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ETOPIA
Humanitarian Access Situation Report
May 2019

This report is produced by OCHA Ethiopia in collaboration with humanitarian partners. It covers the period from 1 to 31 May 2019. The next report will be issued around July – August 2019.

OVERVIEW

- In May, humanitarian access worsened as a result of an increase of security incidents and restrictions on IDP access to assistance, against a backdrop of massive government-led IDP returns.
- Active hostilities remain the main cause hampering access in Ethiopia, with 74 of such incidents reported in May (out of a total of 112), most of them in in West and Southern Oromia, i.e. Borana, East and West Wellega, Guji and West Guji zones.
- The re-displacement of large number of IDPs to areas with access constraints is a major concern. Such is - for instance - the case of IDPs returned from the Wellegas (Oromia) to Kamashi zone (BGR), which the UN has not accessed for nine months.
- Most IDP returns have been conducted without major security incidents as the Government invested significantly in enhancing security conditions in return areas. However, in Gedeo and West Guji, partners have reported a number of protection concerns like intimidation, detention, and sporadic reports of IDPs been beaten by security forces.
- The IDP return operation has challenged IDPs individual rights and access to aid given the dismantling of displacement sites, the dispersing of IDPs upon areas of return (hampering aid deliveries), and the limited assistance made available in areas of return.
- Partners shall carry out localized risk analyses before initiating shelter reconstruction activities, and community and livelihoods recovery programmes in areas of IDP returns that remain unstable from an access and security perspective (“do no harm”).
SITUATION OVERVIEW

Zone 3 (Afar region) – Sitti zone (Somali region)

Four national staff of an INGO have been detained in Afar region for more than three months. The aid workers were conducting a humanitarian programme in Sitti zone, and were arrested in Undufo (Afar) for having allegedly entered the region without permission. The humanitarian community remains concerned over their mental and physical wellbeing.

In early May, renewed fighting took place between Afari Special Forces and Issae /Somali communities over the disputed kebeles of Undufo (Gewane woreda), Adaytu (Mille woreda), and Gedamaytu (Amibara woreda) in Afar’s zone 3, causing a number of casualties and prompting the deployment of the EDF. The Somali Region Administration announced it was withdrawing from the 2014 agreement that transferred the three kebeles to Afar region, accusing the Afar administration of not doing enough to protect Ethnic-Somalis in those kebeles. As a result, partners’ movements and assistance to IDPs were disrupted, and road movements along the Addis Ababa - Djibouti artery was intermittently blocked. On the other hand, from 19 - 22 May, the overflow of Awash, Mille and Ewa Rivers caused flooding in a number of kebeles in Mille, Ewa and Dubti woredas, compromising access to thousands of people.

Metekel zone (BGR) - Amhara region

By early May, large scale violence related to communal conflict between Ethnic Amhars and Gumuz/ Shinashas in Metekel zone (BGR) had diminished following EDF deployment. However, a number of attacks and killings continued in Dangura and Mandura woredas rural areas, where military presence is more limited, and further retaliatory attacks were prevented by EDF. At the time of writing, the situation remains tense along the common border in between Gilgel Beles (BGR) and Chagni (Amhara). Partners’ operations and access to Metekel zone has been highly restricted, while movements along the main roads, including from Jawi to Gilgel Beles to the Renaissance Dam (Guba woreda) was progressively restored. Massive rallies were held in May in several Amhara towns, including Gonder, Changi, and Bahir Dar, condemning the violence. Reportedly, two local government officials have been arrested in connection with this conflict.

East and West Wellega (Oromia) – Kamashi and Assosa (BGR)

The operating environment in West Wellega remains extremely volatile due to active clashes between EDF and UAGs. In May, clashes were reported in Begi, Bogi Dirmegi, Dongoro, Kiltu Kara, Lalo Asabi, Leta Sibu, Mana Sibu, and Nejo woredas. In addition, a number of attacks targeting government officials have been reported, including road ambushes. The security situation in West Wellega is hampering partners’ access to boundary areas between Oromia and BGR, as well as within BGR’s Kamashi and Assossa zones, where the government has recently returned thousands of IDPs. Partners report that the temporary suspension of programmes.

The limited access to assist the thousands of returned IDPs in Kamashi zone is a major concern. There have been reports of IDP families returning back to areas of displacement by their own means after being returned to areas of origin by the Government (e.g. Belojegenfoy woreda), due to lack of food and shelter. On the other hand, authorities have denied partners’ access in areas of displacement, arguing that all assistance be delivered in areas of return, which remain only partially accessible. Further, the situation of these IDPs is very worrying in terms of their extreme vulnerability, after months of displacement, and the cold weather conditions with the start of the rainy season.

Between March and May, there have been four attacks in Nekemte town using explosive devices targeting government officials and public spaces. This is of particular concern given the high presence of UN and NGO partners in Nekemte, which serves as a hub for operations in the Wellegas and also Kamashi zone. The likelihood that aid workers may be indirectly impacted by such attacks is high.

Gambela region

In May, the number of security-related incidents in Gambella decreased significantly from April. Overall, 15 incidents - 13 of which crime related – were reported in Gambella city, Akobo Gambella, and Itang districts, most of them relating to long-standing Nuer and Anyuak tensions. These incidents are not directed at humanitarian partners, but continue to obstruct operations and road movements, including in refugee camps. On 15 May, a post in social media threatened violence against UN and INGO partners as well as Kenyan and western foreigners. The threat was regarded as non-credible, authorities are investigating.
Gedeo (SNNPR) - West Guji (Oromia)

In West Guji, clashes between the EDF and an UAG continued unabated, causing restrictions on humanitarian movements and operations in 18 kebeles in Gelana, Kercha, and Bule Hora woredas. This, against a backdrop of massive government-led IDP returns, including to such insecure areas, where the risk for returned IDPs to be newly displaced is high. Some returned IDPs noted that this has been the second time that they find themselves living in collective centers within their own kebeles, after the first wave of government-promoted returns in August 2018. No major incidents of violence between returned IDPs and host communities have been reported.

