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Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



DFAT COUNTRY INFORMATION REPORT ETHIOPIA

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MAP



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ACRONYMS

ADP	Amhara Democratic Party (formerly the Amhara National Democratic Movement, or ANDM)
ANDP	Afar National Democratic Party
ARRA	Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs
ATP	Anti-Terrorism Proclamation
AUD	Australian Dollar
BGPDUF	Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CUD	Coalition for Unity and Democracy (also known as Qinjit)
EDP	Ethiopian Democratic Party
EHRC	Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defence Force
EPP	Ethiopian Prosperity Party (formally the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front)
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESAT	Ethiopian Satellite Television
ESDP	Ethiopian Socialist Democratic Party
ESPDP	Ethiopian Somali People's Democratic Party
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GANHRI	Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GERD	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
GPDM	Gambela People's Democratic Movement
HNL	Harari National League
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INSA	Information Network Security Agency

IOM	International Organization for Migration
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or Intersex
METEC	Metals and Engineering Corporation
NaMA	National Movement of Amhara
NEBE	National Electoral Board of Ethiopia
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Service
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODP	Oromo Democratic Party (formerly the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation, or OPDO)
OFC	Oromo Federalist Congress
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OMN	Oromo Media Network
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
SEPDM	Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
SLM	Sidama Liberation Movement
SNNP	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (a state)
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UDJ	Unity for Democracy and Justice (also known as Andinet)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USD	US Dollar
VERA	Vital Event Registration Agency

GLOSSARY

<i>Birr</i>	Currency of Ethiopia (ETB)
<i>Kebele</i>	Neighbourhood-level administrative unit
<i>Khat</i>	A stimulant leaf that can be chewed or made into tea
<i>Kilili</i>	State-level legislative assembly
<i>Laissez-passer</i>	Temporary travel document
<i>Liyu</i>	Special police force in Somali State
<i>Qeerroo</i>	Organised movement of young ethnic Oromo
<i>Sharia</i>	Islamic law
<i>Shisha</i>	A tobacco mix smoked in a water pipe
<i>Woreda</i>	District-level administrative unit

Terms used in this report

high risk	DFAT is aware of a strong pattern of incidents
moderate risk	DFAT is aware of sufficient incidents to suggest a pattern of behaviour
low risk	DFAT is aware of incidents but has insufficient evidence to conclude they form a pattern

official discrimination

1. legal or regulatory measures applying to a particular group that impede access to state protection or services that are available to other sections of the population (examples might include but are not limited to difficulties in obtaining personal registrations or identity papers, difficulties in having papers recognised, arbitrary arrest and detention)
2. behaviour by state employees towards a particular group that impedes access to state protection or services otherwise available, including by failure to implement legislative or administrative measures

societal discrimination

1. behaviour by members of society (including family members, employers or service providers) that impedes access by a particular group to goods or services normally available to other sections of society (examples could include but are not limited to refusal to rent property, refusal to sell goods or services, or employment discrimination)
2. ostracism or exclusion by members of society (including family, acquaintances, employers, colleagues or service providers)

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1.1 This Country Information Report has been prepared by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for protection status determination purposes only. It provides DFAT's best judgement and assessment at time of writing and is distinct from Australian Government policy with respect to Ethiopia.

1.2 The report provides a general, rather than an exhaustive, country overview. It has been prepared with regard to the current caseload for decision makers in Australia without reference to individual applications for protection visas. The report does not contain policy guidance for decision makers.

1.3 Ministerial Direction 84 of 24 June 2019, issued under section 499 of the *Migration Act* (1958), states that:

Where the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has prepared [a] country information assessment expressly for protection status determination purposes, and that assessment is available to the decision maker, the decision maker must take into account that assessment, where relevant, in making their decision. The decision maker is not precluded from considering other relevant information about the country.

1.4 This report is informed by DFAT's on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in Ethiopia. It takes into account relevant and credible open source reports, including those produced by: the United Nations and its agencies; the US Department of State; the UK Home Office; the World Bank; the International Monetary Fund; leading human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Freedom House; and reputable news sources. Where DFAT does not refer to a specific source of a report or allegation, this may be to protect the source.

1.5 This updated Country Information Report replaces the previous DFAT report on Ethiopia released on 28 September 2017.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

RECENT HISTORY

2.1 Ethiopia, formerly Abyssinia, is a multi-ethnic federal republic in East Africa. Ethiopia is Africa's oldest independent country — with the exception of a five-year Italian occupation (1936-41), it was never colonised. In 1974, a Communist military junta known as the Derg ('Committee') overthrew the long-serving Emperor, Haile Selassie, and abolished Ethiopia's monarchy, the House of Solomon, which dated to antiquity. The Derg pursued policies of nationalisation and collectivisation, and Ethiopia descended into civil war between junta and rebel forces. Between 1976 and 1978, the Derg killed thousands of its opponents (the campaign of 'Red Terror'). Rebel forces from the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a multi-ethnic alliance led by the Tigrayan people, ousted the Derg in 1991, ending Ethiopia's civil war. The Derg's leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam, was granted asylum in Zimbabwe. The EPRDF and its successor, the Ethiopian Prosperity Party (EPP), have ruled Ethiopia since. In 1993, Eritrea broke away from Ethiopia and established its own state, rendering Ethiopia landlocked. A border dispute between the two countries triggered a two-year war (1998-2000), in which 100,000 people were killed (see [Security Situation](#)). Ethiopia is one of the most drought-prone countries in the world. Drought-induced famines in 1973-74 and 1984-85 resulted in more than 1 million deaths. Its capital city, Addis Ababa, is a major diplomatic hub, as seat of the African Union and the UN Economic Commission for Africa.

2.2 Ethiopia held its first multi-party elections in May 1995. The EPRDF won this and all other subsequent elections, bringing stability and economic growth but restricting political dissent and media and civic freedoms for most of its time in power. The EPRDF was disbanded in December 2019 (see [Political System](#)). Ethnic Tigrayans, a minority, wielded outsized influence during most of the EPRDF's rule, fostering resentment among the considerably larger Amhara and, in particular, Oromo ethnic groups. Meles Zenawi, a Tigrayan who led the removal of the Derg, served as prime minister from 1995 until his death in 2012. Zenawi was succeeded by his deputy, Hailemariam Desalegn, an ethnic Wolayta — Ethiopia's first peaceful transition of power in modern times.

2.3 Large-scale anti-government protests beginning in 2014, centred in Oromia and, later, Amhara states, prompted the declaration of a State of Emergency, under which over 20,000 people were arrested and 1,000 killed (see [2014-18 Protests and State of Emergency](#)). Protesters demanded greater political rights, leading to the resignation, in February 2018, of Prime Minister Desalegn. His successor and current prime minister, Abiy Ahmed (appointed in April 2018), embarked on an ambitious reform agenda, and the human rights situation has improved significantly under his watch. Among other reforms, Abiy has lifted restrictions on freedom of expression, released political prisoners, removed terrorist designations of previously-exiled opposition groups, expanded the space for civil society, and initiated reform of legislation used previously to arrest and prosecute government critics. In parallel, Abiy has pursued high-profile diplomatic initiatives across East Africa. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 for his peacebuilding efforts with Eritrea, culminating in the signing of an agreement to formally end their war. Abiy is Ethiopia's first prime minister from the Oromo ethnic group.

2.4 After an initial period where violence subsided significantly, ethno-nationalism, inter-ethnic clashes and associated displacement again increased, though not nearly to the levels witnessed preceding Abiy's election. Abiy's reform agenda has met some resistance, and his government was the subject of a purported coup attempt in June 2019.

2.5 Abiy had committed to holding free and fair elections in 2020, although these have been postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak in the country. Abiy declared a five-month State of Emergency on 8 April 2020 in response to the outbreak. The State of Emergency, while valid only until September 2020, limits some human rights, particularly those around association and movement. While these reflect the types of restrictions in place internationally, there is scope for abuse. However, the response has generally been accepted as necessary by opposition parties who see it as proportionate to the threat posed by COVID-19.

DEMOGRAPHY

2.6 The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates Ethiopia's population at 110 million, with an average annual growth rate of 2.5 per cent in the period 2010-2019. Among African countries, only Nigeria is more populous. Ethiopia's population is concentrated in the north and centre of the country (the 'Ethiopian highlands'). Ethiopia has a young population — around 70 per cent is under the age of 30 (including nearly 40 per cent under 14). Only 4 per cent of Ethiopians are aged 65 or older. The median age is 18. Approximately 80 per cent of the population lives in rural areas.

2.7 Ethiopia is ethnically and linguistically diverse, comprising more than 80 different ethnic groups and 100 languages. According to the most recent national census (2007), 10 ethnic groups have a population of 1 million people or more. The Oromo constitute the single largest, at 34.5 per cent of the population, followed by the Amhara (26.9 per cent), Somali (6.2 per cent), Tigrayan (6.1 per cent), Sidama (4 per cent) and Gurage (2.5 per cent) peoples. More recent figures are unavailable — a new census has been postponed repeatedly, most recently in 2019 (owing to large-scale internal displacement). Amharic is the official national language, although the government flagged in March 2020 its intention to grant similar status to the Oromiffa, Afar, Somali and Tigrinya languages. These languages already enjoy official status in the regional states in which they predominate. English is widely taught and spoken.

2.8 Oromia is the most populous of Ethiopia's states, with around 37 per cent of the total population, followed by Amhara (23.3 per cent) and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP — 20.4 per cent). Somali and Tigray states, respectively, account for 6 per cent and 5.8 per cent of Ethiopia's population. Addis Ababa is Ethiopia's largest city, with a population of around 4.5 million. As Ethiopia's administrative and commercial capital, Addis Ababa attracts migrants from across the country and has a multi-ethnic character. Inter-ethnic marriage is common in Addis Ababa and urban centres. It is less common in rural areas.

ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

2.9 Ethiopia's economy has averaged double-digit growth over the last decade, making it one of the fastest growing economies in the world and the largest economy in East Africa. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2019 was USD91 billion — up from USD54 billion in 2014. Economic expansion has facilitated important development gains. Between 2007 and 2017, the rate of extreme poverty and hunger fell by half (from 61 per cent to 31 per cent of the population), and Ethiopia has recorded significant gains in health and education. In 2015, Ethiopia met the Millennium Development Goal of reaching over half its population with sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Electrification has increased by 29 per cent since 2004.

2.10 While consistently high growth has helped improve living standards and reduce extreme poverty levels, Ethiopia remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Per capita income in 2019 was USD951. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) ranks Ethiopia 173rd out of 189 countries in the 2019 Human Development Index, situating it in the low human development category. More than half the population does not have electricity, and internet penetration – at 15 per cent – is low. Over 40 million people remain without access to safe drinking water. Food insecurity, owing to drought conditions and associated crop failures, is an ongoing risk, particularly in Somali state (the lowlands parts of Afar, Oromia and SNNP states are also affected). Ethiopia ranks 97th out of 119 countries in the 2019 Global Hunger Index, as calculated by the International Food Policy Research Institute. A locust plague, ongoing at the time of publication, has further undermined food security and livelihoods (Amhara, Somali and Tigray states have been worst hit). According to the Ethiopian Government, 8.4 million people require humanitarian aid, including emergency food assistance, in 2020. In practice, this number is likely significantly higher. Poverty is most pronounced in rural areas.

2.11 Agriculture accounts for 40 per cent of GDP and 70 per cent of exports, and employs most of the labour force. Coffee is Ethiopia's single-largest export commodity, but a fall in global coffee prices, together with the high cost of Ethiopian coffee, means revenue from this source has declined. Successive governments have sought to diversify the economy away from agriculture, and the services sector is now the single-largest source of GDP. Ethiopia is likely to have vast mineral resources (including gold and iron ore), but the country has been largely unexplored by miners, and its actual potential is unknown. Ethiopia's landlocked status (it is the largest landlocked country in the world by population) undercuts its international competitiveness. Following Eritrea's secession in 1993, Ethiopia has been almost entirely dependent on Djibouti for the import and export of goods. The current federal government has made efforts to address this reliance, including by pursuing access to ports in Eritrea, Kenya and Somaliland. Remittances from the large Ethiopian diaspora are an important source of national revenue; Ethiopia suffers from a shortage of foreign currency. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected growth of 7.2 per cent in 2020 (pre-COVID).

2.12 Nearly 70 per cent of Ethiopia's labour force is engaged in the agricultural sector, primarily as subsistence and smallholder farmers. The services sector (at 24 per cent) is the next largest employer. Around 2 million Ethiopians are set to enter the labour force each year. Generating formal employment opportunities for unemployed or underemployed youth, particularly in urban areas, is an ongoing challenge (a lack of employment opportunities was an underlying driver of the 2014-18 protests).

2.13 Urban unemployment has steadily decreased since 2003 and was 19 per cent in 2019. Sixty-five per cent of the urban working-age population, and 60 per cent of the urban unemployed live in small cities and towns. Post-secondary graduates consistently experience the lowest levels of unemployment (14.1 per cent in 2018) and secondary school graduates consistently experience the highest (24.3 per cent in 2018). Unemployment rates for women and youth (aged 15-24) are also significantly higher than the national average.

2.14 Most urban Ethiopians were employed in the services sector (80 per cent) in 2018, and were employed by the private sector (75 per cent). Real wages are currently equivalent to what they were in 2006, after a decline which bottomed out in 2012. Women work disproportionately in the informal sector and in unpaid family work in the home or on the family farm. Men in the formal sector earned 50 per cent more than women in 2018.

2.15 Employment is a major driver of both internal migration (typically to Addis Ababa) and formal and informal external migration, particularly to Saudi Arabia, where a large number of Ethiopians are employed as domestic workers (women) and construction workers (men). Saudi Arabia has periodically cracked down on undocumented migrant workers from Ethiopia (see [Treatment of Returnees](#)).

2.16 Traditionally, Ethiopia has pursued a state-led model of development, with state-owned enterprises dominating the economy and growth driven by public investment, including in large infrastructure projects. Since assuming office in April 2018, Abiy has pursued an ambitious economic reform agenda aimed at stimulating private sector-led growth. This includes improving the business environment (Ethiopia ranks 159th out of 190 countries in the World Bank's 2020 Ease of Doing Business index), expanding the private sector's access to credit and, in the long-term, privatising state-owned enterprises. As part of this agenda, the current federal government has lifted some restrictions on foreign investment, including in strategic sectors like energy, telecommunications, finance and aviation. This represents a major shift in Ethiopian economic strategy; however, liberalisation will be a long-term process, and the state retains substantial control of the economy, including ownership of all land. Ethiopia's largest company in 2018, the Metals and Engineering Corporation (METEC), is military-owned.

2.17 Ethiopia aspires to attain lower-middle-income status (USD1,026 GDP per capita is the World Bank's LMI threshold) by 2025. Central to its development plans is the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), construction of which commenced on the Nile River along Ethiopia's border with Sudan in 2010. When complete, the dam will be the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa, with a capacity to generate up to 6.4 gigawatts of electricity. This is sufficient to meet Ethiopia's electricity needs, and allow it to export surplus electricity to neighbouring countries. Ethiopia expects the GERD to be fully operational by 2022. Construction of the GERD has met resistance from Egypt, which fears the dam will compromise its downstream access to the Nile's waters (Egypt relies on the Nile River for 90 per cent of its water). In mid-2020, Ethiopia announced that it had reached its first year filling target of 4.9 billion cubic metres, reportedly through natural filling in the rainy season. Discussions between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan in relation to future developments and filling levels are ongoing.

2.18 DFAT assesses that poverty and a lack of economic opportunity are the most significant 'push' factors for external migration.

Corruption

2.19 Ethiopia has a strong anti-corruption legal framework. The Criminal Code, the Revised Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission Establishment Proclamation, and the Revised Anti-Corruption Law criminalise all major forms of corruption, including: active and passive bribery; bribery of foreign officials; and money laundering. Facilitation payments are illegal, and public servants are forbidden from accepting gifts or hospitality that may influence their decision-making. Under the Criminal Code, corruption on the part of public servants is punishable by between one and 10 years in prison. Government officials are legally obligated to register their wealth and personal property (non-compliance carries financial and criminal penalties). In January 2017, the federal government established a Corruption Directorate within the Federal Police Commission to investigate cases of systemic corruption. Since the election of Prime Minister Abiy, the directorate has been involved in the investigation of a number of high-profile cases, with some publicised success. For example, in an address to Parliament in November 2019, Abiy outlined that the Government of Ethiopia had identified tens of millions of US dollars that had been illegally obtained and held overseas (mostly in the UAE), and was in the process of negotiating with the relevant banks for their return. The Office of the Ombudsman has the authority to investigate complaints of administrative mismanagement by the executive branch.

