, inter-ethnic conflict between the Borena of Oromiya Region and the Garre of Somali Region displaced an estimated 160,000 people. The conflict broke out over a borehole that the Borena zone officials wanted to construct in disputed territory on the border of the two regions. Officials of both regions accused the central government of inaction, and an international inter-agency assessment in the areas to which people had been displaced found that the government was not providing any assistance to IDPs who had fled into forest areas or to the outskirts of towns.

In Gambella Region, where conflicts are linked to competition of natural and political resources, fighting between ethnic groups displaced tens of thousands of people in 2009. Conflict between ethnic groups in southern Sudan also spilled over into Gambella, due in part to the cross-border ethnic links.

In 2009, the army continued to fight secessionist groups including the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)

in Somali Region and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in Oromiya, and there was no prospect of a resolution to either conflict. Fighting between government forces and the ONLF, and the human rights violations committed by both parties, had resulted in displacement since 2007. The government was accused of burning villages and forcing communities to vacate their land on the pretext of security concerns, while the ONLF was also reportedly responsible for forcibly recruiting people and obliging other non-Ogadeni clans to support the insurgency. Humanitarian agencies were unable to assess the situation as they were not granted access to the area.

Ethiopia was among the countries that signed the Kampala Convention, but the country is yet to take serious steps to address the rights of those displaced as a result of conflict. The government has rarely acknowledged conflict within its territory and has granted humanitarian organisations only limited access to displaced populations. IDPs have not received assistance for basic necessities such as shelter, education or health care, and in the majority of cases have had to rely on the support provided by host communities. In a country struggling to ensure food security, where according to some donors the government has politicised food distribution and obstructed delivery of aid, IDPs were particularly food insecure.

Among the issues raised by CERD in August 2009 was the need for the government to provide detailed information on the human rights situation of refugees and IDPs in its territory. However a law enacted in January 2009 placed further restrictions on the activities of human rights organisations and others monitoring conflict, and so the monitoring of displacement caused by conflict and human rights violations became more difficult. UN agencies were unable to carry out any profiling of internally displaced populations, while humanitarian agencies including Médecins Sans Frontières had to leave Somali Region in 2009, due to government interference and obstruction of their activities.