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## The Plight of Internally Displaced Persons in Tigray A Special Assessment Report



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## List of acronyms

CoHA	– Cessation of Hostilities Agreement
CITG	- Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide
EDF	– Eritrean Defense Forces
ENDF	– Ethiopian National Defense Forces
ETB	- Ethiopian Birr
FDRE	- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
HIV	- Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IASC	- Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICC	- International Criminal Court
ICCPR	- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	- International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
ICRC	- International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP(s)	- Internally Displaced Person (s)
IHL	- International Humanitarian Law
MAM	- Moderate Acute Malnutrition
MHPSS	- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MSF	- Médecins Sans Frontières
NFI	- Non-Food Items
NGO(s)	- Nongovernmental Organization(s)
OCHA	- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PTSD	- Post-traumatic stress disorder
PWD	- Persons with Disabilities
R2P	- Responsibility to Protect
REST	- Relief Society of Tigray
SAM	- Severe Acute Malnutrition
SPSS	- Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TB	- Tuberculosis
TCSWT	- Tsilal-Civil Society of Western Tigray
TIRA	- Tigray Interim Regional Administration
TPLF	– The Tigray People's Liberation Front
TVET	- Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	– United Nations
UNHCR	- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WASH	– Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

## **Acknowledgement**

The devastating war officially waged on Tigray starting from early November 2020, among other harrowing consequences caused mass displacement of civilian Tigrayans throughout the country. Many who survived the mass killing and enforced disappearance were forced to leave their homes from the whole Western Zone of Tigray, and parts of Northwestern, Eastern, and Southern zones of Tigray to other parts as IDPs and others as refugees to Sudan and other countries. Thus, the Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide (CITG) conducted a focused study on the plights of Tigray IDPs.

Hence, first and foremost, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to all those who contributed to the successful completion of this study. We are sincerely grateful to the TIRA for its continued support, which made this study possible. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the leadership, researchers and data collectors for their relentless efforts and dedication, who tirelessly worked to complete this research.

Most importantly, we are profoundly thankful to the IDP communities for their willful participation as respondents and interviewees, devoting their time, sharing their painful experiences and the hardships endured during their lives as IDPs. Their courage and openness have provided vital insights that underpin this study. We also appreciate the contributions and dedication of other key informants including humanitarian institutions and government bodies at Zonal, Wereda, and Tabiya level for their cooperation. These collective efforts have been instrumental in shedding light on the plights faced by IDPs, and we are truly grateful to everyone involved.

## Executive Summary

Since the outbreak of the war in November 2020, Tigray has witnessed a catastrophic humanitarian crisis marked by mass atrocities, ethnic-based violence, and widespread displacement. The war has led to the large-scale forced eviction of Tigrayans from their homes by Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), Amhara regional forces (Amhara Fano, Militia and Special Forces). Many have suffered multiple displacements, traveling long distances under extreme conditions in search of safety. The violence was not incidental to the conflict but a calculated campaign executed through killings, torture, rape, and systematic destruction of property and livelihoods. Civilians were often forcibly loaded onto trucks, imprisoned in makeshift detention centers, and expelled under life-threatening conditions from their homes. Particularly, women and girls suffered mass sexual violence, while children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities were disproportionately harmed and continue to face dire circumstances in crowded IDP sites.

This comprehensive study, conducted across 92 IDP sites and from host community in 18 cities and sub-cities in all zones of Tigray covered by the study, draws on the experiences of 4,534 respondents through two types of structured surveys (1,154 IDPs responded to the questionnaire on life conditions of IDPs and 3,380 IDPs responded to the questionnaire addressing death, physical injury and enforced disappearance of IDPs), 640 in-depth interviews with IDPs, 45 key informant discussions with stakeholders, and field observations. It provides an extensive assessment of the causes and conditions of displacement, living conditions after displacement, the violation of rights, and unmet needs of IDPs across Tigray as compared to the legal guarantees provided to IDPs and the commensurate state responsibilities.

The findings reveal that, despite the existence of international, regional, and national laws that guarantee legal rights for internally displaced persons (IDPs) before, during, and after displacement, significant challenges remain unsolved. The Pretoria peace agreement, signed in November 2022, obliges the federal government to facilitate the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of displaced populations in Tigray. However, these legal rights and governmental responsibilities have yet to be realized, and no meaningful progress has been made toward ensuring the safe and voluntary return of IDPs. Many continue to live in makeshift shelters, abandoned

buildings, and overcrowded school compounds, facing deteriorating conditions without adequate food, medical services, or any hope for return, recovery, or justice.