2.20 In practice, corruption seems to be widespread, including in the civil service. According to the GAN Business Anti-Corruption Portal, common corrupt practices include the payment of facilitation payments and bribes to process documents, to keep land leased from the state and to obtain government contracts. Local sources told DFAT that a bribe is often required to obtain a national identification card, driver's licence and permits for establishing a business. Sources also told DFAT that the police readily accept bribes in exchange

for waiving the issuance of traffic infringements (the going rate is reportedly 50 *birr*, or approximately AUD2.50). While corruption occurs, it is less widespread by regional standards. Ethiopia ranked 96th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index— an improvement of 18 places from a year earlier.

2.21 Combatting corruption is a priority for the current federal government. Over 100 officials have been arrested for alleged corruption and economic sabotage since November 2018, including from the senior ranks of: the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS); the Federal Police; the Public Procurement and Property Disposal Service; the Ethiopian Electric Corporation; and the military-run METEC. Some of these charges were dropped in February 2020. Bereket Simon, a former communications minister and EPRDF founding member, was arrested on corruption charges in January 2019, and remains in jail. METEC is accused of overseeing an illegal procurement program worth USD1.2 billion for the benefit of select individuals, and has lost several government contracts since Abiy took office. Federal parliament was considering legislation to affirm the independence and expand the mandate of the Office of the Ombudsman at the time of publication. The proposed legislation would strengthen the investigative capacity and enforceability of the Ombudsman's decisions. The legislation has not yet been presented to the Parliament for approval.

Health

2.22 Consistently high economic growth rates have allowed successive governments to increase expenditure in the health sector. Ethiopia's health system has undergone significant improvements in the last two decades, including an expansion of health facilities and an increase in the number of health professionals working across the country. Under-five child mortality has been reduced by two-thirds and AIDS-related deaths have fallen fivefold since 2003. Stunting is down by one-third since 2000. Average life expectancy has increased from 56.3 years in 2005 to 66.2 years today.

2.23 These gains have been achieved from a low base, and Ethiopia still lags on a number of health indicators. Most births take place outside of health facilities— the rate of skilled attendance at births is among the lowest in the world (only 28 per cent of births in the period 2006-17 were attended by skilled personnel). While it has fallen significantly, the maternal mortality rate – at 353 deaths per 100,000 live births– remains one of the highest in the world. Malnutrition rates are also high. According to the Global Hunger Index, 20.6 per cent of the population were under-nourished in the period 2016-18, and 38.4 per cent of children under five years of age were stunted in the period 2014-18. Cholera, measles and dengue are major, ongoing public health concerns. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to increase the risks of morbidity from other conditions. As at 5 July 2020, Ethiopia had recorded over 6,500 cases of COVID-19 and 118 deaths. At the time of writing, it was too early to judge the pandemic's eventual impact.

2.24 Access to health care is an ongoing challenge, particularly in rural areas. To help improve availability, the federal government has deployed 38,000 health extension workers across the country. These workers provide door-to-door services, with a focus on the needs of women and children in rural areas. Around 3 million female community volunteers have also been trained and deployed countrywide, to encourage facility-based birth delivery. While the availability of health facilities and health professionals has improved, it remains insufficient overall. According to the UNDP, Ethiopia has one physician and three hospital beds for every 10,000 people. Availability is particularly pronounced in rural areas, which lack hospitals (people in remote areas must often travel to their state capital to access a hospital). Public health facilities in the major cities, including Addis Ababa, are basic. Private clinics and hospitals exist but are financially prohibitive for the average person.

Mental Health

2.25 The Ethiopian Psychiatric Association estimates that 25 million Ethiopians were suffering some form of mental disorder in 2018. Local sources told DFAT that poverty and substance abuse – particularly of *khat*, a mild narcotic leaf (*Catha edulis*) – are major drivers of mental illness. One local source described *khat*, use of which is widespread among Ethiopian youth, as a ‘generation-killer’.

2.26 The federal government has devoted greater resources to mental health and psychosocial support since 2010. In 2012, Ethiopia adopted a National Mental Health Strategy to promote accessible and affordable mental health care. The Strategy mandates that mental health be integrated into Ethiopia’s primary health care system. Psychiatric services are offered in most public hospitals, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also active in this field.

2.27 Despite these efforts, mental illness carries significant social stigma. Those suffering from mental illness face discrimination in employment, education and housing. Traditional attitudes about mental illness discourage victims from seeking professional treatment and discussing their illness openly. Mental health services are available, particularly in Addis Ababa and other major urban areas, but local sources told DFAT the average person is often unaware of their existence. Mental health services are scarce in rural areas, where most of the population lives but where health infrastructure is limited. Private mental health clinics operate in Addis Ababa (including the Sitota Center for Mental Health Care), although these are financially prohibitive for the average person. There is one dedicated psychiatric hospital in Addis Ababa (St. Amanuel Mental Specialized Hospital).

2.28 Sources told DFAT that most Ethiopians eschew the notion of seeking professional services to treat mental illness, preferring traditional treatment methods (e.g. use of holy water) instead. Those seeking professional help are usually educated and progressive. According to the Ethiopian Psychiatric Association, of the 25 million people it estimated were suffering from some form of mental disorder in 2018, less than 10 per cent had received any form of treatment and less than 1 per cent had received specialist care. The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities noted in 2016 that persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities were often subjected to coercive measures, including being physically restrained and isolated.

Education

2.29 As with the health system, Ethiopia’s economic expansion has facilitated greater public spending on education (the federal government spends nearly 5 per cent of GDP on education). Education outcomes are improving, albeit from a low base. Nearly 52 per cent of the population is literate, up from 36 per cent in 2004. Literacy rates are higher for men (59 per cent) than for women (44 per cent). The literacy rate for people aged 15-24 is nearly 73 per cent (73.5 per cent for males, 72 per cent for females). Education services are more accessible, and of a higher quality, in urban areas.

2.30 Primary education (typically from seven to 15 years of age) is free, although the cost of school supplies can be prohibitive for some families, particularly in rural areas. Primary education instruction is provided in over 50 languages. Primary school enrolment tripled between 2000 and 2016. In 2017, 89 per cent of males and 83 per cent of females of primary school age were enrolled in primary school. Despite the relatively high enrolment rates, a large proportion of children do not complete primary school — according to UNICEF, fewer than six out of 10 children complete their primary school education. Primary school dropout rates are higher in rural areas. Secondary school enrolments remain well below those for primary school — only 31 per cent of males and 30 per cent of females of secondary school age were enrolled in secondary school in 2017. Out-of-school rates are highest in Afar and Somali states. Domestic

chores and high rates of child marriage mean girls account for the majority of school-age children who are out of school.

POLITICAL SYSTEM

2.31 Ethiopia's current constitution was adopted in December 1994 and came into force in August 1995. It established a federal system of regional states delineated according to settlement patterns, language and identity (i.e. ethnicity). This method of delineation essentially makes Ethiopia an 'ethnic federation', whereby the largest ethnic groups administer their own states and operate with considerable autonomy from the federal government.

2.32 Ethiopia had nine states at the time of publication: (1) Afar; (2) Amhara; (3) Benishangul-Gumuz; (4) Gambela; (5) Harari; (6) Oromia; (7) Somali; (8) SNNP; and (9) Tigray. A 10th state, for the Sidama people, is in the process of being established, following the successful passage of a referendum on regional statehood in November 2019 (see [Security Situation](#)). States have their own legislative assemblies (*kilili*); its members are popularly elected. Under the constitution, states have the authority to, inter alia, enact and implement state laws; formulate economic, social and development policies; administer land and other natural resources in accordance with federal laws; levy and collect taxes and administer a state budget; and establish and administer a state police force. For administrative purposes, states are divided into districts (*woredas*) and neighbourhoods (*kebeles*). A *kebele* is the smallest unit of local government in Ethiopia. Representatives of *woredas* and *kebeles* are popularly elected. The federal government administers Addis Ababa (in addition to being the federal capital, Addis Ababa is the capital of surrounding Oromia State), Dira Dawa and Harar.

2.33 Ethiopia has a bicameral federal parliament, consisting of the House of Peoples' Representatives (lower chamber, 547 seats) and the House of the Federation (upper chamber, 153 seats). Members of the House of Peoples' Representatives are elected by popular vote to five-year terms. State assemblies elect members of the House of the Federation, also to five-year terms. The constitution mandates that each recognised 'Nation, Nationality, and People' of Ethiopia be represented by one member in the House of the Federation, and one additional member for every million people of its population.

2.34 The President is the head of state, and is elected jointly by both chambers of parliament to a six-year term (for a maximum of two terms). The incumbent, H.E. Mrs Sahle Work-Zewde, was elected in October 2018. The role of president is largely ceremonial. Most power is vested in the prime minister, who serves as the head of government and commander-in-chief of the national armed forces. The prime minister is chosen by the party with most seats in parliament. It is a constitutional requirement to hold national and state elections every five years.

2.35 Political parties have existed in Ethiopia since the overthrow of the Derg in 1991, although the ability of parties not belonging to, or affiliated with, the EPRDF to operate freely was circumscribed. The EPRDF and affiliated parties controlled all tiers of government from 1991 to December 2019, when the EPRDF dissolved and reorganised as the Ethiopian Prosperity Party. The EPRDF was a coalition of four parties representing Ethiopia's most powerful ethnic communities: (1) the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which founded the EPRDF and led the ouster of the Derg; (2) the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), formerly the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation, or OPDO; (3) the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), formerly the Amhara National Democratic Movement, or ANDM; and (4) the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM). The EPRDF had an estimated 8 million members.

2.36 The EPRDF was overwhelmingly voted into power in 1995, Ethiopia's first democratic election. It was re-elected in 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015, although international observers alleged voter irregularities in these elections. Opposition parties made significant gains at the 2005 election, winning 174 of 547 seats in

the House of Peoples' Representatives (the EPRDF took 327 seats) on a record voter turnout of 90 per cent. Opposition parties, led by the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD, also known as Qinqit), disputed the result and launched large-scale protests in Addis Ababa. These turned violent — clashes with government forces left nearly 200 protesters dead. Around 4,000 people were arrested, including opposition leaders. In response, the EPRDF restricted the space for political opposition. In July 2007, 30 opposition leaders were handed life sentences for their participation in the 2005 protests, but were immediately pardoned. In 2009, parliament adopted the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (the ATP), under which large numbers of political opponents, journalists and activists were arrested, effectively hobbling political opposition to the EPRDF (see also Political Opinion (Actual or imputed)). The EPRDF and affiliated parties won 546 of 547 seats in the 2010 national election, and all 547 seats in the 2015 election. The EPRDF and affiliated parties won 1,966 of 1,987 seats in the 2015 regional elections, thus retaining control of all states. National and regional elections were scheduled for 29 August 2020, but have been postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

2.37 Ethiopia has witnessed significant changes in the political operating environment since April 2018. Restrictions on political opposition have eased significantly since April 2018, and political parties are able to operate more freely, particularly in Addis Ababa. To date, over 130 political parties have declared their intention to contest the forthcoming national election. Most are organised along ethnic lines.

2.38 In June 2018, federal parliament removed Ginbot 7 (Amharic for 'May 15', the date of the disputed 2005 election), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) from its list of terrorist organisations. The parties, which maintained armed wings and were committed to the overthrow of the EPRDF through militant means from their bases in Eritrea, were designated as terrorist organisations in June 2011. Ginbot 7, the OLF and the ONLF have since returned from exile and now participate in the political process. Other major opposition movements include the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum (also known as Medrek) and Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (known as Ezema). Medrek is a coalition of four parties: the Ethiopian Socialist Democratic Party (ESDP), the Arena for Sovereignty and Democracy, the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC). Ezema was formed in May 2019 through the merger of several opposition parties, including Ginbot 7, the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP), the Semayawi Party (known as the Blue Party) and Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ, also known as Andinet, the successor party of the CUD/Qinqit). Some political parties promote openly nationalist platforms. Ezema is one of the few political parties that is not ethnic-based.

2.39 The Ethiopian Prosperity Party (EPP), formed in December 2019, merged into a single national party three of the four parties that previously formed the EPRDF (the ODP, ADP and SEPDM). The EPP also includes the former Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP), the Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front (BGPDUF), the Ethiopian Somali People's Democratic Party (ESPDP), the Gambela People's Democratic Movement (GPDM) and the Harari National League (HNL). The ANDP, BGPDUF, ESPDP, GPDM and HNL previously governed Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Somali, Gambela and Harari states, respectively. They were affiliated to – but not formally part of – the EPRDF. Prime Minister Abiy justified the formation of the Ethiopian Prosperity Party on national unity grounds, claiming it would buttress efforts to move away from ethnic-based identity politics and toward 'pan-Ethiopianism'. The TPLF, which traditionally dominated decision-making within the EPRDF but felt marginalised under Abiy, opposed the merger and refused to join the EPP. The TPLF is seeking new alliances ahead of the next elections. These elections were planned for August 2020 but have now been indefinitely postponed due to COVID-19.

2.40 Parliament adopted a new electoral law in August 2019. Among other things, the law bars serving public servants from contesting elections and increases the threshold for the formation of political parties. Under the new law, 10,000 signatures are required to form a national political party (up from 1,500), and 4,000 signatures for a regional party (up from 750). The law also establishes a framework for resolving electoral disputes countrywide. In March 2019, 107 political parties signed a code of conduct with the

federal government to work towards free and fair elections in 2020. The Abiy Government has sought to strengthen the independence of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE). In November 2018, it appointed Birtukan Mideksa – a high-profile dissident who previously led the UDJ and was imprisoned for her role in the 2005 protests – as NEBE Chair. On 31 March 2020, NEBE announced it could not hold general elections as scheduled on 29 August 2020 due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Constitutionally, elections must be held by the end of the Ethiopian Calendar year on 6 September 2020. Having declared this no longer possible, the Government is consulting opposition parties, and assessing its constitutional options.

2.41 DFAT assesses there has been a shift toward political plurality since April 2018. DFAT assesses there is a level of political commitment at the federal level to open the space for opposition political parties and to stage free and fair multi-party elections when possible. Opposition parties were actively preparing for the August 2020 elections before they were postponed but the pressure put on the system by the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the drought and locust plague, will test Abiy's commitment to Ethiopia's new principles, and opposition parties' commitment to collaboration.

HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

2.42 Article 10 of the constitution stipulates human rights and freedoms are inviolable and inalienable, and all human and democratic rights of Ethiopia's citizens (and peoples) shall be respected. The constitution recognises the right to freedom of thought, expression, assembly, association, conscience and religion.

2.43 Ethiopia is a State Party to seven of the nine core international human rights treaties: the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child (and its optional protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography); and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Ethiopia is not a signatory to the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Article 9 of the constitution stipulates that all international agreements ratified by Ethiopia are an integral part of the law of the land.

2.44 Chapter Three of the constitution sets out a series of fundamental rights and freedoms, including: the right to life, security of person and liberty; a prohibition against inhuman treatment; freedom of religion, belief and opinion; the right of assembly, demonstration and petition; freedom of association; and freedom of movement. In practice, application of these provisions has been uneven, particularly before April 2018, when laws such as the ATP were widely used to detain government critics (see [Political Opinion \(Actual or imputed\)](#) and [Media](#)). The human rights situation has improved significantly since April 2018, and parliament adopted a revised ATP on 2 January 2020. The new legislation is significantly more human rights-compliant than the 2009 proclamation but has still drawn criticism from groups, including Amnesty International (see [Political Opinion \(Actual or Imputed\)](#)).

2.45 Ethiopia participated in the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process in 2009, 2014 and 2019. Of the 327 recommendations it received as part of its most recent UPR (May 2019), Ethiopia accepted 270. It has committed to reviewing visit requests from UN special procedure mandate holders. The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression visited Ethiopia in December 2019 — the first visit by a special procedure mandate holder since 2006. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights visited Ethiopia in May 2017 and April 2018.

Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

2.46 The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) was established in 2000 with a mandate to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the constitution. This includes advising the federal government on the compliance of national laws with international human rights standards; delivering training to the military, police, prison officials and public servants; and monitoring federal and regional prisons, including through unannounced visits. The EHRC has the power to investigate allegations of human rights violations that are not currently before the courts, including by summoning parties and analysing evidence, and to make recommendations to relevant state institutions. The EHRC has branches in every regional state. It also operates legal aid centres in collaboration with universities and civil society. The EHRC receives government funding and is accountable to parliament, which appoints its commissioners. Traditionally, the EHRC has lacked capacity and independence and rarely investigated alleged human rights violations by government forces. A local source told DFAT that the EHRC had not lived up to its mandate.

