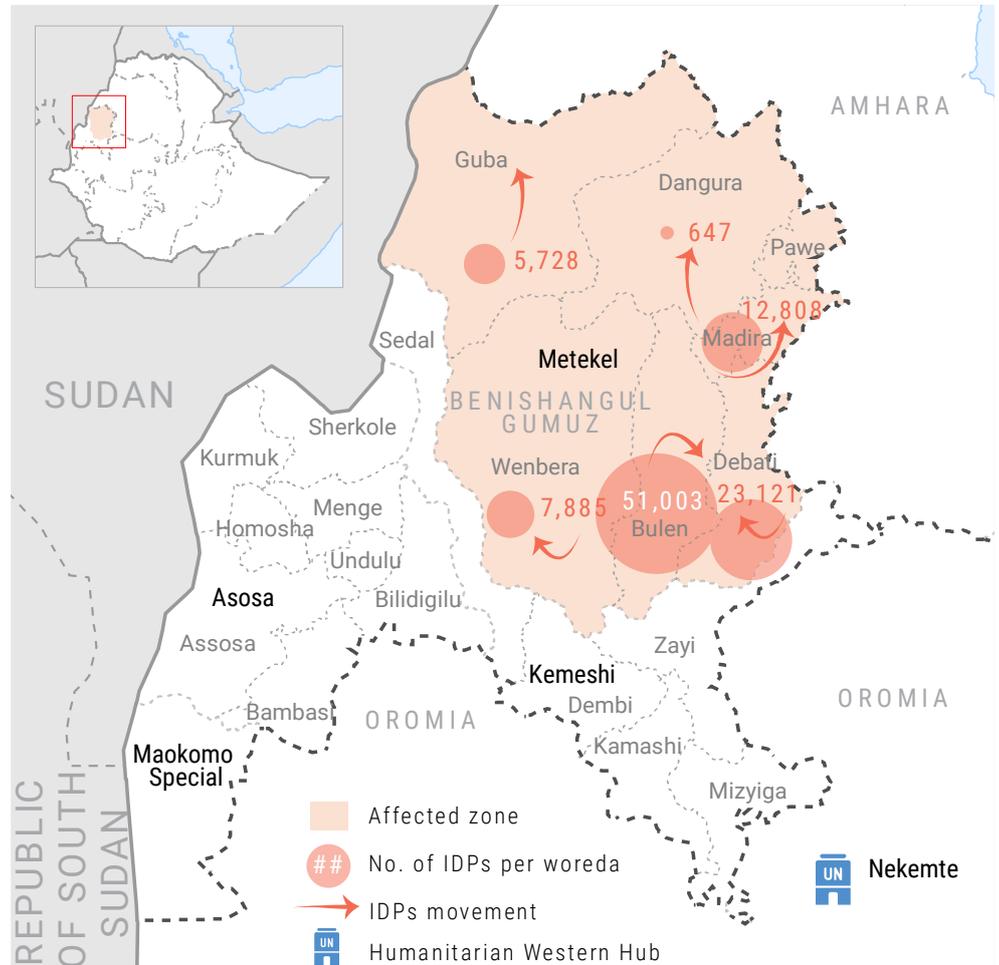


HIGHLIGHTS

- Between end of July 2020 and 04 January 2021, more than 101,000 people were displaced by violence from Bullen, Dangur, Dibate, Guba, Mandura and Wombera woredas of Metekel zone in Benishangul Gumuz Region (BGR).
- Due to the deteriorating security situation in the zone, humanitarian access and life-saving assistance to the 28,000 returnees and 101,000 new IDPs is challenging.
- The regional Government has been providing limited life-saving assistance since July 2020 using armed escorts.
- Clusters at sub-national level have been mapping resources but so far insecurity has not allowed transporting staff and commodities to affected areas.
- The federal Government is in the process of establishing an Emergency Coordination Center (ECC) in Metekel zone to coordinate the humanitarian response to the IDPs.