Overall, 73 IDP sites have been dismantled (22 in Gedeo and 51 in West Guji), subsequently, partners have faced difficulties in identifying the whereabouts of IDPs in areas of return. In some instances, IDPs decided to leave the sites by themselves in order to avoid being returned due to safety and security concerns. The overall situation in the collective sites (secondary displacement) in areas of return in terms of the population access to assistance is concerning, given the lack of shelter, health, and hygiene and sanitation assistance available. Furthermore, physical access constrains related to poor road conditions as a result of the start of the rainy season, for instance in kebeles such as Banjo Datatu, have impacted operations.

East and West Hararge (Oromia)

Conflict along boundary areas between Oromia and Somali regions largely subsided in 2019, however, there remain areas in Gursum, Kumi, and Meyu Muleke woredas (East Hararge) that partners have not been able to access for a long time, with a number of kebeles in Kumbi and Meyu Muloke woredas occupied by the Somali Liyu Police since 2015. In May, conflict between two clans was reported in Jarso woreda, halting operations and forcing the evacuation of aid personnel. In terms of physical constraints, returning IDPs to Lakole kebele (Babile City) are facing challenges to access assistance due to the bad condition of the main road from Darera Arba to Lakole primary school due to the rainy season.

In West Hararge, partners report challenges in accessing parts of Miesso and Gumbi Bordode woredas, while incidents related to the border conflict continue to be reported in Walitane site. In early May, a mass demonstration over interruption of electricity and water supplies in Mechara town (Daro Lebu woreda) restricted partners’ movements and prompted the evacuation of aid personnel. Another conflict between Oromo clans in Gadulo kebele (Daro Lebu woreda) affected assistance to IDPs in Gadulo, with a partner halting operations briefly. Lastly, in Machara city (Daro Lebu woreda) a rumor regarding alleged plans by Muslim members of the community to attack Christians prompted the blockage of a road and partners evacuated their staff as a precautionary measure.

In Dire Dawa town, according to UNDSS, intercommunal clashes between two youth groups deteriorated into widespread Ethnic Oromo - Amhara violence. The first round of clashes lasted two days, and renewed fighting was reported a week later at the University Campus. Whereas there remain IDPs in town, the impact of these clashes in relief operations was minimal.

Guji, Borena, and Moyale zones (Oromia - Somali regions)

In Guji zone, clashes between EDF and an UAG intensified, particularly in rural kebeles and lowland pastoralist IDP hosting woredas, following the killing of EDF soldiers in Wadera woreda (near Bale zonal boundary) and Gumi Eldelo woreda (near Somali regional boundary). Tensions increased in HSP1 IDP hosting woredas, prompting partners in Gumi Eldelo woreda to suspend operations. Active hostilities impacted critical nutrition activities in a number of kebeles of Moyale and Huded woredas (Somali region)

In Borena zone (Oromia region), active hostilities were reported in Dilo, Yabelo, Moyale, Arero, and Guchi woredas, impacting relief efforts. An inter-clan conflict between Borena and Garre was reported in Dilo woreda along the Kenyan border. Furthermore, a clash along the Yabello - Moyale road (Boko Luguma, previously known as “147”) between the EDF and an UAG, restricted partners’ movements in Guchi and Wachile woredas. The situation of some 500 IDPs who remain in Dhas woredas is of concern, given their limited access to assistance, their heightened vulnerability, and the fact that moving back to their areas of origin would cut off their access to livelihoods opportunities in town. In addition, some 3,800 IDPs in Elweye remain deprived of food aid due to the woreda task force reluctance to intervene, as these IDPs belong to Konso (SNNPR), and peace process aimed at their return are ongoing.
Southern Nations and Nationalities People’s region (SNNPR)

Conflict-affected people in Amaro district, Segen Hizboch zone, remain highly vulnerable. The government has not prioritized these areas in the first wave of IDP returns to areas of origin. Partners report an improvement of the security situation with the establishment of the command post in the zone. However, the roads from Konso - Amaro and Amaro - Dilla remain off limits to partners due to insecurity. In Bench Maji zone, the security situation in May is stable due to the establishment of a command post in the area, and some progress has been made with the return of Ethnic-Bench displaced from Sheko woredas.

The security situation in some areas of Basketo special woreda is tense. On 4 May, along the common border with Basket and Menkosa, an attack killed one person and injured two, limiting aid operations in the area. In addition, access to the Ethnic-Basketos IDPs in Bonara Markana site (17 km from Laseka town) displaced from Melokoza woreda of Goffa zone in September 2018, was cut off by flash floods. Heavy rainfall also created physical access constraints in parts of Halaba and Silite and zones. In Halaba zone, from 17 - 19 May, flooding affected ten kebeles of Wera Jijo woreda displacing over 3,700 people and damaging hundreds of houses, while in Silte zone, flooding on 22 May affected twenty-six kebeles in five woredas (Lanfuro, East Siliti, Mito, Dalocha and Sankura) affecting 9,200 people and displacing some 2,750.

Tigray region

Road access to the region through the two main national roads that connect it with Addis Ababa and beyond remained unpredictable through May, with traders and public transporters generally avoiding them. As a result, there were reports of prizes increases in certain products, affecting the more disadvantaged access to critical food and non-food items. On the other hand, the government Administration for Refugees and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) reported a steadily increase in the number of Eritrean asylum seekers arriving to Ethiopia, with the number of daily arrivals increasing from 150 to 450 on average.