2.47 The Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) assesses the EHRC as being partially compliant with the Paris Principles, the international standard for national human rights institutions (the EHRC was last assessed in 2013). In making its assessment, the GANHRI noted that the EHRC had not provided any advice to the government on laws that impact on human rights, including the ATP and the Charities and Societies Proclamation (2009) (see [Human Rights Organisations](#)).

2.48 The EHRC has a complaints mechanism, and receives about 1,000 complaints annually. These range from domestic violence, workplace discrimination and labour disputes to enforced disappearances, ill-treatment in detention and mass killings. DFAT understands the EHRC plans to publish its findings from all future investigations. Budgetary constraints are an ongoing challenge, and hamper its ability to attract and retain qualified staff, and, in turn, to monitor and investigate complaints of human rights violations.

2.49 The current federal government has undertaken to reform and strengthen the capacity and independence of the EHRC. It is reviewing the law establishing the EHRC, with a view to strengthening its mandate. The review is ongoing. A new Chief Commissioner, Daniel Bekele, was appointed in July 2019. Bekele is a high-profile human rights activist who was jailed for his work with the NGO ActionAid Ethiopia and, following his release, went into exile, where he held senior positions at Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

SECURITY SITUATION

2.50 The security situation has deteriorated in parts of the country since 2018. Inter-ethnic clashes – invariably over land and other resources – have increased significantly, particularly in the West Guji Zone of Oromia State and along the Oromia-Somali, Oromia-Benishangul-Gumuz, and Amhara-Tigray state borders. Inter-ethnic clashes have caused death, the destruction of property and large-scale internal displacement – Ethiopia recorded the most conflict-related internal displacement in the world in 2018 (see [Internally-Displaced People](#)). Ethnic militias have proliferated in the states, and weapons are readily available. Addis Ababa has largely been immune from this instability to date.

2.51 Inter-ethnic clashes along the border between Oromia and Somali states have displaced more than 1 million people since 2017. Clashes have subsided, but continue to flare up sporadically. In August 2018, the federal government deployed forces to quell riots in Jijiga, the capital of Somali State, and surrounding areas. The riots were triggered by the arrest of the state president, and involved the targeting of non-Somalis and Christians (see [Religion](#)). At least 30 people died and 140,000 were displaced. Youths loyal to the former state president, belonging to a group called the *Heego*, were behind the riots. The security situation in

Somali State has improved significantly since (see [Somalis](#)). In February 2019, federal parliament adopted a proclamation establishing a national reconciliation commission to promote dialogue and encourage resolution of inter-ethnic disputes.

2.52 The return from exile of previously-banned groups and individuals has catalysed unrest in Oromia State. In September 2018, the return of the OLF provoked intra-Oromo clashes and the targeting of homes and businesses belonging to non-Oromos. At least 70 people were killed and 15,000 displaced. The OLF has yet to disarm completely, and some OLF factions engage in armed clashes with government forces, particularly in western areas of Oromia State. Armed OLF factions have reportedly engaged in criminal activities, including extorting businesses and conducting bank robberies in western Oromia. In October 2019, at least 86 people died during riots triggered by claims – made via Facebook – that the federal government was endangering the personal security of Jawar Mohammed, a prominent Oromo activist and founder of the Oromo Media Network (OMN). Jawar, an advocate for greater rights for the Oromo people who was previously allied to Prime Minister Abiy (but who is now a prominent critic), helped organise from his US base the 2014-18 protests that precipitated the resignation of the previous government. Jawar returned to Ethiopia in August 2018.

2.53 Jawar was rearrested on 30 June 2020 during renewed unrest, chiefly in Oromia State but also in the capital Addis Ababa. The unrest followed the 29 June murder of popular Oromo singer and activist Hachalu Hundessa, a former political prisoner who rose to become one of the country's biggest music stars and a voice for the Oromo ethnic group. International media reported that more than 230 people, including almost a dozen members of the security forces, were killed in the unrest, and an internet blackout was imposed. Nearly 5,000 people were arrested on various charges, including several prominent Oromo leaders and journalists, among them Jawar. The Attorney-General announced that the premises of three media outlets (including Jawar's Oromia Media Network) had been searched on suspicion of 'incitement to racial or religious hatred'. The Prime Minister's Office stated in a press release on 10 July 2020 that, 'contrary to erroneous reporting', calm had returned to Addis Ababa and affected areas of Oromia State.

2.54 In June 2019, the chief of staff of the National Defence Force (head of the military), General Seare Mekonnen, and the president of Amhara State, Ambachew Mekonnen, were assassinated in concurrent events in Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar (Amhara State). Both were allied to Prime Minister Abiy, who characterised the assassinations as a failed coup attempt. The alleged ringleader, Brigadier General Asaminew Tsige, the chief of security in Amhara State, was killed by government forces. Tsige, who had advocated for greater regional autonomy, had been pardoned and released from prison in 2018 (he was serving a life sentence for his alleged involvement in a failed 2009 coup attempt by Ginbot 7). Federal government forces were deployed to Amhara State and Addis Ababa, and a weeklong internet blackout was imposed nationally, in the wake of the alleged coup. Abiy was earlier the subject of a grenade attack at a pro-government rally in Addis Ababa. The authorities described the June 2018 incident as a failed assassination attempt, and five people were charged with terrorism offences. The attack killed two people and injured more than 100.

2.55 SNNP experienced major civil unrest in July 2019, after the federal government delayed a referendum on whether the Sidama people – the largest ethnic group in SNNP and the fifth-largest in Ethiopia overall – should secede from SNNP and create their own regional state. Clashes between Sidama protesters and government forces ensued, and ethnic minorities were targeted, leaving over 50 people dead. A State of Emergency was put in place in SNNP (though never publicly declared) and the military and federal police were deployed to restore order. The situation in SNNP has since stabilised. A referendum was held in November 2019, where the Sidama voted overwhelmingly in favour of regional statehood (the process of establishing a separate state for the Sidama was ongoing at the time of publication). SNNP is the most diverse of Ethiopia's states, comprising over 45 ethnic groups. At least 10 other ethnic groups,

including the Wolayta, have since flagged their intention to pursue their own regional states, a right guaranteed by the constitution (see [Race/Nationality](#)).

2.56 Border areas with neighbouring countries are extremely unstable. Non-state armed groups, including bandits, operate along Ethiopia's borders with Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Kenya. Inter-tribal clashes, including across national borders, and skirmishes between non-state armed groups and government forces are common in these areas (in April 2016, members of the Murle people in South Sudan attacked a number of villages in Gambela State, killing 200 people). The risk of violent robbery and kidnapping in border areas is high. The terrorist group Al-Shabaab, based in Somalia, reportedly maintains a presence in areas close to the Ethiopian border.

2.57 The security situation along Ethiopia's border with Eritrea has improved, but remains fragile. Ethiopia and Eritrea fought a war over disputed territory between May 1998 and December 2000 (100,000 people died). A peace accord, the Algiers Agreement, established a 25-km demilitarised zone inside Eritrea (monitored by UN peacekeepers) and an independent boundary commission to demarcate the border. Ethiopia rejected the commission's ruling that it cede the disputed town of Badme to Eritrea. In a major reversal, in June 2018 Abiy announced Ethiopia would respect the ruling and withdraw its forces from Badme. In July 2018, Abiy and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki agreed to formally end the war and restore relations, including reopening embassies, resuming direct flights, restoring telephone lines and granting Ethiopia access to Eritrean ports. They signed a formal treaty ending the state of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea in September 2018, and Ethiopian troops withdrew from the town. The land border was reopened in September 2018, but was subsequently closed in April 2019 due to Eritrean concerns over the impact of Ethiopian imports on the local economy. The border remained closed at the time of publication.

2.58 Al-Shabaab is known to have operated in Ethiopia, including Addis Ababa; however, the authorities have been successful in preventing the kinds of major terrorist incidents that have occurred elsewhere in East Africa. Nevertheless, terrorist incidents can occur. In October 2013, a bomb exploded in a residential area of Addis Ababa. The bomb exploded prematurely, killing two suspected al-Shabaab operatives who had intended to attack a major sporting event. In September 2019, authorities arrested a number of suspected al-Shabaab operatives who were allegedly planning to attack hotels, public places and religious festivities in Addis Ababa and Oromia and Somali states.

2.59 DFAT assesses that, outside of national and state border areas, the government controls the security situation, and Ethiopia tends to be safer than most of its neighbours. DFAT assesses Addis Ababa to be particularly stable, and it continues to attract migrants from other parts of the country in search of economic opportunities. Nevertheless, the rule of law has deteriorated in some regional states and several non-state armed groups have emerged to advance the interests of their ethnic group. The situation along regional state borders can be particularly unstable. DFAT assesses that, with Ethiopia's democratic opening presenting opportunities for the expression of previously-suppressed historical grievances and ethnic-based clashes increasing across the country, people who constitute ethnic minorities in regional states face a growing risk of physical violence. This risk is more pronounced during times of civil unrest.

3. REFUGEE CONVENTION CLAIMS

RACE/NATIONALITY

3.1 Article 25 of the constitution stipulates all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection regardless of race, nationality, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, property, birth or other status. Article 46 of the constitution provides the basis for Ethiopia's states to be delimited 'on the basis of the settlement patterns, language, identity and consent of the people concerned'. In effect, this involves the creation of states that are broadly consistent with the geographic locations of major ethnic groups. Traditionally, ethnically-motivated societal violence has been rare, although ethnic-based clashes have increased since 2018 (see [Security Situation](#)), fuelled largely by competition for resources and enabled, in part, by the lifting of restrictions on freedom of expression and an associated rise in hate speech and misinformation (see [Media](#)). With the exception of the ethnic Anuak people of Gambela State, most ethnic groups in Ethiopia are indistinguishable by their physical appearance, partly as a result of inter-marriage.

3.2 Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic society, and ethnic groups enjoy extensive rights. Under the Ethiopian Constitution every 'nation, nationality and people' (a reference to all ethnic groupings which constitute Ethiopia) has the right to speak their language and promote their culture. Every nation, nationality and people also has the constitutional right to self-determination, including the right to regional statehood within Ethiopia's federal system — a right recently asserted by the Sidama (see [Security Situation](#)). Several conditions must be met for regional statehood, including: approval by a two-thirds majority of the members of the relevant state legislature; and a majority vote in a referendum organised by the federal government (the referendum must be organised within one-year of the request for regional statehood being received).

3.3 All major ethnic groups are represented in the federal government and bureaucracy, and political parties represent the interests of Ethiopia's various ethnic groups. DFAT assesses official discrimination — including systematic state-sanctioned discrimination, denial of public services and higher detention rates — based on race and/or ethnicity is rare. This assessment is consistent with the constitutional prohibitions on discrimination, and reflects the need for governments to maintain their legitimacy through inclusiveness, given Ethiopia's ethnic diversity. Different ethnic groups have a history of co-existence in Addis Ababa, and discrimination on ethnic grounds is not common there. One source described ethnicity as a 'non-factor' in Addis Ababa — most people consider themselves from Addis Ababa as opposed to a particular ethnic group. Violence based on ethnicity is not common in Addis Ababa, but is a growing concern in regional states. Inter-ethnic relations have deteriorated since 2018, and DFAT assesses the situation for ethnic minorities at the regional state-level is increasingly challenging, and they face a growing risk of violence at the hands of the majority community.

3.4 Societal discrimination based on ethnicity can occur, but is predominantly in the form of positive discrimination in favour of a particular ethnic group rather than active discrimination against people of a different race or ethnicity. Official policies can limit opportunities for some groups; for example, the use of Oromiffa as the language of instruction in schools in Oromia State can limit opportunities for ethnic Oromos in the public sector if they do not also speak Amharic and English. Similarly, ethnic groups that constitute a

minority within regional states are at a disadvantage from a linguistic perspective, insofar as their languages do not enjoy official status in those states.

Oromos

3.5 The Oromo people are the single largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, at nearly 35 per cent of the population. They live mostly in Oromia State, which surrounds the federally-administered Addis Ababa. According to the 2007 national census (the most recent), there are significant Oromo communities in Addis Ababa (534,000), Amhara State (450,000) and SNNP State (236,000). While recent data is hard to come by, roughly similar numbers of Oromos practise Islam and Christianity (both Orthodox and Protestant). Oromos speak Oromiffa (also known as Afaan Oromo), which is the language of administration and schooling in Oromia State. By virtue of its location surrounding Addis Ababa, Oromia State is one of the more developed parts of the country.

3.6 Ethnic Oromos' level of political and economic influence has traditionally been incommensurate to their size. Oromos argue they have long been subservient to smaller ethnic groups — a major source of historical frustration. While Oromos were represented in federal government and held positions of influence during the EPRDF's rule, ethnic Tigrayans predominated politically and economically. Likewise, ethnic Amharas dominated during the periods of military and monarchic rule. The displacement of Oromos from traditional land on which Addis Ababa is built is another historical grievance for the Oromo community. Oromos were the most vocal of Ethiopia's ethnic communities during anti-government protests from 2014 to 2018, and bore the brunt of associated arrests and detentions (see [2014-18 Protests and State of Emergency](#)).

3.7 Oromo influence at the federal level has expanded significantly since the April 2018 election of Abiy as prime minister — the first time in Ethiopia's modern history an Oromo has led the country. The Oromo were the single largest ethnic group in the federal cabinet (the Council of Ministers) at the time of publication, and were represented in the senior ranks of the public service and the military. Oromo political prisoners, including those arrested for their involvement in the 2014-18 protests, have been released. The OLF, an opposition party dedicated to Oromo self-determination, was delisted as a terrorist organisation in June 2018 and returned from exile in Eritrea in September 2018. The OLF signed a peace agreement with the federal government in August 2018 and agreed to disarm. It now operates as a registered political party and plans to contest forthcoming national and regional elections. Despite these gains, historical grievances remain. The resignation of Prime Minister Desalegn, his subsequent replacement by Abiy and Ethiopia's democratic opening has triggered a resurgence of Oromo nationalism. Ethnic Oromos have been involved in many of the inter-ethnic clashes and associated displacement that has occurred since 2018, both as instigators and victims (Oromos have been targeted in Benishangul-Gumuz and Somali states). The killing of prominent Oromo singer and activist, Hachalu Hundessa, in June 2020 — who had been increasingly outspoken on the economic and political marginalisation of the Oromo people — sparked renewed Oromo protests (see [Security Situation](#)).

3.8 While there was widespread violence against, and detention of, protesters across Oromia State between 2014 and 2018, DFAT assesses this was not ethnically motivated, but reflected the then-federal government's sensitivity to political opposition. The situation for government critics, including ethnic Oromos, has improved significantly since April 2018. DFAT assesses that individuals who are part of, or have links to, armed OLF factions engaged in criminal activities and clashes with government forces are likely to be of interest to the authorities, and face a moderate risk of arrest and detention. The risk of arrest and detention faced by OLF members who participate peacefully in the political process is low. DFAT assesses, overall, Oromos face a low risk of official discrimination based on their ethnicity, including with respect to

employment in the public sector. DFAT assesses that, excluding in Addis Ababa, Oromos face a moderate risk of violence in areas or states where they constitute a minority.

Amharas

3.9 The Amhara people are the second-largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, at 26.9 per cent of the population. While they reside predominantly in Amhara State, ethnic Amharas are present throughout Ethiopia, with significant populations in Oromia and SNNP states (2 million and 420,000, respectively). Nearly 1.3 million Amharas were residing in Addis Ababa at the time of the 2007 census, making them the single-largest ethnic group in the capital. Most Amharas are Orthodox Christian. Their language, Amharic, is the official national language. The Amhara governed Ethiopia for the longest period before the EPRDF came to power in 1991, including during military rule and the era of the monarchy. Like the Oromo, the Amhara felt marginalised by the Tigray under the EPRDF, and protests in Amhara State helped catalyse the resignation of Prime Minister Desalegn in February 2018. Similarly to the Oromo, Amhara nationalism has increased with Ethiopia's democratic opening and lifting of restrictions on freedom of expression.

3.10 The Amhara are represented politically at the federal level, including in the current federal government and the senior ranks of the public service and the military (until recently Amharic was the sole working language of the federal bureaucracy). Roughly a quarter of lower house members in Federal Parliament are elected from Amhara State. The current federal president is an ethnic Amhara, and the Amhara were second only to the Oromo in their representation in the Council of Ministers at the time of publication. Political parties representing Amhara interests are active. DFAT assesses the arrest of Amharas during the 2014-18 anti-government protests was not ethnically motivated, but reflected the then-federal government's sensitivity to political opposition. DFAT assesses Amharas face a low risk of official discrimination based on their ethnicity, including with respect to employment in the public sector. The Amhara have been the subject of ethnic-based attacks in states where they do not constitute a majority, particularly in Benishangul-Gumuz. DFAT assesses that, like most other groups, Amharas face a moderate risk of violence in areas or states where they are a minority.

