



Ethiopia

Quick facts

Number of IDPs	200,000–300,000
Percentage of total population	0.2%–0.4%
Start of current displacement situation	2006
New displacement in 2008	700
Returns in 2008	50,000
Causes of displacement	Internal armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations
Human development index	169

Ethiopia has been vulnerable to conflict for many years. During the cold war it was used as a proxy state by the USSR, while in more recent years a border conflict with Eritrea, irredentist insurgencies and problems associated with ethnic boundaries and pastoral conflicts have led to displacements. Also, the US-led “war on terror” has found a willing partner in Ethiopia and critics suggest that this has helped enable the government to apply repressive practices which have led to displacement, especially in Somali region.

In 2008, displacement was reported in Somali and Oromiya regions, due to conflict between the army and the Ogaden National Liberation Front and the Oromo Liberation Front, and due to conflicts over pasture and water. 50,000 people reportedly fled territorial conflicts between members of the Borena, Somali and Guji tribes, and OCHA reported in December that there were 300,000 people displaced by conflict in the country. Most of them were in Somali, Oromiya and Gambella.

Most IDPs have relied on support from members of their family or community rather than national or international assistance. Some of them have moved to urban areas in search of livelihoods, but most have remained in rural conflict-affected areas.

The government’s exclusive control of humanitarian response mechanisms in the country has left many emergency situations either unreported or under-reported. Responses have been fragmented, inadequate and delayed, compounding the impact on affected populations and leaving their needs unmet. Situations of displacement resulting from internal conflicts have been obscured and the plight of conflict-induced IDPs quickly forgotten.

Depending on the causes and areas of displacement, Ethiopia’s conflict-induced IDPs have complex protection needs, due to the actions of government forces, allied militias and insurgent groups, and due to the recurrence of violence in pastoral areas over natural resources.

Pastoralists face specific protection needs given that their livelihoods rely heavily on mobility. They have historically been marginalised by successive Ethiopian governments promoting settled agriculture over nomadic lifestyles. Conflicts

have denied them freedom of movement and made it difficult for them to maintain their livelihoods, forcing them into sedentary destitution.

The prospects for Ethiopians internally displaced by conflict were not good at the end of 2008. For sustainable peace to prevail in areas of insurgency and conflict, the central government would have to do more to recognise the diversity of its population, and meet its constitutional commitment to ethnic federalism by devolving more powers to state governments. The government would also have to work more closely with international and national institutions to find durable solutions for them. Meanwhile, international donors should step up attempts to prevail on the government to respect and protect the human rights of conflict-affected groups.

In 2008, the Government of Ethiopia prepared a draft law that would criminalise human rights activity and seriously undermine civil society groups. If enacted, the law would bar both foreign and Ethiopian organisations receiving more than ten per cent of their funding from abroad from undertaking any activities in human rights, gender equality, children’s rights, disabled people’s rights, conflict resolution or the strengthening of judicial and law enforcement practices. The law would also exclude groups funded by Ethiopians living outside the country.

In 2008 there were no ministries or government focal points with a mandate to respond to conflict-induced displacement; there were no national NGOs or monitoring bodies following IDPs, and there were no laws or national policies to provide a framework for their protection. For the national response to improve, the government would have to establish or encourage these elements, after first of all acknowledging that populations have been displaced by conflict within the country’s borders. For this to happen, donors and international organisations need to maintain a proactive approach in engaging the government.