The situation in Guji constitutes a protection crisis. The humanitarian situation continues to worsen as a result of security operations against unidentified armed groups (UAGs) and a limited response. The security situation remains highly volatile and unpredictable.

Since June 2019, the intensity and the geographic area of clashes continue to increase impacting Aga Wayu, Gora Dola, Gumi Eldelo, Liban, Odo Shakisso, and Saba Boru. The scale of violence and displacement is unprecedented. According to zone authorities, 80,000 people are displaced, in addition to some 40,000 displaced from the previous conflict with Somali region. IDPs and host communities have raised lack of security and food aid as the most urgent needs.

Guji and Borena zones are under command-post administration since August 2019. Security restrictions, coupled with insecurity related to the presence of UAGs, are limiting population movements, and access to farmland, water, and pastures. Public and private transportation in some areas are banned, causing economic and social problems. The population is trapped amidst violence, with targeted killings of local officials, traditional leaders or local militia members by UAGs, and arbitrary arrests and harassment by security forces to alleged UAGs supporters.

A recent UN access and protection mission received allegations of serious human rights violations. IDPs were not properly informed - neither consulted - about their displacement and prospects for return. IDPs were asked at short notice to leave their homes in anticipation of security operations, what was initially described as a “temporarily relocation”, it is now 11 months in some areas, six in others. Kebele capitals in affected woredas have become de facto collective centres hosting thousands of IDPs, putting a strain on available resources and increasing the risk that traditional social structures and cohesion collapse.

IDPs and host communities have lost access to their livelihoods, with access to food and markets highly constrained. According to a joint government and UN assessment, no emergency food has been distributed to the displaced population for the past six months to one year, and only 20,000 out of the estimated 80,000 IDPs have received a one-off food ration. At the time of writing, regional authorities have agreed to dispatch food to all IDPs. Access to essential services such as water, health or education is curtailed. Reportedly, most health posts in conflict kebeles are dysfunctional, and at least 36 schools closed, impacting access to education to some 6,000 children.

Humanitarian space continues shrinking. Partners’ operations in boundary areas between Guji and Borena zones are heavily constrained by insecurity. Clashes in Gumi Eldelo are reported on a daily basis, while in Liban, few kebeles are accessible and others inaccessible since mid-2019. The road to Borena through Hudet (Somali region) remains insecure due to residual tensions from the Oromo – Somali conflict.

Limited access has compounded critical humanitarian activities such as malnutrition screening. Projects in health, nutrition, agriculture, water and sanitation, and non-food items distributions in Gora Dola, Gumi Eldelo, Liban, and Saba Boru Woredas are temporarily suspended, impacting thousands of IDPs (23,000 in Gumi Eldelo, 18,000 in Liban, 5,000 in Gora Dola, and 3,000 in Saba Boru). Partners continue to work to find out alternative operational modalities to deliver aid, for instance by reaching woredas capitals or accessible kebeles.

Partners have reported instances whereby their activities have been disrupted by nearby clashes as well as cases of intimidation and misappropriation of their assets by parties to the conflict. Security restrictions on the use of vehicles and motorbikes are in place, impacting significantly relief operations. Partners shall use any possible opportunity – including when communicating with communities – to assert the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and operational independence.