Tigrayans

3.11 Ethnic Tigrayans constitute 6.1 per cent of the population. They reside predominantly in Tigray State, the northernmost part of Ethiopia (neighbouring Eritrea, where Tigrayans constitute a majority). Tigray State is considered one of the safest states in the country. The largest concentration of Ethiopian Tigrayans outside of Tigray State at the time of the 2007 census was in Addis Ababa (nearly 170,000). Most Tigrayans are Orthodox Christians and speak Tigrinya. Despite their minority status, Tigrayans wielded significant political and economic influence and controlled the federal security apparatus, including the military and intelligence services, through the TPLF, traditionally the most influential party within the former EPRDF coalition (Tigrayans founded the EPRDF and led the overthrow of the Derg). Tigrayans have also traditionally had strong links to state-owned enterprises, including METEC.

3.12 Tigrayan influence at the federal level has declined steadily since 2012, following the death of Prime Minister Zenawi, an ethnic Tigrayan. Their influence has waned further since April 2018, and the TPLF elected not to join the ruling EPP when it was formed in 2019. While Tigrayans are represented in the Council of Ministers, most federal ministers at the time of publication were ethnic Oromos and Amharas. Tigrayans have systematically been removed from leadership positions in the military, the NISS and METEC, though many are still part of the senior executive of the respective organisations. Tigrayans resent their loss of federal influence and are sceptical of Prime Minister Abiy's reform agenda. They accuse the Abiy

Government of pursuing targeted, politically-motivated prosecutions of former senior Tigrayan officials for alleged corruption and human rights violations.

3.13 There is a growing sense among Tigrayans that their community is under threat. Anti-Tigrayan sentiment has become more overt since 2018, and hate speech against ordinary Tigrayans has increased in this time.

3.14 The Government of Tigray is engaged in a number of border disputes, predominantly with the Government of Amhara state. Ethnic Tigrayans have clashed with Ethnic Amharans in the Welkait and Raya *woredas*, with both sides claiming foul play by the other. Conflict has persisted in rural areas, and Tigrayans have also been targets for violence in eastern Amhara State (approximately 37,000 Tigrayans were living in Amhara State at the time of the 2007 census).

3.15 DFAT assesses that, excluding in Addis Ababa, ethnic Tigrayans face a moderate risk of violence in rural parts of the states where they constitute a minority. DFAT notes most Tigrayans reside in Tigray State, which is majority Tigrayan and where the central government wields less influence. DFAT assesses Tigrayans face a low risk of official discrimination based on their ethnicity, including with respect to employment in the public sector.

Somalis

3.16 Ethnic Somalis live predominantly in the arid Somali State (formerly Ogaden) in southeastern Ethiopia, on the border with Somalia. Like their brethren in Somalia, Ethiopian Somalis are Muslim. Most are pastoralists. According to the 2007 census, Somalis are the third largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, at 6.2 per cent of the population. Somali State is one of the least developed states in Ethiopia, with poor infrastructure and limited access to government services, including education. Somali State is thought to have significant oil and gas deposits (these are largely untapped). Attempts by Somalia to claim the Somali Region have led to war with Ethiopia in the past, most recently in 1977-78 ('the Ogaden War').

3.17 In 1984, the ONLF launched an armed insurgency for secession from Ethiopia. The ONLF tempered its demands with time, and pursued greater political and economic rights for Ethiopian Somalis within Ethiopia proper. Armed clashes between the ONLF and government forces, including the Somali State Special Police ('the Liyu Police'), claimed thousands of lives. The conflict peaked in 2007-08, following an ONLF attack on a Chinese-run oilfield (65 Ethiopians and nine Chinese nationals were killed) and subsequent counter-insurgency operations. Human Rights Watch accused government forces of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity, including executions, torture, rape and forced displacement, during the course of these operations. There are credible reports of the ONLF committing similar crimes.

3.18 In October 2018, the government and the ONLF signed a peace agreement, under which the ONLF undertook to disarm and engage in the political process. Some former ONLF combatants have since returned to Ethiopia from neighbouring countries and undergone rehabilitation. Federal parliament lifted its designation of the ONLF as a terrorist organisation in June 2018 and, in July 2019, ONLF opened an office in Addis Ababa. The security and human rights situations in Somali State have improved significantly since August 2018, following the resignation and subsequent arrest by federal government forces of the state president, Abdi Mohamoud Omar (known as Abdi Illey). Abdi was charged with orchestrating human rights violations and stoking ethnic violence leading to mass displacement (the case against him is ongoing). Abdi was replaced as state president by Mustafa Omer, a human rights activist and long-time former UN employee. One source told DFAT that Somali State had experienced 'remarkable progress' under Omer, including from a human rights perspective.

3.19 Prior to April 2018, Somalis with real or imputed links to the ONLF faced a high risk of arbitrary detention and torture. DFAT now assesses this risk to be low. DFAT further assesses Ethiopian Somalis, including government critics, face a low risk of official discrimination or violence on ethnic grounds.

The Gurage

3.20 The Gurage are a small ethnic community, numbering around 1.9 million people (or 2.5 per cent of Ethiopia's total population) at the time of the 2007 census. The Gurage live throughout Ethiopia, with the largest concentrations in SNNP State (1.1 million), Addis Ababa (450,000) and Oromia State (250,000). Most Gurage are either Orthodox Christian or Muslim. They speak Gurage Af (Guraginya in Amharic). The Gurage are merchants and traders. DFAT assesses the ethnic Gurage face a low risk of official or societal discrimination, including in parts of the country where they are a minority.

Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean Origin

3.21 Eritrea was a region of Ethiopia from 1962 until its independence in 1993. Ethnic Eritreans residing in Ethiopia were Ethiopian citizens during this time. During the course of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border war (1998-2000), the Ethiopian Government withdrew the citizenship of and deported over 70,000 people of Eritrean origin. It did so on the grounds that these people had renounced their Ethiopian citizenship in the process of voting in the 1993 referendum on Eritrean independence and/or posed a security risk. In August 1999, the Ethiopian Government ordered those people of Eritrean origin who had voted in the 1993 referendum and remained in Ethiopia to register for alien residence permits. Deportations reduced dramatically with the end of the war, and there is no credible evidence to suggest Ethiopians of Eritrean origin have faced deportation to Eritrea since the early 2000s. The Proclamation on Ethiopian Nationality, adopted in 2003, regularised the status of Ethiopians of Eritrean origin, and many Eritreans have reacquired Ethiopian citizenship under this law. People who left Ethiopia prior to the 2003 proclamation, and have not resided long-term in Ethiopia since, may face difficulties in providing sufficient documentation to establish their right to Ethiopian citizenship.

3.22 Approximately 165,000 Eritrean refugees live in Ethiopia, mostly in Tigray State (which borders Eritrea). Eritrea continues to be a source of refugees for Ethiopia owing to the prevailing human rights environment in that country—the number of Eritreans crossing into Ethiopia has increased with the countries' rapprochement in September 2018. Most of the new arrivals are women and children looking to reunite with their husbands and fathers who sought refuge in Ethiopia in order to evade military conscription in Eritrea. Some arrivals are unaccompanied male minors seeking to avoid future military conscription.

3.23 Unlike refugees from other countries, an 'out-of-camp' policy has long applied to Eritrean refugees. Under this policy, Eritrean refugees are able to live in the community rather than in refugee camps provided they have a guarantor who can provide for their financial needs (an 'out-of-camp' policy was extended to all registered refugees and asylum seekers in January 2019 — see [Refugees](#)). According to UNHCR, approximately 80 per cent of Eritrean refugees left camps in Tigray State within 12 months of arriving in Ethiopia. Many moved to Addis Ababa. DFAT understands some Eritrean refugees have subsequently left at their own volition for third countries, including to South America, which they use as a jumping off point for the US, and Libya in the case of those wanting to reach Europe. Eritrean refugees who have lived in Ethiopia for more than 20 years are eligible for an Ethiopian residence permit. Claims for residence permits by Eritrean refugees are assessed by a special committee within the Immigration Office. Some Eritrean refugees are eligible for Ethiopian citizenship although, in practice, few have been offered it. According to a report by

the Danish Immigration Service, those Eritreans who voted in Eritrea's 1993 referendum to secede from Ethiopia are ineligible for Ethiopian citizenship.

3.24 There is no recent credible evidence to suggest Eritreans face a significantly greater risk of official or societal discrimination than other groups based on their ethnicity since the enactment of the Proclamation on Ethiopian Nationality in 2003. DFAT assesses Ethiopians with Eritrean heritage do not face a significantly greater risk of official or societal discrimination than other groups in Ethiopia based on their ethnicity.

RELIGION

3.25 The constitution enshrines the separation of state and religion, and prohibits state interference in religious matters. Article 25 of the constitution provides for equal treatment of all persons under the law without discrimination on the grounds of religion. Article 27 provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom to hold or adopt a religion of one's choice and to manifest one's religion in worship, observance, practice and teaching. Article 34 provides for disputes involving personal status issues, including marriage and divorce, to be determined by customary and religious systems. This allows, for example, *sharia* courts to adjudicate personal status disputes where both parties to the dispute are Muslim and both consent to the process (see [Judiciary](#)). Article 816 of the Criminal Code prohibits 'blasphemous or scandalous utterances or attitudes' about religion in public, including gestures or words that are 'grossly offensive to the feelings or convictions of others or towards the Divine Being or the religious symbols, rites, or religious personages'. Such behaviour is punishable with a fine or arrest not exceeding one month. The law prohibits religious instruction in schools, although churches and mosques are allowed to establish private religious schools. These provide both religious and secular education. Religion-based political parties are banned.

3.26 Ethiopian society is deeply religious, reflected in strong religious observance across all faiths. According to the most recent national census (2007), 43.5 per cent of the population belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, 33.9 per cent are Muslim and 18.6 per cent are Protestant. Orthodox Christians predominate in Amhara and Tigray states; and Muslims in Afar, Oromia and Somali states (Ethiopian Muslims are considered moderate in their religious views). Protestants are concentrated in Gambela, Oromia and SNNP states. Ethiopia has an ancient Jewish community (between 6,000 and 7,000 members today) though a change in Israeli policy towards the recognition of Ethiopian Jews in 2019 has led to many emigrating to Israel. There are also small numbers of Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and followers of traditional indigenous religions (collectively, these account for less than 5 per cent of Ethiopia's total population). Around 1,000 Rastafarians live on land set aside for them by Emperor Haile Selassie in the 1940s, primarily in Addis Ababa and Shashemene (Oromia State). The Orthodox, Islamic, Catholic and Jewish communities are not required to register with the government as religious groups. All other religions must register with the Directorate of Faith and Religious Affairs within the Ministry of Peace (formerly the Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs) in order to gain legal standing. Registered religious groups must provide annual reports on their activities and financial situation.

3.27 No formal government policies exist that discriminate against people based on their religion, and religious minorities are politically and economically engaged. Where high-profile religious activists have been arrested under the 2009 ATP, they were arrested for their participation in protests and/or criticism of government policies, rather than for their religious beliefs. The requirement for some religious organisations to register with the authorities creates an administrative barrier; however, this is not prohibitively onerous. The registration requirement does not have a significant direct impact on adherents of smaller religions, including on their ability to practise their faith.

3.28 Low-level informal and societal discrimination can occur on the basis of religion, particularly where a religious group forms a minority in a particular area or state. For example, Protestants claim they face

unequal treatment by local officials with respect to religious registration and obtaining land for churches and cemeteries. DFAT assesses such discrimination, where it occurs, is not systematic or state-directed, but rather arises from societal discrimination by individuals of authority within local administrative units.

3.29 Ethiopia has a history of religious diversity, and different religions have traditionally coexisted peacefully. However, attacks on places of worship have increased since 2018. According to the Amhara Professionals Union, a US-based advocacy group, 30 churches, belonging primarily to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, were attacked between July 2018 and September 2019, mostly in Muslim-majority areas. These attacks reportedly left 100 people dead, including priests and parishioners. Some of the attacks occurred in the course of riots in Jijiga (Somali State) in August 2018, when rioting youth loyal to the former president of Somali State torched eight Orthodox Churches and killed seven priests (see [Security Situation](#)). In October 2019, protesters targeted Orthodox Churches and their congregants during unrest in Oromia State (see [Security Situation](#)). In February 2020, three Orthodox Christians were killed during clashes with government forces in Addis Ababa linked to the demolition of an Orthodox Church built on disputed land. Mosques and Muslim-owned businesses have also been targeted. According to the Ethiopian Muslims Affairs Supreme Council, at least four mosques were torched and 150 Muslim shops and properties robbed or damaged in Amhara State in December 2019. In January 2020, Muslim-owned shops and other property were reportedly vandalised and destroyed in Harari State.

3.30 While there has been a recent uptick, attacks on places of worship are rare overall. The two largest religious groups, Orthodox Christians and Muslims, generally respect each other's right to practise their faith, despite some low-level mutual mistrust. Local sources told DFAT that inter-faith marriage in Addis Ababa is common. DFAT has observed people of different faiths openly attending their respective religious services without facing discrimination or harassment. In many parts of the country, particularly Oromia State and major cities such as Addis Ababa where there are large numbers of Orthodox Christians and Muslims, mosques and Orthodox Churches are located within close proximity of one another, with no evidence of hostility or tension. There are an estimated 40,000 mosques in the country. Major Islamic festivals are observed as public holidays and DFAT observed men and women in Islamic dress walking the streets freely in Addis Ababa.

3.31 DFAT assesses there is a low risk of official and societal discrimination or violence on the basis of religion, including in the case of religions with small followings. DFAT assesses that people can practise their religious beliefs freely and openly.

3.32 Few Ethiopians identify as atheist — most hold strong religious views. According to a local source, atheists may encounter familial disapproval and pressure to reconsider their non-belief, but physical violence is uncommon. Atheists and secular-minded Ethiopians can be open about their views. DFAT assesses atheists face a low risk of official and societal discrimination.

POLITICAL OPINION (ACTUAL OR IMPUTED)

3.33 The constitution enshrines extensive protections in relation to political opinion. Article 25 provides for equality under the law, without discrimination on the grounds of political or other opinion; Article 29 provides for freedom of expression; Article 30 provides for freedom of assembly, peaceful demonstration and petition; Article 31 provides for freedom of association; and Article 38 provides for the right to vote, be elected and be a member of a political organisation regardless of colour, race, nation, nationality, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion. Organisations formed in violation of appropriate laws and/or with the intent to subvert the constitutional order are prohibited. Organisers of large public gatherings must notify the authorities 48 hours in advance and obtain a permit.

3.34 In practice, political freedoms were significantly curtailed before April 2018. Members of opposition groups, human rights activists, and independent commentators such as journalists and bloggers who opposed the government's policies were regularly harassed and detained. The ATP was used extensively to restrict political freedoms and arrest and prosecute government critics, particularly individuals with suspected affiliations to proscribed groups Ginbot 7, the OLF and the ONLF. Against this background, many opposition leaders and dissidents left Ethiopia. Individuals who were not members of the EPRDF reportedly faced discrimination in public sector employment, including impediments to career progression. Anti-government protests were often dispersed through force, and participants arrested.

3.35 Freedom of political expression has expanded since 2018. More than 10,000 political prisoners have been released since 2018 (a process initiated by the Desalegn Government), including senior opposition leaders Andargachew Tsege of Ginbot 7 and Merera Gudina and Bekele Gerba of the OFC. In June 2018, parliament lifted its terrorist designations of Ginbot 7, the OLF and the ONLF. These groups subsequently renounced armed struggle and returned to Ethiopia, where they operate as registered political parties. In July 2018, federal parliament amnestied thousands of individuals charged with treason and other crimes against the state. This has enabled high-profile opposition figures, including Berhanu Nega of Ginbot 7, to return from exile and resume their political activities. According to the federal government, over 13,000 people have been released under the amnesty law. Political opposition parties now operate with greater freedom, although some report intimidation and obstacles to holding rallies due to a lack of protection in regional states. In January and February 2020, over 100 OLF supporters were reportedly arrested across Oromia State, while some members of the National Movement of Amhara (NaMA) – an opposition party formed in 2018 that espouses Amhara nationalism – were detained in connection to the alleged coup attempt in June 2019 (see [Security Situation](#)). DFAT is unable to verify if these arrests were politically motivated. A local source involved in politics told DFAT they were able to express their political views freely without fear of arrest and prosecution. Anti-government protests are common — in January 2020, large-scale anti-government protests took place in Amhara State in relation to the abduction of 27 ethnic Amhara university students in Oromia State. Protesters accused Prime Minister Abiy of not doing enough to secure the students' release.