SITUATION OVERVIEW

Security in Metekel Zone of Benishangul Gumuz Region (BGR) has been gradually deteriorating since 2019, and more intensely so in recent months. On 23 December 2020, 207 individuals lost their lives in one day reportedly following an attack by unidentified armed groups (UAGs). Reports also indicate that more than 20 houses were set on fire by the UAGs in Bukeji kebele of Bullen woreda. According to BGR Disaster Risk Management Commission (DRMC), between end of July 2020 and 04 January 2021, more than 101,000 people were displaced from Bullen, Dangur, Dibate, Guba, Mandura and Wombera woredas. The majority of the IDPs are displaced from rural areas to towns, while some fled to the neighboring Amhara Region (Chagni town and Guangua woreda of Awi Zone). The IDPs are sheltered in public spaces, including schools and meeting halls, while others have set up temporary make-shift shelters, some are staying with relatives and others are out in the open. Given ongoing fighting between Government security forces and UAGs, and the continuing attacks on civilians by UAGs, additional displacements are expected in surrounding towns and woredas.

Looking at past conflict and displacement trends in BGR, inter-communal violence between the Gumuz and Oromo communities in September 2017 displaced nearly 75,000 people in Assosa and Kamashi zones (BG Region) as well as in neighboring East and West Wellega zones (Oromia Region), according to BGR DRMC. Following a Government-led return operation in May 2019, some of the IDPs returned to their places of origin in BGR, while most of them, around 60,000 people, opted to remain in East and West Wellega zones (according to zonal DRMC).

Similarly in September 2018, nearly over 21,000 people were displaced from Metekel Zone to Awi Zone (in Amhara Region) while several others were displaced internally within Metekel Zone following inter-communal violence between Amhara and Gumuz communities in Metekel zone. In May 2020, Amhara and BGR Governments launched a return plan that led to the return of over 28,000 IDPs back to Metekel Zone. The returnees received assistance from Government and humanitarian partners, with some interruptions due to the tense security situation in the zone.

Overall, due to the deteriorating security situation in Metekel Zone, humanitarian access to returnees and life-saving assistance for the new IDPs has been challenging. Abduction of three zonal Government staff by UAGs was reported in November 2020. Public transport and other private/Government vehicles are reportedly repeatedly ambushed by UAGs, causing civilian casualties. Currently, the only route with relative safety to access Metekel zone is the direct road from Addis Ababa to Gelgel Beles (zonal capital of Metekel) through Amhara Region. In the last three months following escalation of insecurity in the zone, humanitarian agencies in Gelgel Beles have relocated their staff to Chagni town in Amhara Region.

The regional Government has been providing limited life-saving assistance since July 2020, including food and partial NFIs, using armed escorts. On 20 December 2020, NDRMC dispatched food items to Gelgel Beles town, but transporting the items to the woreda centers for distribution became a challenge due to insecurity. By the end of December, the Government had distributed 2,943 quintals of cereals for IDPs in Bulen woreda using armed escorts, while the local NGO Mijijigalo distributed 200 quintals of cereals in the same woreda. Meanwhile, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) - Assosa branch, distributed 500 mattresses and 500 blankets in Bullen and Dibate woredas. The ERCS also distributed 3,000 liters of cooking oil and 500 quintals of flour for IDPs in Dibate and Bullen woredas. Local NGO Action for the Needy in Ethiopia (ANE) transported different NFI items donated by UNHCR for distribution to IDPs in Metekel Zone, including 3,400 mats, 13,600 blankets, 3,400 buckets, 50,000 laundry soaps, 3,395 fire retardants, 6,800 mosquito bed nets, 3,400 kitchen sets, and 2,400 plastic tarpaulins. The BG Regional Health Bureau deployed two mobile health teams to Bullen and Dibate woredas along with emergency medical supplies to support health facilities and manage medical cases. The team reportedly faced difficulties to operate due to insecurity in the areas.

As per the findings of the assessment conducted by ERCS from 9 to 16 December 2020 (<https://bit.ly/38jxmo1>), there is a significant gap in the response. Identified needs include food, water supply, shelter/NFI and sexual and gender-based violence support. This assessment was conducted at a time when the number of IDPs was around 30,000. The response gaps are likely to be higher with the current displacement figure of 101,000 people.

At the level of sub-national Clusters, a resource mapping was conducted but the security situation did not allow transporting the available items to the affected areas. According to the regional DRMC, there is a huge gap of emergency health supplies, NFIs, WaSH, food, and protection items. A gap analysis is being conducted at the zonal level.

The federal Government is currently planning to establish an Emergency Coordination Center (ECC) in Gelgel Beles to coordinate the humanitarian response to the IDPs. Unhindered access to affected areas is of utmost importance to reach the population in need with life-saving assistance.

