

*Amid conflict and drought, Ethiopia faces one of the world's most extreme food security emergencies*

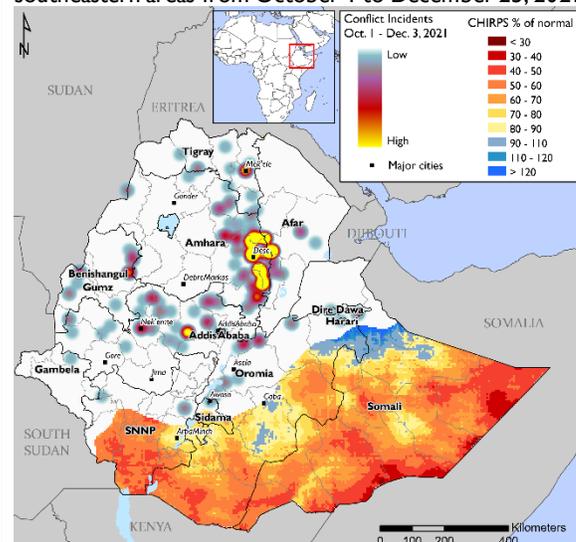
Humanitarian assistance needs in Ethiopia in 2022 will be at record levels<sup>1</sup>, nearly 40 percent higher compared to both 2021 and 2016, which followed the historic 2015 El Niño drought. Conflict-affected northern Ethiopia remains the greatest concern, where large consumption deficits in line with Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are widespread, and it is possible outcomes are worse in parts of Tigray. In southern pastoral areas, a prolonged drought, rivaling those of 2010/2011 and 2016/2017 in terms of both severity and duration, will drive widespread Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes. Large-scale humanitarian assistance will be needed throughout much of the country in 2022, coupled with unhindered humanitarian access in northern Ethiopia, to avert the loss of lives and livelihoods. Further, a resolution to conflict in northern Ethiopia is required to address the underlying drivers of the most severe needs.

Conflict in northern Ethiopia has persisted since November 2020, with the shifting of frontlines from Tigray to bordering areas of Amhara and Afar in mid-2021. In addition to the direct loss of human life and large-scale displacement from the war, the conflict has substantially reduced income options, thereby limiting food access. Millions of households are atypically market reliant, while food prices are exorbitantly high due to significant interference with trade flows and market activity, which has, in turn, driven food prices to over 300 percent above pre-crisis levels in some instances. Food access is further restricted by severe constraints to labor-related income-earning opportunities. The conflict has also displaced millions of people. Displaced households, especially those fleeing conflict, often leave behind their assets and face a sudden loss of livelihood options.

As conflict continues to spread across northern Ethiopia, the third prolonged drought in just over a decade developed across southern Ethiopia. Widespread below-average rainfall during the October to December 2021 *deyr/hageya* season extended moderate to extreme drought conditions, marking the third consecutive poor season in southern Ethiopia. The worst-affected areas include Borena, Dawa, Liben, and Afer zones. Pasture/browse and water availability are significantly below average, resulting in emaciated livestock and large-scale livestock deaths; over 220,500 livestock, predominately cattle, have reportedly died in worst-drought affected areas. Based on a government report from November, herds sizes in southern Oromia are now, on average, around only 50 percent of 2014 levels. Also, in November, a multi-agency report indicated over 120,000 livestock, mostly cattle, have died in Afer, Dawa, and Liban zones of Somali Region. Despite inflationary pressure, livestock prices were stable or declining in recent months, and livestock-to-cereal terms of trade are up to 45 percent below average due to very high staple food prices. Livestock prices are expected to further decline as livestock conditions deteriorate, driving even worse terms of trade in the coming months. Milk production is also low, limiting income and food from this crucial source. Additionally, *deyr/hageya* production failed for cropping households, resulting in reduced access to food from own production and labor activities.

In 2022, conflict is expected to remain volatile, with the intensity and frequency of offensives and counter-offensives likely to increase. This will drive higher levels of displacement and significantly restrict access to most economic activities associated with household food security, notably in northern Ethiopia. At the same time that conflict is expected to drive high food assistance needs in the north, research by FEWS NET climate scientists suggests the forecast of waning La Niña conditions

**Figure 1.** Conflict incidents from October 1 to December 3, 2021, in central, western, and eastern Ethiopia and rainfall as a percent of normal (CHIRPS) in southern and southeastern areas from October 1 to December 25, 2021



Source: ACLED, Climate Hazards Center UCSB, and FEWS NET

<sup>1</sup> This statement is in relation to the time frame for which FEWS NET has comparable national needs estimates, which includes 2014-2022. The highest recorded needs in this timeframe prior to this year were in 2016 following the El-Niño drought.

may result in a fourth consecutive below-average rainfall season in southern Ethiopia from April to June 2022. As such, livestock herd sizes, value, and production are expected to see only minimal improvements during the first rainy season of 2022, following likely high livestock deaths during the January to March dry season. Compounding the high levels of conflict and severe drought are poor macroeconomic conditions resulting from COVID-19 impacts, declines in budgetary support, and the large national trade deficit driving high inflation and depreciation in the Ethiopian Birr (ETB). Since August, the annual inflation rate has been over 30 percent, driven primarily by food inflation. Labor wage rates are also not keeping pace with inflation, and as a result, poor households are facing below average labor-to-cereal terms of trade.

Ongoing humanitarian assistance is mitigating food consumption gaps for some households; however, distributions are not regular, and rations are being stretched. In northern Ethiopia, the de facto humanitarian blockade to Tigray and ongoing conflict in Afar and Amhara, [where WFP recently suspended food distributions](#), are restricting assistance delivery. In these areas, rounds of assistance are meant to be distributed every six weeks but are only reaching beneficiaries a round once every five months. In the Somali Region, as of early December, humanitarians are reaching about 1.87 million people per round of assistance delivery. Based on historical trends, distributions of the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) are likely to start across most of the country in late February/March; however, distributions will likely not occur in conflict-affected areas of northern Ethiopia due to access constraints. [Funding constraints](#) are also likely to limit the capacity to meet all populations in need.

Widespread Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are likely to persist in northern Ethiopia, where millions face large food consumption gaps due to limited food and income sources amid persisting insecurity and shifting frontlines. Worst outcomes in Tigray, with associated Extremely Critical levels of acute malnutrition and high levels of hunger-related mortality, remain likely. In the south, given that drought impacts are already comparable in severity to 2010/2011 and 2016/2017, there is concern that a significant proportion of the population will face food consumption gaps large enough to drive high levels of acute malnutrition and mortality. Widespread Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are likely in most areas, with Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes likely in Tigray; Zones 2 and 4 in Afar; Wag Himra and North Wollo zones in Amhara; Borena Zone in Oromia; and Afder, Liben, and Dawa zones of Somali Region. One of the world's most severe food security emergencies will likely occur in Ethiopia in 2022 due to the combination of these shocks. Large-scale food and livelihood assistance will be needed throughout much of the country, coupled with unhindered humanitarian access in northern Ethiopia to prevent further loss of lives and livelihoods.

*FEWS NET Ethiopia Food Security Alert: Amid conflict and drought, Ethiopia faces one of the world's most extreme food security emergencies, December 22, 2021.*