3.36 In June 2018, the government established an Advisory Council for Legal and Justice Affairs comprising independent legal professionals to review and recommend reforms to laws that had been used to restrict political, civic and press freedoms (namely, the ATP, the Charities and Societies Proclamation, and the Freedom of Information and Mass Media Proclamation). The Advisory Council has a three-year mandate. The Charities and Societies Proclamation was repealed and replaced by the Organization of Civil Society Proclamation in February 2019 (see [Human Rights Organisations](#)). The new law is in operation, and has been well received by civil society organisations. A revision of the ATP was adopted on 2 January 2020. It is a significant improvement on the previous ATP but has still drawn criticism from civil society groups, including Amnesty International, who fear it could still be used against those critical of government. Replacement legislation for the Freedom of Information and Mass Media Proclamation was before federal parliament at the time of publication. While these laws remain in force, they have been used only sporadically since April 2018.

3.37 Human rights organisations have particularly welcomed the government's commitment to review and revise the ATP, which was widely considered to fall short of international human rights standards. The old ATP contained a broad definition of 'terrorist acts', and was used extensively to arrest and prosecute critics of government policy before April 2018. Under the ATP, detainees could be held without charge for 28-day periods up to a maximum period of four months. In practice, many were held for considerably longer. Bail was not available for persons charged with terrorism offences. Those charged under the ATP can face up to 20 years' imprisonment.

3.38 Under the new ATP, a person must incite terrorist acts to be prosecuted (rather than simply ‘encouraging terrorism’) and workers’ rights to strike have been strengthened (illegal strikes that affected public services used to be classed as terrorist acts). However, Amnesty International believes opportunities to abuse power still remain. For example, the proclamation criminalises ‘intimidation to commit a terrorist act’.

3.39 According to the federal government, about 300 people were arrested in connection to the alleged coup attempt in June 2018 (see [Security Situation](#)). DFAT understands a significantly higher number of people were arrested, including activists, journalists, government officials and members of the NaMA. The majority of arrests occurred in Amhara State; over 40 were detained in Addis Ababa. Most were subsequently released, including 22 in October 2019. A total of 58 people (45 in Amhara State and 13 in Addis Ababa) were charged under the ATP. In February 2020, the federal government said it had dropped charges ‘for the national good’ against some individuals – including NaMA members – suspected of involvement in the alleged attempt, as part of a broader pardon of high-profile detainees.

3.40 Local sources told DFAT that, traditionally, being a member of the EPRDF increased one’s chances of gaining employment in the public sector and earning subsequent promotions, including in the judiciary, police, and public schools and universities. DFAT heard anecdotally that, while the practice of ruling party members being advantaged in public sector employment and promotions persisted, it was not as pronounced under the current federal government.

3.41 DFAT assesses tolerance for political dissent has increased considerably since April 2018. Opposition political parties are able to organise and operate significantly more freely, particularly in Addis Ababa, and their members face a low risk of harassment, arrest and detention by virtue of their political affiliations and views. DFAT assesses Ethiopians can openly criticise the ruling party.

2014-18 Protests and State of Emergency

3.42 Ethiopia witnessed large-scale anti-government protests from 2014 to 2018 in Oromia and Amhara states (which, collectively, account for 60 per cent of Ethiopia’s population). The protests began in Oromia State (Ethiopia’s most populous) in April 2014, triggered by the federal government’s plan to expand the municipal boundaries of Addis Ababa into Oromia State, which it abuts. The federal government justified the Addis Ababa Integrated Development Master Plan on the grounds it was necessary to cater for the rapid growth of the capital; critics claimed the encroachment would displace Oromo farmers and result in land seizures. The protests were put down through force, but re-emerged in November 2015. The government scrapped the Master Plan in January 2016; however, protests intensified across Oromia State and evolved into calls for greater political rights and the release of ethnic Oromo political prisoners. The *Qeerroo*, an Oromo youth movement, was at the forefront of these protests. Parallel protests emerged in neighbouring Amhara State in July 2016 (Ethiopia’s second-most populous state), triggered by historical Amhara grievances over the loss of traditional Amhara land stemming from the demarcation of the border between Amhara and Tigray states. Like in Oromia State, the protests in Amhara State morphed into calls for broader reform. The protests in Oromia and Amhara states saw violent confrontations between government forces and protesters, including the use of live bullets.

3.43 The federal government declared a countrywide State of Emergency in October 2016 after protesters torched farms and businesses (a State of Emergency is constitutionally permissible in the event of a breakdown in law and order that threatens the constitutional order and is beyond the capacity of regular law enforcement agencies to control. It must be approved by a two-thirds majority in the House of Peoples’ Representatives within 15 days of being declared). The State of Emergency gave authorities broad powers to detain people and search private property without court orders, limit travel and the right to association and

protest, and impose curfews and media restrictions (including on social media). The practical effect of the State of Emergency was to formalise and expand practices that were largely already in place. The State of Emergency was lifted in August 2017, but reinstated in February 2018, following the resignation of Prime Minister Desalegn. The State of Emergency was subsequently lifted in June 2018, two months ahead of schedule.

3.44 DFAT understands the authorities arrested and detained around 26,000 people under the State of Emergency. This number includes journalists, bloggers, opposition party members and large numbers of people who were thought to have participated in anti-government protests, including children. Arrests and detentions were not limited to protest organisers or high-profile opponents of the government. Large numbers of detainees were subjected to a 'rehabilitation and re-education' program, mostly low-profile participants who were released following their completion of the program (see [Arbitrary Arrest and Detention](#)). Some of those arrested under the State of Emergency claim to have been tortured (see [Torture](#)). The majority of those arrested and imprisoned for their participation in the protests have since been released. Over 1,000 civilians are estimated to have died during the course of the protests.

3.45 Anti-government protests can and do occur. DFAT assesses that, since April 2018, participants in peaceful protests face a low risk of arrest and detention. DFAT further assesses that participants in peaceful protests, including organisers, are likely to be of little ongoing interest to the authorities.

GROUPS OF INTEREST

Human Rights Organisations

3.46 The activities and financial operations of human rights organisations were severely restricted before April 2018. Under the Charities and Societies Proclamation, adopted in 2009, charities and societies that received more than 10 per cent of their funding from international sources (including from Ethiopians living abroad) were considered foreign entities and barred from engaging in a wide range of activities, including activities that advance human and democratic rights and promote gender equality, the rights of children, and persons with disabilities. This highly restrictive regulatory environment meant those domestic charities and societies engaged in human rights monitoring, reporting and advocacy that relied on foreign funding (the majority) had to wind back and, eventually, cease their operations. Members of the few human rights organisations that were able to withstand the funding restrictions were the subject of monitoring, harassment, arrest and detention. Local sources told DFAT the law had the effect of 'crippling' and 'hollowing out' those NGOs working in the field of human rights.

3.47 The legal and operational space for human rights organisations has expanded significantly under the current government. In February 2019, parliament repealed and replaced the Charities and Societies Proclamation with the Organization of Civil Society Proclamation. The new law removes restrictions on the ability of domestic charities and societies, including human rights organisations, to source foreign funding and continue to engage in advocacy activities. It also limits the powers of the government body responsible for overseeing the activities of charities and societies (the Civil Society Organizations Agency, previously the Federal Charities and Societies Agency), including by granting applicants who are denied registration the right to challenge the decision in court. Human rights activists have been released from prison or chosen to return from exile, and a growing number of organisations advocating on human rights issues and investigating allegations of human rights violations operate freely under the new law. A local NGO source told DFAT that the situation for human rights defenders today was 'fundamentally different' to what it had been before Abiy's reform agenda.

3.48 DFAT assesses the operating space for human rights organisations and other NGOs has expanded significantly since April 2018. DFAT further assesses that human rights organisations and other NGOs can organise and openly criticise the ruling party without fear of arrest and prosecution.

Media

3.49 The constitution protects the rights of freedom of expression and freedom of the press. This includes: prohibiting any form of censorship and guaranteeing legal protection for the press ‘to ensure its operational independence and its capacity to entertain diverse opinions’. The Criminal Code and the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation (2008) contain a number of limitations to these rights, including defamation, restrictions on the criticism of public officials and the right to prevent the publication of content deemed a risk to public order. The Computer Crime Proclamation, adopted in 2016, criminalises the sharing of content online that is defamatory or incites violence. Under the ATP, reporting on the activities of organisations designated as terrorists was prohibited (the ATP was amended on 2 January 2020). The State of Emergency, effective from October 2016-August 2017 and then from February-June 2018, placed restrictions on print, television, radio, the Internet and social media.

3.50 Freedom of speech and the media were severely restricted before April 2018 — Ethiopia ranked consistently among the worst countries in the world for media freedoms. The authorities regularly arrested and detained journalists and bloggers perceived to be critical of the government or supportive of opposition parties, including through social media. Journalists were typically charged under the ATP, under which anybody publishing information deemed to encourage terrorism faces up to 20 years’ imprisonment. A number of independent newspapers were closed and, in October 2016, the diaspora-run, pro-opposition Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT) and the Oromo Media Network (OMN) were barred from broadcasting in Ethiopia. ESAT and the OMN were charged in absentia in February 2017 for inciting violence and promoting acts of terror with a view to overthrowing the government. Internet and telephone blackouts were common, and access to websites and blogs critical of the government was blocked.

3.51 Prime Minister Abiy has committed to strengthening and upholding freedom of the press, and the media environment has improved significantly under his government. All imprisoned journalists, including bloggers, were released in 2018 — the first time since 2004 that no journalists were in prison, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. In June 2018, the federal government restored access to 264 previously-banned websites (including Al Jazeera, the BBC, blogs critical of the government, and websites belonging to the Ginbot 7, the OLF and the ONLF) and lifted its bans on ESAT and the OMN. Charges against ESAT and the OMN were dropped in May 2018, and they have since established operations in Ethiopia, where they operate without restriction. Anti-government bloggers are active. Work to amend the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation and the Computer Crime Proclamation is ongoing, with a view to strengthening press freedoms. Reporters Without Borders ranked Ethiopia 110 out of 180 countries in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index representing an improvement of 40 places from a year earlier — the biggest improvement by any country since the Index was launched in 2002. Ethiopia has improved still further in 2020, jumping another 11 places to 99. The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, speaking following a December 2019 visit, described Ethiopia’s progress toward freedom of expression under Abiy as ‘remarkable’.

3.52 While press freedoms have improved since April 2018, concerns remain. At least three journalists were arrested and charged under the ATP, two of them in connection to the alleged coup attempt in June 2019. A third journalist was arrested for violating the ATP after recording an interview with a lawyer outside an Addis Ababa court. DFAT heard that the military remains sensitive to criticism. In July 2019, the Ministry of Defence said it planned to charge journalists and media outlets for ‘publishing defamatory information’ about the national armed forces. In February 2019, two journalists were temporarily detained by the Oromia

Regional Police for reporting on authorities' demolition of illegally-built homes and allegations of forced displacement. A local source told DFAT there were limits on what the media could report, and that journalists continued to self-censor. According to this source, to avoid adverse official attention, journalists observed a number of redlines in their reporting, including reporting that uncovered wrongdoing by political elites and establishment figures.

3.53 DFAT heard journalists generally felt secure and could operate freely in Addis Ababa, but faced a growing risk of harassment and intimidation – including physical attacks – from non-state actors (including the *Qeerroo* in Oromia State) in regional states who disagreed with their reporting. A source told DFAT that the situation for journalists gets progressively worse the further out one ventures from Addis Ababa. The source claimed that the risk of harm from government forces, in contrast, has declined significantly.

3.54 Internet services are wholly state-run. The authorities frequently suspend the internet, including, but not only, during periods of political and social unrest. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the internet was suspended on eight separate occasions in 2019, including for the purpose of preventing cheating during end-of-school-year exams in June and as a preventive measure against cyberattacks against Ethiopia's financial institutions in December. The internet was blocked for more than one week following the alleged coup attempt of June 2019. An internet blackout in place in western Oromia State, the site of armed clashes between OLF factions and government forces, since 3 January 2020, was lifted in April 2020 to help with communication around the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.55 The lifting of curbs on freedom of expression has facilitated a rise in hate speech and misinformation and contributed to inter-ethnic clashes. DFAT heard hate speech and misinformation on social media is a growing problem, particularly on Facebook (Ethiopia had 4.5 million Facebook subscribers at December 2018). In February 2020, parliament adopted legislation to combat hate speech and misinformation. Under the new law, those convicted of disseminating hate speech and misinformation – defined as rhetoric that fuels discrimination 'against individuals or groups based on their nationality, ethnic and religious affiliation, sex or disabilities' – face a fine of up to 100,000 *birr* (approximately AUD4,700) and five years' imprisonment. 'Dissemination' includes creating or sharing social media posts that result in violence or disturbance of public order (but not liking or tagging such content). Parliamentarians who voted against the law expressed concern it could be used to curtail free speech. A local journalist told DFAT they feared the law could be used to limit media freedom. Defamation remains a criminal offence.

3.56 DFAT assesses that freedom of expression, including of the press, has expanded significantly since April 2018. Outside of a State of Emergency (such as that in place to deal with COVID-19) independent media can and do operate freely, and people can speak freely in public places, including against the government. DFAT further assesses that journalists and bloggers can openly criticise the government without fear of arrest and prosecution.

Women

3.57 Article 35 of the constitution enshrines a range of rights for women, including: equality with men in the enjoyment of constitutional rights and protections; equal rights in marriage; the entitlement to affirmative measures to remedy the historical legacy of inequality and discrimination against women and to enable women to participate in society equally with men; the right to maternity leave at full pay; equal rights with the respect to the use, transfer, administration and control of land and the inheritance of property; equal rights in employment, including in relation to pay and promotion; and the right of access to family planning education, information and capacity. Article 34 stipulates that marriage can be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. Gender equality is a priority for the current federal government.

3.58 Ethiopia scores highly in international rankings for gender equality in political participation. In October 2018, Ethiopia elected a female president (the only African female head of state at the time of publication). In parallel, Prime Minister Abiy appointed women to half of all positions in the Council of Ministers, including the ministers of defence, trade and industry, and peace (with the latter responsible for overseeing the federal police and all civilian intelligence agencies). Abiy has also appointed women to head the Supreme Court and the NEBE. Women hold 37.3 per cent of seats in the current federal parliament. Some state legislatures have an even higher representation of women. The World Economic Forum ranks Ethiopia 82nd out of 153 countries in its 2020 Global Gender Gap Index, including 16th for political participation (ahead of the likes of Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Switzerland and the UK).

3.59 Local sources told DFAT that, while women's political participation has increased, the situation for the average Ethiopian woman remains challenging. Women aged 15-24 have higher literacy rates than men, but girls are more likely to be out of school than boys, particularly in rural areas (see [Education](#)). Women typically have fewer employment opportunities than men, in both urban and rural areas, and their participation in the labour force (at 74.2 per cent) is significantly lower than that of men (86.5 per cent). This is influenced by a number of factors, including societal discrimination, traditional norms and attitudes regarding gender roles, and women's generally lower levels of educational attainment. Early marriage is widespread, and negatively impacts the ability of girls to attain an education and participate in the labour force (see [Children](#)). DFAT heard that it is common in rural areas for young girls to be married off in order to ease the financial burden on the girl's family, particularly during times of drought. Women often lack financial independence, particularly in rural areas. Ethiopia ranks 125th out of 153 countries for economic participation and 140th for educational attainment in the 2020 Global Gender Gap Index.

3.60 According to local sources, access to sexual reproductive health services is limited. The fertility rate is 3.9 children per woman, but regional variations exist (the fertility rate in Somali State is 7.1). Abortion is allowed in some circumstances, including: where the life and physical health of the woman is at risk; in instances of rape, incest and foetal impairment; if a woman has physical or mental disabilities; or if she is younger than 18 years of age. Most abortions now occur in health facilities. Local sources told DFAT that, while professional abortion services exist, women often do not know where to find them. Abortion carries significant social stigma.

3.61 DFAT heard anecdotally that divorce is not uncommon in urban areas and divorce rates are increasing overall. Women's growing economic independence in urban areas and the availability of legal aid services and courts were cited as contributory factors. Being a single woman or seeking divorce from one's husband is widely accepted in major urban areas and carries less social stigma compared to rural areas. According to local sources, single or divorced women may face greater economic challenges but not societal discrimination in urban areas.

Gender-Based Violence

3.62 Gender-based violence is a criminal offence punishable by up to 20 years' imprisonment. In practice, the law is rarely enforced. Marital rape is not explicitly prohibited. A local source told DFAT the authorities largely consider events behind closed doors to be private matters.