One of the critical findings of the survey indicates from the 3380 survey respondents on death, physical injury and forced disappearance, the commission has documented the names and identities of 1,748 victims of death, 915 victims of enforced disappearance, and 1,656 victims of physical injuries. These figures reflect the extreme vulnerability of IDPs to grave human rights violations, with killings emerging as the most widespread form of victimization. The high number of disappearances is particularly alarming, as it not only signifies the loss of life and liberty but also leaves families in a state of uncertainty and trauma, compounding the humanitarian crisis.

Additionally, the finding indicates the existence of systematic deprivation of basic needs. The food aid provided was irregular, and inconsistent with humanitarian standards. In many cases, food distribution has been suspended for several months, and when it is delivered, the quality is poor, including spoiled maize grain or sorghum unfit for consumption. The quantity is frequently below standard and often not based on household size. Many IDPs are forced to sell part of their food rations just to cover milling costs or to purchase cooking necessities, including salt and pepper. Vulnerable groups, including pregnant women, unaccompanied children, and persons with chronic illnesses, are often excluded from aid due to flaws in biometric registration systems and bureaucratic neglect. Some have never received any aid since their displacement.

Shelter conditions are equally dire. A large proportion of IDPs live in overcrowded, decaying plastic tents, unfinished buildings, or sleep outdoors. Many shelters are no longer functional and provide no protection even from rain, wind, and sun. IDPs report exposure to wild animals like snakes, and extreme weather. Makeshift settlements in school compounds have interrupted local education systems and exacerbated pressures on host communities. The lack of sanitation infrastructure further exposes IDPs to disease outbreaks, particularly in densely populated sites where latrines and clean water are either unavailable or severely limited.

Healthcare is another major area of concern. The study found an alarming absence of medical services across IDP sites. Essential medicines and treatments for chronic illnesses, maternal and child health services, and mental health support are practically nonexistent. Cases of death due to



starvation, untreated illnesses, and preventable conditions such as hypertension and diabetes were frequently reported. Some IDP sites recorded several death incidents due to the compounded effects of starvation, malnutrition, lack of medicine, and hygienic problems. In camps like Hitsats and Endabaguna, death tolls reached staggering levels, including elderly individuals who perished from neglect and children dying from malnutrition.

As 64.5% of the IDP respondents sheltered in schools, it created pressures on the host community education system. Many IDP students are denied access to school: those who registered in the overcrowded schools do not have the means to finance basic educational necessities like uniforms, notebooks, and school fees. The lack of food and harsh conditions in the IDPs also left the IDP students under the bitter option of drop out and illegal migration risking their lives in dangerous journeys.

IDPs also face serious protection risks. Women and girls continue to be exposed to several vulnerabilities. Some survivors report multiple instances of rape by soldiers and militia members, and yet have not received any medical and psychosocial support. Persons with disabilities, especially those with mobility issues, in some IDP sites, are excluded from aid programs because they cannot walk to registration points or food distribution centers. The fingerprinting system used to identify aid recipients is reportedly flawed and has resulted in the exclusion of thousands. Some IDPs report being told they were “erased from the system” or that “their data was lost,” leaving them completely cut off from assistance. Others are denied aid because they were not present at the registration day due to illness or disability.

Despite the scale of displacement and suffering, mechanisms for justice, accountability, and durable solutions remain virtually absent. The rights of IDPs to protection during displacement, access to basic services, and safe voluntary return are guaranteed under the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the African Union’s Kampala Convention, and the Ethiopian Constitution. Yet, these rights remain unfulfilled. The CoHA obligates the Ethiopian government to ensure the withdrawal of foreign and non-state forces from Tigray and to facilitate the safe return of displaced persons. However, the return remains obstructed in areas still under occupation by Amhara and Eritrean forces. IDPs express profound feelings of abandonment and hopelessness, with no clear path toward return, restitution, or reparations. Many survivors of atrocities have no

access to legal redress or psycho-social support. Instead, they continue to endure marginalization, insecurity, and deprivation.

The study concludes that the crisis facing IDPs in Tigray is not only humanitarian but also deeply political and moral. It is a crisis of protection, accountability, and political will. The evidence presented in this report underscores a systematic failure of both national and international actors to uphold their legal and ethical obligations. While the Ethiopian government bears primary responsibility, the international community also has a duty under international law to intervene where states fail to protect their populations from atrocities. The continued suffering and marginalization of IDPs in Tigray demand urgent and coordinated action. A comprehensive and victim-centered approach, involving humanitarian support, legal recognition, and safe return, is essential to restoring the rights, dignity, and humanity of displaced Tigrayans.

