

*Emergency (IPC Phase 4) expected in parts of Tigray in 2021 if access constraints persist*

In November, tensions between the national and regional governments developed into widespread conflict in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia. The conflict has driven large-scale displacement, with populations fleeing to areas not directly under attack, neighboring Afar and Amhara Regions, and Sudan. The movement of goods and people, food assistance delivery, and many economic activities have largely halted. Insecurity in the region is likely to persist in the near term, disrupting access to food and income into 2021. High food assistance needs are expected now through at least the next harvest in late 2021 in eastern and southern areas of Tigray, and among displaced populations in Afar, Amhara, and Sudan. Urgent action is needed to reverse restrictions to movement and activities, to open humanitarian space for all humanitarian actors, and to resume and immediately scale up humanitarian assistance necessary to meet basic food needs and prevent further deterioration in food security.

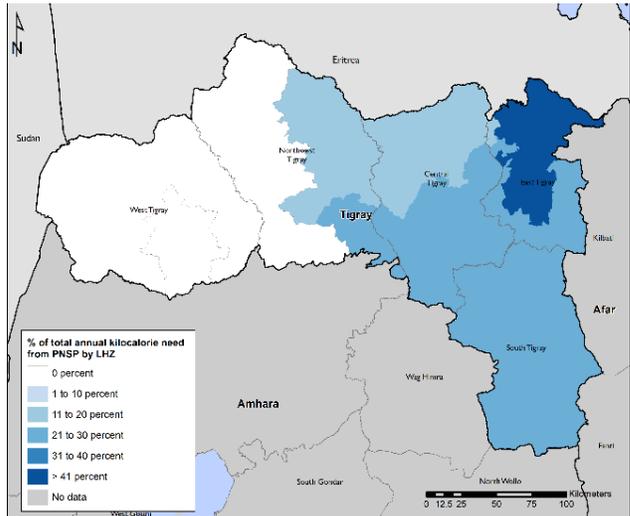
Since the outbreak of conflict on November 4, fighting was primarily focused along main roadways running west to east in the region, though the full extent of conflict is likely still unknown as telecommunication services remain limited. The government imposed a six-month [state of emergency on November 6](#). Fighting was concentrated in western Tigray, but moved eastward as the month progressed, and continues in localized areas of Tigray, with federal forces taking control of the regional capital Mekele in late November. [According to UNHCR](#), as of December 9, nearly 50,000 people have fled to Sudan. While no official figures are available, reports indicate people have also fled to neighboring Amhara and Afar regions and that many are likely displaced within Tigray.

Poor households in Tigray rely on their own crop production and income earned through agricultural and non-agricultural labor to meet their basic food needs. When the conflict erupted, the main season *meher* harvest was ongoing. Available information suggests that conflict has been relatively low in rural areas, allowing many rural households to continue harvesting and consuming crops. However, reporting also suggests that some rural households in areas affected by conflict have abandoned or cannot access their fields. Furthermore, given official movement restrictions, fear of moving due to the conflict, and reduced intra- and inter-region trade flows, economic activity is generally reduced. Restricted movement is especially damaging to poor households in the deficit-producing mid- and highland areas who rely heavily on labor migration to surplus areas in the western lowlands. Income from labor migration was already negatively affected in 2020 by the COVID-19 related movement restrictions. In addition, livestock sales, an important income source among middle and better-off households throughout the region, are limited by reduced market functioning. Since this income helps support the local economy, generating demand for local agricultural labor, a reduction in livestock sales has knock-on effects for poorer households. Overall, poor households' access to income has notably decreased.

At the same time, extremely high food prices are further constraining access to food. Information from those who recently left Tigray suggests the destruction of infrastructure, regional border closures, and fuel shortages have resulted in limited food supplies in markets, putting significant upward pressure on food and non-food prices, which were already above average.

The ongoing conflict has also prevented the delivery of humanitarian food assistance and Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) permanent direct support. More than 300,000 people in Tigray, including internally displaced people (IDP) and

**Figure 1.** Contribution of PSNP\* expressed as a percent of annual food needs by livelihood zone in Tigray



\*Cash PSNP was converted into food terms and added to the food distribution, then calculated as a percent of the annual kilocalorie needs. A weighted average was taken across all wealth groups.

Source: USAID HEA Activity and government of Ethiopia

refugees, typically receive humanitarian food assistance every six weeks, though it is expected they have not received a distribution since October due to the conflict. An estimated 1 million people in Tigray receive PSNP support, covering up to 50 percent of basic kilocalorie needs among poor and very poor households (Figure 1). While most PSNP beneficiaries receive distributions between February and July, roughly 250,000 permanent direct support beneficiaries, including the elderly and disabled, receive year-round assistance. It is believed that these beneficiaries have not received a distribution since August as the federal government did not transfer cash to the region following the tension due to the regional election. On December 2, the federal government and UN announced a humanitarian corridor was opening to government-controlled areas. Humanitarian assistance has likely reached some areas, as the NDRMC reported on December 8, though this is difficult to confirm. However, PSNP distributions are likely to be limited in the short to medium term as the resumption of deliveries, which require federal government funds, will depend on the implementation support of the regional government.

Localized conflict and some displacement in Tigray are expected to continue into 2021. Economic activity is expected to somewhat improve as the military offensive has largely ended; however, with the anticipated continuation of the state of emergency coupled with damaged infrastructure, some disruption to the movement of people and goods is likely through at least mid-2021.

Food security among displaced, urban, and some poor rural households has notably declined. With the availability of the harvest, particularly in surplus-producing western areas, most poor households are likely meeting their immediate short-term food needs; however, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are anticipated in several eastern, central, and southern areas, including some urban and peri-urban areas, of Tigray. Anecdotal reports suggest that IDP and poor households in bordering areas of Amhara and Afar are also having difficulty accessing food and other basic supplies due to limited market activities with Tigray; Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are also likely among these populations. It is expected that some direct beneficiaries of PSNP who have not received assistance since August are likely facing wide food consumption gaps indicative of Emergency (IPC Phase 4). FEWS NET currently anticipates that PSNP deliveries are likely to resume by mid-2021 and that humanitarian assistance will be delivered to some areas starting in the coming months. However, in the absence of assistance and PSNP, additional very poor households are likely to deteriorate to Emergency (IPC Phase 4) in the coming months with the depletion of the harvest, and area-level Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes would be likely in early 2021. Urgent action is needed to enable the immediate scale up of food assistance necessary to meet basic food needs and prevent further deterioration in food security.