3.63 Gender-based violence is widespread in Ethiopia. Typically, gender-based violence is intimate-partner based and occurs in domestic settings. Local sources told DFAT gender-based violence is a countrywide phenomenon that occurs across all ethnic groups and religions. An Ethiopian Demographic Health Survey from 2016 found that 23 per cent of women aged 15-49 had experienced physical violence, and 10 per cent had experienced sexual violence. A 2018 academic study found almost half of women had experienced gender-based violence in their lifetimes. According to the UNDP, 28 per cent of women aged 15 and older have experienced intimate partner violence. DFAT heard anecdotally violence against women is

most prevalent in Afar and Somali states, where the vast majority of the population is Muslim and the family legislative framework is based on traditional practices and *sharia* law (see [Judiciary](#)). Local sources told DFAT refugee and IDP women and girls are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, including, in the case of Gambela State, rape perpetrated by men making cross-border incursions from South Sudan.

3.64 Societal norms and a lack of financial independence mean violence against women is under-reported, and victims generally do not seek legal remedies, particularly in rural areas. According to reports, men widely consider hitting or beating their wife to be justified in certain circumstances, including where a wife has burned her husband's food, argued with him, left the house without telling him, neglected the children or refused to have sexual intercourse with him. A local source told DFAT there was an acceptance among many women to tolerate domestic violence and submit to the sexual desires of their husbands.

3.65 The authorities have taken measures to combat gender-based violence. In 2010, the federal government developed a Strategic Plan for an Integrated and Multi-Sectoral Response to Violence against Women and Children and Child Justice in Ethiopia. Protection units for women and children operate in some police stations and prosecution offices, and there are special benches dealing specifically with violence against women in federal and regional courts. The government has committed to establishing a free hotline service for victims of gender-based violence. According to local sources, there are 11 shelters countrywide for women escaping domestic violence. Shelters typically accommodate between 20 and 50 women. A woman can stay in a shelter for a maximum of 1.5 years. Shelters include counselling services and childcare centres, allowing women to bring their children and to pursue employment. Some shelters are government-run, while some are administered by NGOs with UN support. Some local charities provide financial assistance to victims of physical and sexual abuse. One such charity, Agar, operates in Addis Ababa and Oromia and Amhara states.

3.66 Local sources told DFAT that, while services for victims of gender-based violence exist, including shelters, they are insufficient. Demand for shelters is reportedly increasing, particularly among younger women, but they remain scarce — space constraints mean women are often turned away. Of the 11 shelters currently in operation, three are located in Addis Ababa, and only one in Oromia State (covering a population of over 30 million). There are no shelters in Afar, Gambela and Somali states. DFAT heard anecdotally that reporting of gender-based violence is increasing, but remains low overall, largely due to women's economic dependence on men.

3.67 DFAT assesses women in Ethiopia face a high risk of domestic violence and sexual harassment. Sexual assault, including spousal rape, is common. DFAT assesses support services for women escaping from domestic violence have improved but are insufficient overall.

Female Genital Mutilation

3.68 Article 35 of the constitution prohibits laws, customs and practices that oppress or cause bodily or mental harm to women. The Criminal Code explicitly outlaws Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which is punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment. Ethiopia has committed to eliminating FGM by 2025 and launched a national roadmap to this end in August 2019, led by the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (a National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children, including FGM, was previously adopted in 2013). In 2017, the Ministry of Health banned the medicalisation of FGM in all public and private medical facilities in the country. In parallel, the authorities and NGOs have sought to change cultural and societal attitudes to FGM by working with communities, including schools and religious institutions.

3.69 While the incidence of FGM has declined, it remains widespread, particularly in rural areas. The law against FGM is rarely enforced — DFAT is not aware of recent prosecutions. According to the UNDP, 65.2 per cent of women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 have undergone FGM. Local sources told

DFAT that the incidence of FGM is highest in Muslim-majority Afar and Somali states, where rates are near-universal. While the practice of FGM is most common among Muslims, it is not exclusive to them — FGM occurs in Amhara and Tigray states, for example, although the practice has declined in these areas since 2014 (FGM is least prevalent in Tigray State, at 23 per cent). FGM is performed predominantly in the home, usually by an older woman with mid-wife experience. Only a small percentage of FGM procedures are performed by health professionals.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

3.70 Same-sex sexual activity is illegal in Ethiopia and punishable by up to 15 years' imprisonment. Laws against such activity are strictly enforced. The death penalty does not apply to same-sex sexual activity, although the idea has been considered in the past. No laws currently exist prohibiting discrimination or hate crimes against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or intersex (LGBTI) individuals.

3.71 Ethiopia is a conservative society, and LGBTI individuals face high levels of societal discrimination. Negative attitudes toward homosexuality are prevalent countrywide, including in Addis Ababa. LGBTI individuals risk discrimination in education and employment, physical violence and ostracism — including from family, friends and work colleagues — if their sexual orientation is revealed. The social stigma associated with homosexuality and its illegal nature makes it extremely difficult for LGBTI individuals to be open about their sexual orientation. It also means instances of harassment or violence against LGBTI individuals are rarely reported.

3.72 Against this background, there is no visible LGBTI community in Ethiopia. While there have been instances of people being jailed for allegedly engaging in homosexual acts, its underground nature means arrests and prosecutions are not common (DFAT is not aware of recent prosecutions). According to a local source, the current federal government is not actively seeking to punish LGBTI individuals but nor is it attempting to improve their situation either. Given the sensitivities, local NGOs do not advocate for LGBTI rights. Another local source told DFAT that the conservative nature of the society means there is no scope for the public discussion of LGBTI issues.

3.73 DFAT assesses that LGBTI individuals in Ethiopia face high levels of official and societal discrimination, and have no recourse to state protection. DFAT further assesses that, given prevailing conditions, internal relocation is not a viable option for LGBTI individuals.

Children

3.74 Article 36 of the constitution stipulates that children have the right not to be subject to exploitative practices; the right not to perform work that may be hazardous or harmful to their education, health or wellbeing; and the right to be free of corporal punishment or cruel and inhumane treatment in schools and other institutions responsible for the care of children. Ethiopia is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and two of its three optional protocols (see [Human Rights Framework](#)). In 2013, Ethiopia launched a National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children, with a focus on preventing child marriage, FGM (see [Female Genital Mutilation](#)) and abduction for marriage. In 2017, Ethiopia adopted a National Children's Policy to protect the rights of children, including by preventing child sexual violence and child labour exploitation. Ethiopia has committed to eliminating child marriage by 2025.

3.75 The Family Code sets the minimum legal age for marriage at 18 years, although special dispensation may be granted for children to marry at 16 years, upon application by the child concerned and their parent/s

or guardian/s. While the authorities and NGOs have sought to combat early marriage, and the median age for marriage has increased since 2000, the practice remains widespread (the UN has described it as 'rampant'). According to a study by the international charity Girls Not Brides, using UNICEF data, Ethiopia has the 15th highest rate of child marriages in the world (with 40 per cent of girls married by 18 years of age and 14 per cent by 15 years of age) and the 5th highest total number of child brides (about 2.1 million). Afar and Amhara states have the lowest median ages for marriage in the country.

3.76 The abduction of young girls for marriage has historically occurred across Ethiopia; however, according to UNICEF and the Overseas Development Institute, the incidence of marriage by abduction has declined significantly in recent years. Abduction for marriage is illegal. In practice, perpetrators generally avoid punishment if the victim agrees to marriage.

3.77 Ethiopia has ratified all major international conventions on child labour. The minimum legal age for paid employment is 14 years. Children between the ages of 14 and 18 are banned from hazardous or night work ('hazardous work' being defined as work that could jeopardise the health of a child). In practice, these laws are rarely enforced, and child labour is common across the country, particularly in the agricultural sector but also in construction and manufacturing. Girls engaged in paid domestic work are vulnerable to mistreatment and sexual abuse. According to Save The Children, 27.4 per cent of children between the ages of five and 17 were engaged in child labour in the period 2013-18. DFAT is not aware of any reports of child recruitment by Ethiopia's armed forces.

3.78 Corporal punishment occurs in schools, orphanages and in the home. The Ministry of Women, Children and Youth has adopted a Manual on Positive Child Disciplining and conducts regular awareness raising to discourage corporal punishment against children.

3.79 The minimum age of criminal responsibility is nine years. While there have been instances of children being prosecuted as adults, this is not common.

3.80 DFAT assesses that girls face a high risk of genital mutilation and early marriage. DFAT further assesses boys and girls face a high risk of labour exploitation.

Internally-Displaced People

3.81 Regional border disputes and inter-ethnic clashes have driven large-scale internal displacement in much of the country. Around 3.5 million Ethiopians have been internally displaced since the beginning of 2018. Of these, at least 3 million have been conflict-induced. By way of contrast, Ethiopia had only 200,000 conflict-induced IDPs in September 2017. Conflict-induced displacement – usually over access to land and other resources – has occurred countrywide, including in Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Harari, Oromia, Somali and SNNP states. The most significant displacement has occurred as a result of clashes between the Guji Oromo and Gedeo ethnic groups in the West Guji Zone of Oromia State, where the two communities share some of the most densely-populated farmland in Ethiopia (the Guji are an ethnic Oromo sub-group) and along the Oromia-Somali state border. Drought and water shortages are other drivers of internal displacement, particularly in Somali State. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), there were 1,256 sites for IDPs as of June 2019. Conditions in IDP sites are generally poor, with some sites having one latrine per 300 people. The IOM and UNHCR provide humanitarian assistance to registered IDPs. Unregistered IDPs and/or those living in informal sites are ineligible for assistance.

3.82 The federal government released a strategic plan for the return and resettlement of IDPs in April 2019, developed in cooperation with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The federal government claims that most IDPs have since returned to their places of origin in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner. International sources who DFAT spoke to question this claim. Some returns have

reportedly not met international standards, including because of ongoing instability in places of origin, resulting in secondary displacement in some instances. According to Human Rights Watch, the authorities have occasionally restricted the delivery of humanitarian assistance and demolished IDP sites to encourage returns to places of origin. A local source told DFAT there have been instances of the delivery of humanitarian assistance being contingent on IDPs returning to their places of origin. Some IDPs were reportedly given misleading or insufficient information about conditions in their places of origin, and were thus unable to make informed decisions about returning. Some sources characterised some returns as 'forced'. In cases where IDPs have had their land dispossessed by other groups, the government has proposed providing them with land in their area of displacement, where they would remain, rather than returning to their place of origin.

Refugees

3.83 Ethiopia has one of the largest refugee populations in the world. As of March 2020, Ethiopia hosted nearly 750,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers. Most originate from South Sudan (337,000), Somalia (197,000), Eritrea (165,000) and Sudan (42,000). Some refugees have resided in Ethiopia for decades and have children born in the country. Registered refugees reside in 26 camps across Ethiopia administered jointly by the federal government (Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs, or ARRA) and UNHCR, mostly in Gambela, Somali, Tigray and Benishangul-Gumuz states. In the case of Gambela, the refugee population (predominantly ethnic Nuer from South Sudan) is thought to outnumber the local permanent resident population (predominantly ethnic Anuak). UNHCR and the IOM provide assistance to registered refugees. NGOs are also active in this space. Asylum-seekers from South Sudan, south and central Somalia, Eritrea and Yemen are recognised as *prima facie* refugees, and undergo only light screening procedures. Nationals from all other countries seeking asylum in Ethiopia undergo an individual refugee status determination by an Eligibility Committee administered by the federal government (UNHCR is an observer).

3.84 In January 2019, parliament adopted a new Refugee Proclamation. This grants registered refugees and asylum-seekers freedom of movement, including: the right to live outside of the camps; engage in wage-earning employment in certain circumstances; acquire and transfer property; access health and education services; legally register births, deaths, marriages and divorces; obtain drivers' licences; and access judicial and financial services, including banking. The law, developed in consultation with UNHCR, is consistent with the UN Global Compact on Refugees, which aims to increase refugees' self-reliance and ease the pressure on host communities, and pledges made by Ethiopia at the UN in 2016 to facilitate durable solutions for refugees living in the country. UNHCR describes the Refugee Proclamation as one of the most progressive refugee policies in Africa. One international source described the law to DFAT as 'the gold standard, not just for Africa, but for the world'. Refugees from Eritrea were permitted to live outside of refugee camps prior to the adoption of the Refugee Proclamation (see [Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean Origin](#)).

3.85 Refugees and asylum seekers must possess an identification card to reside outside of refugee camps and access government services. These cards are issued jointly by ARRA and UNHCR. Those residing outside of refugee camps are ineligible for UNHCR assistance. ARRA issues birth, marriage, divorce and death certificates and identification cards to registered refugees (see [Birth and Death Certificates](#)).

3.86 Ethiopia has been enrolling refugee children in schools since 2016. According to UNHCR, 196,000 refugee students were enrolled in different levels of education (pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary) across Ethiopia in the 2018-19 academic year.

4. COMPLEMENTARY PROTECTION CLAIMS

ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE

Extrajudicial Killings

4.1 Human rights groups documented extrajudicial killings in the period 2014-18, primarily in Oromia and Somali states. Most extrajudicial killings occurred in the context of the 2014-18 protests and clashes between ethnic Somalis and Oromos in Somali State (Amnesty International accuse the Liyu Police and local militia of executing hundreds of Oromo in Somali State). Nine civilians were reportedly killed by government forces in Moyale (Oromia State) in March 2018. Non-state groups like the OLF and the ONLF have also been accused of extrajudicial killings and other abuses against government forces and civilians. The OLF and the ONLF signed peace agreements with the federal government in 2018, and have committed to disarming and engaging peacefully in the political process (see [Security Situation](#)).

4.2 The current federal government has acknowledged past violations by security and law enforcement agencies, and has committed to holding perpetrators to account. Criminal investigations against senior officials from the NISS, the police and prison system suspected of extrajudicial killings and torture are ongoing. Local sources told DFAT that government forces are increasingly showing greater restraint in their use of force, including against protesters.

4.3 DFAT assesses that the federal government is genuine in its efforts to impose greater accountability and discipline on government forces. Reports of extrajudicial killings by government forces have decreased significantly since April 2018, and DFAT does not consider extrajudicial killings, where they occur, to be systematic or chronic.

Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

4.4 Ethiopia is not a signatory to the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. International sources report that some people arrested in connection to anti-government protests in 2014-18 were held incommunicado. Thousands of political prisoners have been released since 2018 (see [Political Opinion \(Actual or Imputed\)](#)). Reports of enforced disappearance have declined under the current federal government.

Deaths in Custody

4.5 There is no reliable publicly available information on deaths in custody in the Ethiopian prison system. The US Department of State and the UK Home Office have previously reported that prison conditions are harsh and, in some cases, life threatening (see [Detention and Prison](#)). In September 2016,

more than 20 inmates died during a fire at Qilinto Prison, on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. The authorities charged 38 prisoners for causing the fire.

DEATH PENALTY

4.6 Under the Criminal Code, the death penalty applies to a number of serious crimes, including: aggravated murder; terrorism-related offences; espionage; treason; war crimes; and genocide. In 2015, parliament considered two pieces of legislation to extend the list of offences punishable by death to include homosexual acts and people trafficking. Neither bill passed. The Criminal Code prohibits public hanging and other inhuman methods of execution.

4.7 While it retains the death penalty in law, Ethiopia is de facto abolitionist. The death penalty was last used in 2007, when a military officer was executed for the 2001 killing of Ethiopia's Chief of Security and Immigration. Prior to this, the last recorded execution was in 1998. DFAT understands 68 prisoners were on death row in 2017. Amnesty International, which monitors executions worldwide, recorded no executions or death sentences in 2019. In December 2018, Ethiopia voted against a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a universal moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

TORTURE

4.8 Article 28 of the constitution defines torture as a crime against humanity and bars the legislature and other state institutions from pardoning or providing amnesty to individuals who commit torture. Article 19 of the constitution stipulates that evidence obtained through coercion is inadmissible. The Criminal Code provides for a fine or imprisonment for public servants who treat detained persons in a manner that is incompatible with human dignity, including physical or mental torture.

4.9 Despite these legal protections, prior to 2018 the use of torture was widespread in police stations, prisons and other places of detention, both as a form of punishment and for the purpose of obtaining information and extracting confessions from detainees. According to human rights organisations, common methods of torture included beatings, burning, electric shocks, waterboarding, tying prisoners in stress positions, and prolonged periods of solitary confinement. Individuals belonging to groups designated as terrorist organisations and others perceived to oppose the federal government and its policies – including journalists, bloggers and civil society activists – were at particular risk of torture and other ill-treatment. Torture was known to occur at the Federal Police Crime Investigation Sector, a federal police detention facility in Addis Ababa commonly known as Maeke'lawi, and in Jijiga Central Prison (known as Jail Ogaden) in Somali State. Most of those reportedly subjected to torture in Jail Ogaden were suspected of having affiliations to the ONLF.

4.10 The current federal government has identified the prevention of torture as a core priority. In July 2018, Prime Minister Abiy, in an address to parliament, acknowledged that government forces relied on torture, which he characterised as state terrorism. Abiy has committed to holding perpetrators of torture to account and ending a culture of impunity. In July 2018, the federal attorney-general announced investigations into torture and ill-treatment in detention facilities. Over 60 senior officials were subsequently arrested, including for suspected acts of torture. Their trials were ongoing at the time of publication. The authorities also issued an arrest warrant for Getachew Assefa, the former longtime director of the NISS, for alleged torture, causing deaths during interrogations and detaining members of opposition groups (Assefa has evaded arrest to date). Maeke'lawi was closed in April 2018. Jail Ogaden was closed in September 2018, and some administrators, including the jail's former head, have been arrested for suspected human rights

violations committed under their command. Restrictions on access to detention centres by independent bodies for monitoring purposes have been loosened (see [Detention and Prison](#)).

4.11 DFAT understands that, at the time of publication, the EHRC was not receiving extensive complaints of torture by the authorities. Multiple sources told DFAT they were hearing significantly less frequent claims of torture, including by the police and inside prisons, suggesting the practice is less common today.

CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

4.12 Article 18 of the constitution affords Ethiopians the right to protection against cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Article 424 of the Criminal Code prohibits treatment of prisoners or suspects ‘in an improper or brutal manner, or in a manner which is incompatible with human dignity’. Such acts are punishable with up to 10 years’ imprisonment.

4.13 In practice, prisoners have reported incidents of physical punishment. There are credible reports of individuals detained in connection to the 2014-18 protests and/or for suspected affiliations to previously-outlawed opposition groups being mistreated, including being subjected to beatings, overcrowding, extreme heat, lack of water and solitary confinement. The current federal government has committed to addressing such abuses as part of its wide-reaching reform agenda (see [Detention and Prison](#)).


Arbitrary Arrest and Detention

4.14 The constitution stipulates that no person may be subject to arbitrary arrest and detained without charge or conviction. Under the Criminal Code, ‘unlawful arrest or detention’ is punishable by up to 10 years’ imprisonment. In practice, before April 2018 critics of the federal government were regularly detained on arbitrary grounds and often held for extended periods without charge. Under the State of Emergency, effective from October 2016-August 2017 and then from February-June 2018, authorities were allowed to arrest and detain individuals without a court warrant and hold detainees for longer than proscribed under normal regulations. According to the US Department of State, security forces went door-to-door after some protests, and arrested and arbitrarily detained opposition party members and supporters, whom they accused of inciting violence.

4.15 There are fewer reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions since the change in federal government in April 2018 and the lifting of the State of Emergency. Some members of the OLF and the NaMA claim to have been the subject of arbitrary arrest and detention (in connection to the failed June 2019 coup attempt in the case of the NaMA) (see [Political Opinion \(Actual or Imputed\)](#)).

4.16 In September 2018, security forces detained 3,000 people in Oromia State and Addis Ababa in response to rising criminality. Those arrested included individuals found gambling and – despite not constituting criminal offences– smoking *shisha* (a tobacco mix smoked in a water pipe) and consuming *khat*. Most were subsequently released.

4.17 Successive governments have detained people – primarily youth – for ‘rehabilitation and re-education’ purposes in military-run camps. This includes people involved in the 2014-18 protests. About 1,200 people – detained in connection to the September 2018 unrest in Oromia State that accompanied the return from exile of the OLF – were sent for rehabilitation at a military facility. Most have since completed their rehabilitation and been released. Rehabilitation occurs outside of the judicial process – those undergoing rehabilitation are not charged and prosecuted. Amnesty International reports that rehabilitation processes continued throughout 2019. DFAT understands rehabilitation can last between one and several



months, and includes education and physical exercise components. DFAT understands that rehabilitation does not involve torture or other forms of ill-treatment. Those undergoing rehabilitation are released without charge on completion of their program. The authorities claim rehabilitation boosts the employment prospects of those who undergo it and supports national unity.

5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

STATE PROTECTION

5.1 Ethiopia has an extensive security and intelligence apparatus, a legacy of its previous political systems. The state exercises control over most of the country, and it has largely been effective in maintaining law and order and protecting the population from major crimes, including terrorism. The security and intelligence apparatus was used in the past to monitor and suppress dissent, and had a history of using force to quell instances of unrest, including large-scale anti-government protests. Prime Minister Abiy has sought to impose greater discipline and accountability on the security forces, including by punishing past wrongdoings, as part of broader efforts to strengthen the professionalism and civilian oversight of the security forces (local sources claim this has had a deterrent effect on government forces). According to the national report it submitted ahead of its most recent UPR (May 2019), the federal government is developing legislation on police use of force and accountability, and plans to establish an independent mechanism to which complaints of ill-treatment by security and law enforcement authorities can be submitted, but this is not yet legislated. Regional state governments are making parallel efforts to reform law enforcement at the state level. A proliferation of ethnic-based militias since 2018 has challenged state authority and eroded the rule of law in some parts of the country, particularly in western Oromia State.

5.2 Government forces have shown greater restraint toward protesters since April 2018. Local sources told DFAT that non-state actors now posed a greater threat to safety than did government forces. In a report presented to federal parliament in January 2020, the EHRC claimed that human rights violations committed by government forces had declined, with most violations now perpetrated by non-state actors.

5.3 DFAT assesses that, overall, federal and regional security forces are largely effective at maintaining law and order and in providing protection from threats by non-state actors, particularly in major urban centres. However, DFAT assesses that the emergence of armed, invariably ethnic-based non-state actors has increasingly challenged the state's monopoly on the use of force and its concomitant ability to provide protection in remote areas and along borders separating Ethiopia's regional states.

Military

5.4 The Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) comprises an army and air force. Combined, the ENDF has around 180,000 personnel. As a landlocked country, Ethiopia has no naval capacity, although Prime Minister Abiy has initiated steps to re-establish a naval force (Ethiopia's navy was disbanded following Eritrea's secession). The ENDF is a capable force, and is one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations (including to peacekeeping missions in neighbouring countries). The ENDF is occasionally deployed to regional states to support regional security forces restore order during instances of major civil unrest, but generally does not have a major presence at the regional state level.

5.5 Military service is not routinely compulsory, although the ENDF retains the right to conduct call-ups. A refusal to perform military service can attract a penalty of up to 10 years' imprisonment under the Criminal Code. The minimum age for military service is 18 years.

5.6 International partners, including the US, provide funding for a range of training programs for the ENDF, including peacekeeping, professional military education, military training management and counter-terrorism operations. The ENDF is accused of past human rights violations, including the use of excessive force and extrajudicial killings during the 2014-18 protests in Oromia and Amhara states and counter-insurgency operations against the ONLF in Somali State.

5.7 The military has extensive economic interests through METEC, an industrial conglomerate spanning nearly 100 companies. METEC has been the subject of anti-corruption investigations by the current federal government, and several senior executives, including its former chief executive, Brigadier General Kinfe Dagnew, have been arrested for suspected corruption.

Police

5.8 The Ethiopian Federal Police Force reports to the Ministry of Peace and is subject to parliamentary oversight. It is responsible for preventing and investigating crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of the Federal Court, including terrorism, drug trafficking and human trafficking. In addition, all regional states have their own regional police forces. These are responsible for law and order at the state level and report to their respective state governments. Regional police forces are dominated by the ethnic group that is the majority in the state for which the force is responsible. One local source told DFAT that regional police forces often show favouritism to the ethnic community from which they are predominantly drawn.

5.9 The Federal Police Force is responsible for coordinating regional police commissions and setting national policing standards, and it provides training and operational support to regional police forces. Some regional states also maintain some form of informal local militias. Militias operate independently, although there is often some degree of coordination with regional and federal government forces.

5.10 There are credible reports of abuses committed by federal and regional police forces, ranging from beatings and arbitrary arrest and detention to rape, torture and extrajudicial killings, including in the context of the 2014-18 protests in Oromia and Amhara states and counter-insurgency operations against the ONLF in Somali State. The 40,000-strong Liyu Police force was used as a counter-insurgency force against the ONLF, and has been implicated in extrajudicial killings, torture and rape. The Liyu Police are also accused of committing cross-border human rights violations, including in eastern Oromia State and in Somalia. The Liyu Police have been undergoing a reform process since August 2018, and were confined to barracks after the displacement of the previous regional president, Abdi Illey. Following a review of the force, those reintegrated into the Somali regional state police force are required to follow its more human-rights compliant policing practices.

5.11 Under the State of Emergency, effective from October 2016-August 2017 and then from February-June 2018, federal police had the power to arrest people without a court order under certain circumstances (see [2014-18 Protests and State of Emergency](#)). This power was used extensively. The ATP granted the police similar powers. The current federal government has amended the ATP with a view to making it more human rights-compliant. It has been largely successful but some concerns still remain. The current federal government has also drafted legislation to improve police accountability in relation to the use of force. The draft legislation includes the creation of an independent complaints mechanism to handle complaints of ill-treatment by security and law enforcement officials.

Intelligence Services

5.12 Ethiopia has a highly capable domestic intelligence system. The NISS is an autonomous federal government office, in theory accountable to the Minister for Peace, but in practice directly accountable to the prime minister. While reliable data on the size of the NISS is not available, it is broadly considered to have a strong capacity to monitor the activities of persons of interest in Ethiopia, and high priority areas along its borders. A civilian monitoring and reporting system supports the intelligence network, whereby individuals report on the activities of others in their community or household. The current federal government is working to strengthen the NISS' independence from political interference. Abiy replaced the NISS' senior leadership in June 2018, and over 30 senior NISS officials, including its former deputy head, have been arrested for allegedly overseeing human rights violations of prisoners and suspects, including abduction and torture (NISS' former head has also been charged, but evaded arrest to date). Under proposed legislation currently before parliament, the NISS will be renamed the National Information Center.

5.13 The federal government operates a separate cyber-intelligence and security organisation, the Information Network Security Agency (INSA). INSA's role includes investigating threats to national security, combatting cyber-crime and preventing cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure.

5.14 The Ethiopian intelligence agencies are highly capable. DFAT assesses that individuals considered a threat to national security are unlikely to escape their attention within Ethiopia.

Judiciary

5.15 Article 78 of the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and Article 79 establishes a dual judicial system of federal and regional courts. The constitution recognises both religious and traditional courts. *Sharia* courts may hear religious and family cases involving Muslims, provided both parties agree (*sharia* cannot be used in relation to criminal matters). *Sharia* courts adjudicate most cases in the predominantly-Muslim Afar and Somali states. The Federal Supreme Court is Ethiopia's highest judicial body. The House of Peoples' Representatives appoints the head of the Federal Supreme Court on the recommendation of the prime minister.

5.16 The constitution enshrines defendants' right to a fair trial, including presumption of innocence, legal representation of their choosing and appeal. As part of the right to presumption of innocence, suspects have the right to bail except for a limited number of serious criminal offences. Bail is not available for persons charged with terrorism, murder, treason or corruption. In all other cases, courts set bail of between 500 and 10,000 *birr* (approximately AUD24-470). This is considered prohibitive for most Ethiopians.

5.17 Defendants have the right to be tried within a reasonable time of being charged— under the constitution, detainees are required to appear before a court and face charges within 48 hours of their arrest, excluding the time required for the journey from the place of arrest to the court. Public prosecutors at both the federal and state levels conduct regular visits to police stations to ensure suspects are brought before a court within 48 hours of their arrest and their human rights are respected. Traditionally, it was common for defendants in sensitive cases to be held for long periods without charge and obstructed from accessing legal representation. This still occurs – possibly due to lack of capacity among police forces rather than an intent to harm. This is especially true in rural and remote areas.

5.18 Publicly appointed defenders are available for detainees unable to afford private legal counsel, although they are typically inexperienced, overworked and poorly paid. Free legal services are available, including by legal aid clinics operating from public universities. The EHRC, the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, the Office of the Attorney-General, regional justice bureaus and NGOs provide free legal aid services in cases involving family matters. Court proceedings in Addis Ababa take place in Amharic and, at

the state level, in the official language of the state in which the court is located. By law, translation services must be provided in a language the defendant understands. Federal courts have interpreters for major local languages on hand, and must hire an interpreter where the defendant speaks another language. According to a local source with experience of the legal system, interpreters are not always readily available.

5.19 Judicial capacity is an ongoing challenge, and courts are often overburdened. Court accessibility is more challenging in rural areas, which have limited access to formal judicial systems and often rely on traditional mechanisms (e.g. councils of elders) to resolve disputes. To enhance accessibility in remote areas, video conference and e-litigation centres have been established across the country. According to a local lawyer, the courts are inefficient — it can take several years for criminal cases to be completed. Another source claimed family and civil disputes were generally dealt with more expeditiously than criminal cases.

5.20 Traditionally, the judiciary has been subject to political influence — EPRDF membership used to be a pre-requisite for judges. Government critics, including journalists, bloggers, members of opposition parties and anti-government protesters, were routinely imprisoned without due process or transparent legal proceedings. Strengthening the independence, professionalism and capacity of the judiciary is a stated priority of the current federal government. Multiple bodies are supporting these efforts, including the Advisory Council for Legal and Justice Affairs (see [Political Opinion \(Actual or Imputed\)](#)) and the Judiciary Affairs Reform Task Force (a body comprising 20 independent legal professionals). In November 2018, Meaza Ashenafi, a prominent lawyer and women's rights activist with no formal affiliation to the EPRDF, was appointed President of the Federal Supreme Court. Ashenafi has undertaken to strengthen judicial independence and eradicate corruption.

5.21 Judges are poorly paid and corruption in the judicial system exists, although judicial corruption is not considered prevalent, particularly at higher levels. DFAT heard anecdotally that judges are less prone to solicit bribes today in light of the current federal government's corruption crackdown. According to sources, the judiciary now operates with greater transparency, and judicial appointments are now made without regard to one's political affiliation.

5.22 DFAT assesses that the judiciary operates in a reasonably fair and independent manner with regard to routine legal matters, but suffers from a lack of capacity. DFAT assesses that government efforts to strengthen the independence of the judiciary from political interference and to combat judicial corruption are genuine, but this will be a long-term undertaking.

Double Jeopardy

5.23 The constitution expressly prohibits double jeopardy. Article 23 stipulates that no person shall be liable to be tried or punished again for an offence for which they have been convicted or acquitted in accordance with criminal law. DFAT is not aware of double jeopardy being applied in recent times.

Detention and Prison

5.24 Article 21 of the constitution states that all persons held in custody and imprisoned upon conviction and sentencing have the right to be treated in a way that respects their human dignity. The law prohibits detention in any facility other than an official detention centre.

5.25 In practice, prison conditions are difficult and fall short of international standards. According to the US Department of State, food, water and sanitation facilities are inadequate. Medical services are also limited, particularly in regional prisons. Overcrowding is a problem in many places of detention. Children are sometimes incarcerated with adults, although male and female prisoners are typically separated.

5.26 A number of unofficial detention centres were known to operate in the past. Some people arrested in relation to the 2014-18 protests were reportedly held in unofficial places of detention, including military bases, local administration offices and makeshift detention centres in government-owned properties. Mistreatment of prisoners – particularly those imprisoned on political grounds and/or under the ATP – was previously common.

5.27 The current federal government has taken steps to improve prison conditions, including by cracking down on ill-treatment and torture and improving physical prison infrastructure. To alleviate overcrowding, it is building four new prison facilities, while committing to improving water supply, medical and sanitation services, and amenities in existing prisons. These efforts were ongoing at the time of publication. One local source told DFAT that the cleanliness of prisons, including the availability of sanitation facilities, has improved.

5.28 Several secret detention centres administered by the NISS have been closed following criminal investigations by the federal Attorney-General. The Maeke'lawi federal police detention facility in Addis Ababa and Jail Ogaden in Somali State, where torture was known to occur, were closed in April and September 2018, respectively (see [Torture](#)). Senior officials overseeing prisons where serious violations are alleged to have occurred have been dismissed and detained. DFAT heard that allegations of ill-treatment and torture in places of detention have decreased significantly since April 2018.

5.29 The current federal government has also loosened restrictions on prison access by monitoring bodies, a right that was previously restricted. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Justice for All – Prisons Fellowship of Ethiopia (an NGO), the Office of the Attorney General and the EHRC have access to places of detention across Ethiopia, and conduct regular visits. The Office of the Ombudsman has the authority to investigate prison conditions. The EHRC publishes an annual report on conditions in police stations and prisons.

INTERNAL RELOCATION

5.30 Article 32 of the constitution provides all Ethiopians with the right to freedom of movement within Ethiopia, including the freedom to choose their place of residence and to leave the country. The right to freedom of movement is largely respected in practice (including during the 2016-18 State of Emergency), and Ethiopians can and do relocate internally. Many do so in pursuit of greater economic opportunities. Food insecurity and water shortages are also major drivers of internal relocation. As Ethiopia's commercial capital and with a history of inter-ethnic coexistence, Addis Ababa attracts significant migration from the regions.

5.31 Inter-ethnic clashes – and associated blockades and road closures – in some parts of the country are an impediment to freedom of movement and internal relocation. According to Freedom House, blockades and road closures were reported in 2019 along the Amhara-Tigray border and in Oromia, Somali and SNNP states. The roadblocks and road closures are not state-sanctioned. A lack of family connections and financial resources, particularly for vulnerable groups like divorced women, young mothers and victims of domestic violence, can limit internal relocation options. Ethnicity and language differences – and associated perceptions of discrimination – can also be barriers to internal movement and relocation. Amharas have more freedom to move around Ethiopia given the presence of these groups in many different states and the status of Amharic as the official national language.

5.32 Security and intelligence services operate across Ethiopia. DFAT assesses that an individual who is of interest to the authorities is unlikely to be able to avoid attracting official attention by relocating within Ethiopia.

TREATMENT OF RETURNEES

5.33 Article 32 of the constitution stipulates that Ethiopian nationals have the right to return to the country. Ethiopia has a large diaspora. About 5 million Ethiopians live outside of the country, with large concentrations in the US and the Middle East. Members of the diaspora return to Ethiopia regularly and contribute to the economy, including through remittances. Prime Minister Abiy has encouraged former dissidents to return from abroad and participate in his reform agenda. Many have done so, including members of opposition movements previously designated as terrorist organisations (see [Political System](#)). DFAT understands there have been instances of individuals who were seeking asylum abroad discontinuing their protection claims and returning to Ethiopia. Some returnees are now active in politics and civil society. Former political prisoners have returned from exile to head the EHRC and the NEBE.

5.34 Ethiopia is a source, transit and destination country for international migration. Large numbers of people attempt to move from Ethiopia to other countries in search of better economic opportunities. These people typically travel along three routes: (1) through Somalia, Djibouti or Eritrea to Yemen and then on to Saudi Arabia; (2) north through Sudan and Libya in an attempt to reach Europe; or (3) south, in an attempt to reach South Africa. The Gulf region is the preferred destination, given the ready availability of jobs in these countries (Saudi Arabia accounts for most of Ethiopia's total labour migration in recent years). The number of people travelling by air to Western countries tends to be much smaller.

5.35 Most Ethiopian migrants to Saudi Arabia are undocumented, and are employed either as construction or domestic workers. In 2013, Saudi Arabia expelled over 100,000 Ethiopian citizens as part of a crackdown on migrant workers. In March 2017, the Saudi authorities announced plans to deport all undocumented migrants, whom they granted a 90-day amnesty period to leave voluntarily without sanction or face detention, fines and deportation (the amnesty period expired in June 2017, but was extended to November 2017). Of the 500,000 undocumented Ethiopians in Saudi Arabia at the time, 300,000 are estimated to have returned to Ethiopia, most of whom were deported (less than 30,000 returns were voluntary). Many returnees reported being kept in poor conditions and subjected to torture, assault or rape. The IOM provides food, temporary shelter, onward transportation, cash assistance and other forms of support such as clothing and bedding to deportees considered particularly vulnerable (those who were detained before deportation and returned without any belongings, assets or savings). The Ethiopian Government also provides some reintegration assistance, including temporary shelter, food, medical assistance and skills training.

5.36 The Ethiopian authorities have made efforts to restrict irregular migration. In January 2020, parliament ratified a proclamation for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants. The bill imposes punishments including financial penalties and long-term imprisonment for traffickers, smugglers and their accomplices. Under this law, human trafficking is punishable by seven to 12 years' imprisonment, plus a fine of between 40,000 and 100,000 *birr* (approximately AUD1,900-4,700). Despite the crackdown on undocumented migrants and the war in Yemen, some Ethiopians still use people smugglers to travel through Yemen to Saudi Arabia in search of domestic work (women) or construction jobs (men). Of those who travel south, many are stopped prior to making it to South Africa and returned to Ethiopia. According to local sources, some of these people use the reintegration assistance provided upon their return to fund another migration attempt.

5.37 The authorities have typically welcomed voluntary returnees to Ethiopia, including, since April 2018, government critics and opponents. DFAT assesses that returnees, including failed asylum seekers and/or government critics and opponents, face a low risk of monitoring, harassment, detention and official discrimination. While the authorities have significant intelligence-gathering capabilities and are likely to be aware of major anti-government protest activity undertaken in other countries and online, DFAT assesses

that people who openly criticise the ruling party while they are outside of Ethiopia face a low risk of official harm on their return to Ethiopia.

5.38 DFAT assesses that, under the current federal government, failed asylum seekers face a low risk of harm on their return to Ethiopia, including where they sought asylum on political grounds.

Exit and Entry Procedures

5.39 Ethiopians travelling internationally by air are subject to security and identification checks at the airport, and immigration stations at airports have photograph and fingerprinting facilities. Ethiopian passports are machine-readable and have a range of security features (see [Documentation](#)). Biometric security measures linked to national databases apply at formal entry and exit points across the country. The NISS has primary responsibility for intelligence and border security processes.

5.40 An exit visa is not required to depart Ethiopia, and Article 32 of the constitution stipulates that Ethiopian nationals have the right to leave the country at any time. In practice, there have been some instances of individuals being prevented from exiting the country. From 2013 to 2018, Ethiopia prohibited its citizens from travelling to the Gulf region in search of work. The travel ban was imposed to prevent the exploitation and abuse of unskilled and female domestic workers. It was lifted after Ethiopia signed bilateral agreements with several Gulf countries to protect the rights of Ethiopian workers. A Certificate of Good Conduct ('police clearance certificate') is required when a person seeks to emigrate from Ethiopia (see [Police Clearance Certificates](#)).

5.41 Ethiopia has a number of national borders that are not secure, including those with Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia and Kenya. Many Ethiopians use people smugglers to help them reach Saudi Arabia, Europe or South Africa. Local sources told DFAT that Ethiopia is also increasingly becoming a migration hub for people in other parts of Africa, in part due to the expanding Ethiopian Airlines network. Addis Ababa is Africa's leading aviation hub, with Bole International Airport able to accommodate up to 22 million passengers annually. In January 2020, Ethiopian Airlines said it planned to construct a new airport with a capacity to handle 100 million passengers per year.

DOCUMENTATION

Birth and Death Certificates

5.42 Birth certificates are issued by the Vital Events Registration Agency (VERA) via the local administrative (*kebele*) office, within which jurisdiction the applicant was born. To obtain a birth certificate, an applicant under the age of 18 must provide national identification cards for both parents, two passport-sized photographs and a notification of birth either from a hospital (if the birth took place in a hospital) or from the *kebele* office (if the birth took place at home). Both parents must be present at the registration. Applicants over the age of 18 must present their national identification card or passport, a completed application form and two passport-sized photographs. All applicants, regardless of age, must present a statutory declaration issued by a court and signed by three witnesses.

5.43 Ethiopian law requires the registration of all children within 90 days of birth. In practice, only a small percentage of births are registered and children issued birth certificates (according to the UNDP, 3 per cent of births under the age of five are registered). Non-registration is particularly acute in rural areas, where most births occur outside of health facilities. Registration of births is more prevalent in Addis Ababa.

Registration of children who are not born in hospitals requires the payment of a fee, which can be a deterrent for poor families. The absence of a birth certificate can complicate access to other forms of legal documentation, where a birth certificate is required as a form of evidence.

5.44 Adoptive parents can obtain a birth certificate for their adopted children reflecting the names of the adoptive parents as the parents of the child. This can be obtained following the grant of an adoption order, which must be presented in support of the birth certificate application. In such cases, the birth certificate contains a footnote indicating that the parents are adoptive parents.

5.45 As with birth certificates, death certificates are issued by VERA via the *kebele* in which the deceased resided. Proof of death is required to register a death. By law, a death must be registered within 30 days of the event. A letter from the local *kebele* is required where a death occurs at home. If a death occurs in a hospital, a certificate from the hospital attesting to the death is required. Applicants need to provide a statutory declaration issued by a court and signed by three witnesses attesting to the details of the death. Applicants must be an immediate relative of the deceased, and must present the national identification card of the deceased. In cases where a minor is an orphan with no identified guardian, the minor is able to obtain death certificates for their parents.

5.46 The format of birth and death certificates is not uniform, and varies by state. All legitimate birth and death certificates contain a photograph of the applicant and wet seals of the issuing authority. Birth and death certificates are issued in two languages: (1) English; and (2) either Amharic or the local language of the state of issuance.

5.47 In December 2018, there were approximately 18,600 *kebeles* across Ethiopia, 90 per cent of which were providing civil registration services to the public through VERA. VERA was established in 2016 to improve civil registration and serve as a central repository, at the national level, of births, deaths, adoptions and other vital events like marriages and divorces. Around 92 per cent of *kebeles* are situated in rural areas. *Kebeles* are accessible by foot for the majority of the population.

5.48 ARRA – the government agency responsible for asylum seekers in, and returnees to, Ethiopia – issues birth and death certificates to registered refugees. Birth and death certificates issued to refugees are almost identical to those issued to Ethiopian citizens. The primary difference is that birth and death certificates issued to refugees contain additional information relating to their status (e.g. refugee identification number in the case of birth certificates, and refugee identification number and the refugee camp in which the deceased was registered in the case of death certificates).

National Identity Cards

5.49 Ethiopians use national identity cards (also known as *kebele* cards) as their primary identification document. National identity cards are issued by VERA via the *kebele* in which one is resident. National identity cards are required to obtain a passport or driver's license and at any other time when an ID is required. National identity cards are normally issued at 18 years of age. They require renewal every two years at a cost of ETB50-100 (AUD 2.50-5).

5.50 National identity cards do not take a uniform format, and vary between states. They all contain a photograph of the cardholder; their name and address; and the date of issue. Since late 2019, new cards no longer list the cardholder's ethnicity. New-style identification cards issued in Addis Ababa since the fourth quarter of 2019 are computer-generated, and are similar in appearance to a credit card. National identity cards issued in rural areas may be handwritten, and may appear as a small booklet or cardboard identification card.

5.51 Where an individual plans to relocate to another city or state, they must relinquish their national identity card and obtain a letter stating their current residence and their intended future place of residence. Upon relocating, they must register with the *kebele* in their new place of residence and apply for a new national identity card.

5.52 *Kebele* maintain household records. These show when a house was acquired, the names of all individuals declared to be resident in the house and each resident's relationship with the head of the house. Responsibility for updating these records lies with the household members, but this is not always done and records can be several years out of date.

Police Clearance Certificates

5.53 A Certificate of Good Conduct ('police clearance certificate') is required when a person seeks to emigrate from Ethiopia. For migration purposes, a police clearance certificate can only be issued by the Federal Police Forensic Investigation Department in Addis Ababa. A police clearance certificate confirms the applicant has never partaken in any criminal activity. Any person who has resided in Ethiopia for more than six months can obtain a police clearance certificate following payment of a fee and presentation of: a formal request letter seeking issuance of a police clearance certificate for migration purposes; a copy of the applicant's national identity card or passport; three passport-sized photographs; and original fingerprints of the applicant.

5.54 Applicants who resided in Ethiopia as refugees are required to present their Ethiopian government-issued refugee identity card or their refugee travel document, where the applicant has departed Ethiopia through a resettlement process. Applicants who lived in Ethiopia as refugees but were not registered as such are unlikely to be able to obtain a police clearance certificate. Individuals with criminal records are unable to obtain a police clearance certificate.

5.55 The Federal Police Forensic Investigation Department began issuing a new style of police clearance certificate in 2012. The details appearing on the certificate must be completed in English and, in some cases, Amharic. Parts of the certificate (such as the reference number and the date of issue) may be completed by hand. Processing can take up to 10 days for applicants resident in Ethiopia and more than one month for applicants resident outside of Ethiopia.

Drivers' Licenses

5.56 Drivers' licenses are renewable every two years, and involve payment of a modest fee (50-100 *birr*, or approximately AUD2.50-5). They do not specify the ethnicity of the cardholder.

Passports

5.57 All Ethiopian citizens are legally entitled to obtain an Ethiopian passport. To obtain a passport, an applicant must present: a completed passport application form; an application fee; a national identification card or government employee card (for applicants over the age of 18); a birth certificate (for applicants between six months and 18 years of age); a clinic card or letter from the institution of birth (for applicants under six months of age); passport photographs; and a recently issued police clearance certificate. Fingerprints are also taken at the time of application. Passports can be obtained countrywide, through local branches of the Immigration Office.

5.58 Prior to April 2010, Ethiopian diplomatic missions abroad issued handwritten passports. While this practice has officially ceased, some missions continue to produce handwritten passports. Some handwritten passports remain in circulation and are valid for travel. Ethiopia has also commenced issuance of one-year, non-renewable Alien passports to Eritrean nationals resident in Ethiopia who cannot obtain Eritrean passports. These passports enable the holder to return to Ethiopia without a residence permit. The documents have the same security features as an Ethiopian passport, but have a grey cover.

5.59 Ethiopian passports have a number of security features. The 'prayer page' contains an oval Optically Variable Device (OVD) showing Amharic writing in the centre and the letters 'ETH' repeated. Micro-printing and a latent image in Amharic are also present on the prayer page, which under ultraviolet light shows the Ethiopian pentagram and repeated writing 'Ethiopian passport' in Amharic (this also appears on the inside back cover). Page one of the passport has a barcode and the passport number, both of which react under ultraviolet light. The biodata page has a digitised photograph of the holder on the left side, and this photograph is also superimposed over the passport details. There is a holographic pattern incorporated onto the laminate that covers the whole page. Under ultraviolet light a pattern appears over the top half of the page, which repeatedly reads 'FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA' in English and Amharic. The biodata page has a code that can only be read by a decoder, and that contains the holder's biodata and their image.

5.60 The passport number is laser perforated from Page 17 through to the back cover. There is a watermark on all inner passport pages, as well as a security thread reading 'ETHIOPIAN PASSPORT' in English and Amharic and micro-printing in Amharic under the word 'VISA' on each page. There is rainbow printing across adjoining pages, and under ultraviolet light there is a pattern across adjoining pages that repeatedly reads 'ETHIOPIAN PASSPORT' in English and Amharic. The stitching does not reach the edge of the passport and reacts under ultraviolet light, and page numbers appear at different locations on each page under ultraviolet light. On the inside back cover, there is intaglio printing for the patterns on the sides as well as micro-printing that repeatedly reads 'FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA' and a latent image that reads 'ETHIOPIA'.

5.61 Ethiopian diplomatic missions may issue temporary travel documents (*laissez-passers*) to facilitate urgent travel to Ethiopia by Ethiopian citizens who lack valid travel documents (e.g. because their passport has been lost or stolen). A *laissez-passer* may only be used once.

Dual Citizenship

5.62 Ethiopia does not recognise dual citizenship. Citizenship can be obtained through descent (at least one parent must be an Ethiopian citizen) and marriage (the applicant must have resided in Ethiopia for at least one year and been married to an Ethiopian citizen for at least two years). Foreign nationals can also obtain Ethiopian citizenship through a naturalisation process, although this is a lengthy and complicated process.

PREVALENCE OF FRAUD

5.63 The NISS controls travel documentation. Fraudulent passports are rare and expensive to produce because of their security features. Local sources told DFAT that Ethiopian passports are typically genuine and reliable, but sometimes contain falsified visas to build up a fake travel history. Genuine passports based on fraudulent supporting documents are common.

5.64 Ethiopian civil documents such as birth and death certificates are issued on the basis of statements made by the applicant and supporting witnesses — limited supporting documentation is required. Documents such as medical and school records tend to be more reliable in determining age and guardianship compared to civil documents, but these can also be easily falsified.

5.65 Documents considered to be higher-risk in terms of fraud include birth certificates, death certificates and national identification cards. Medical records and school records are also a high risk of fraud, but can be more easily verified. Documents assessed as being at low-risk of fraud include police clearance certificates, adoption orders, bank statements and university documents.

5.66 The introduction of some technical features means legal documents are increasingly more difficult to replicate. According to the Danish Immigration Service, it is possible to pay bribes to facilitate the introduction of inaccurate information into genuine documents, including national identification cards. Genuine documents containing inaccurate information about the document holder (e.g. relating to their age) are reportedly common.

5.67 Possession of a fraudulent legal document is punishable by three years' imprisonment.