## 1. Background and context

The devastating war that Tigray has suffered, which began in November 2020, has caused large-scale forced displacement of civilians across the region, among its overall unbearable devastation. Western Tigray has particularly experienced severe episodes of ethnic cleansing, mass killings, and deliberate destruction of livelihoods. However, Tigrayans were evicted from Western Tigray and other parts of Tigray, including the Northwestern, Southern, Eastern, and Central zones of Tigray. Tigray had been hosting more than 100 thousand Tigrayans evicted from various regions of Ethiopia, most of them from Gondar area, since 2016, and about 95 thousand Eritrean refugees when the war erupted<sup>1</sup>. Additional tens of thousands of Tigrayans have also been forcefully expelled from Amhara, Afar, Oromia, and other parts of the country after the war. Those forcefully evicted Tigrayans have fled to central parts of Tigray in search of safety and humanitarian support.

Subsequent to the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in November 2022, by the Federal Government and the TPLF, the IDP population in Tigray had hopes for peace, safe return, and justice. They had hopes that foreign and non-ENDF forces would be withdrawn, the lawful administration restored, and IDPs would be able to return safely to their homes. They also had expectations of justice and accountability for atrocities committed during the war and the restoration of their properties and livelihoods.

However, these hopes linger unfulfilled. Hundreds of thousands of IDPs continue to live in dire conditions in congested makeshift camps, with little access to basic needs, including food, healthcare, and shelter. The promised return has been obstructed. Justice mechanisms have not been materialized, and hence perpetrators enjoyed impunity, and neither reconciliation nor reparations have taken place. As a result, many IDPs feel abandoned, with their aspirations for dignified return, recovery, and justice dwindling day by day, and life conditions worsening.

Therefore, this study aims to comprehensively examine the living conditions of IDPs across Tigray and to shed light on the profound suffering they have endured, beginning from the date of their displacement, through the journey they undertook, and continuing into their current state of

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<sup>1</sup> Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), “The Pre-crisis situation in Tigray”. Accessed at: [file:///C:/Users/hp/Downloads/20210223\\_acaps\\_secondary\\_data\\_review\\_ethiopia\\_pre-crisis\\_situation\\_in\\_tigray.pdf](file:///C:/Users/hp/Downloads/20210223_acaps_secondary_data_review_ethiopia_pre-crisis_situation_in_tigray.pdf)

instability and vulnerability. For so doing, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to capture the multifaceted nature of the displacement experience. Quantitative data were gathered through structured surveys administered across multiple IDP sites, ensuring wide coverage and statistical representativeness. Meanwhile, qualitative insights were drawn from in-depth interviews and key informant discussions, allowing for the exploration of personal experiences of IDPs. Additionally, the research team undertook extensive personal observations at IDP sites, documenting the physical living conditions and access to essential services. Together, these data sources provide a holistic and evidence-based account of the experiences of IDPs in Tigray, contributing to a more in-depth understanding of their situations, needs, and the urgent interventions required.

## **2. Objective**

This study examines the living conditions of IDPs across Tigray, with the principal objective of exploring their experiences from the point of displacement to their current circumstances. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Investigate the underlying causes and conditions of displacement, including the triggering events and the nature of the displacement process;
2. Assess the humanitarian situation of IDPs, with particular focus on access to basic needs and services, including food, nutrition, non-food items, shelter, healthcare, WASH, and education.
3. Identify key protection risks faced by IDPs and evaluate the effectiveness of institutional and community-based response mechanisms.

## **3. Methodology**

This study employs a mixed research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the life conditions of IDPs in Tigray. The approach was chosen to ensure triangulation of data, improve reliability, and offer statistical coverage and contextual depth to the findings. The study engaged a total of 5,219 research respondents through structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and key informant discussions with relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, the research team undertook extensive personal observations at the IDP

sites and documented the physical living conditions and the access to essential services of the IDP population.

### 3.1. Study area and population

A team formed by the Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide (here in below, the commission) has identified 123 IDP sites in Tigray. However, data was gathered from 92 accessible IDP sites and IDPs living in communities alongside each IDP site located in Central, North Western, Eastern, Southeastern, Southern, and Mekelle zones. The study population comprises IDPs living in public schools, shelters, health facilities, public and private buildings, and those who live within the host communities. In terms of gender composition, the IDP survey has been gender inclusive, 49.1% of the research respondents were male, while 50.9% were female. Data was gathered from all types of IDP sections, including female-headed households, lactating and pregnant women, elderly individuals, people with disabilities, and individuals with chronic illnesses. Humanitarian workers, relevant local officials, and camp coordinators who work with the IDPs were also involved as key informant respondents for ensuring triangulation and upholding data reliability. The table below shows the details of shelter types that the IDPs in Tigray live in.

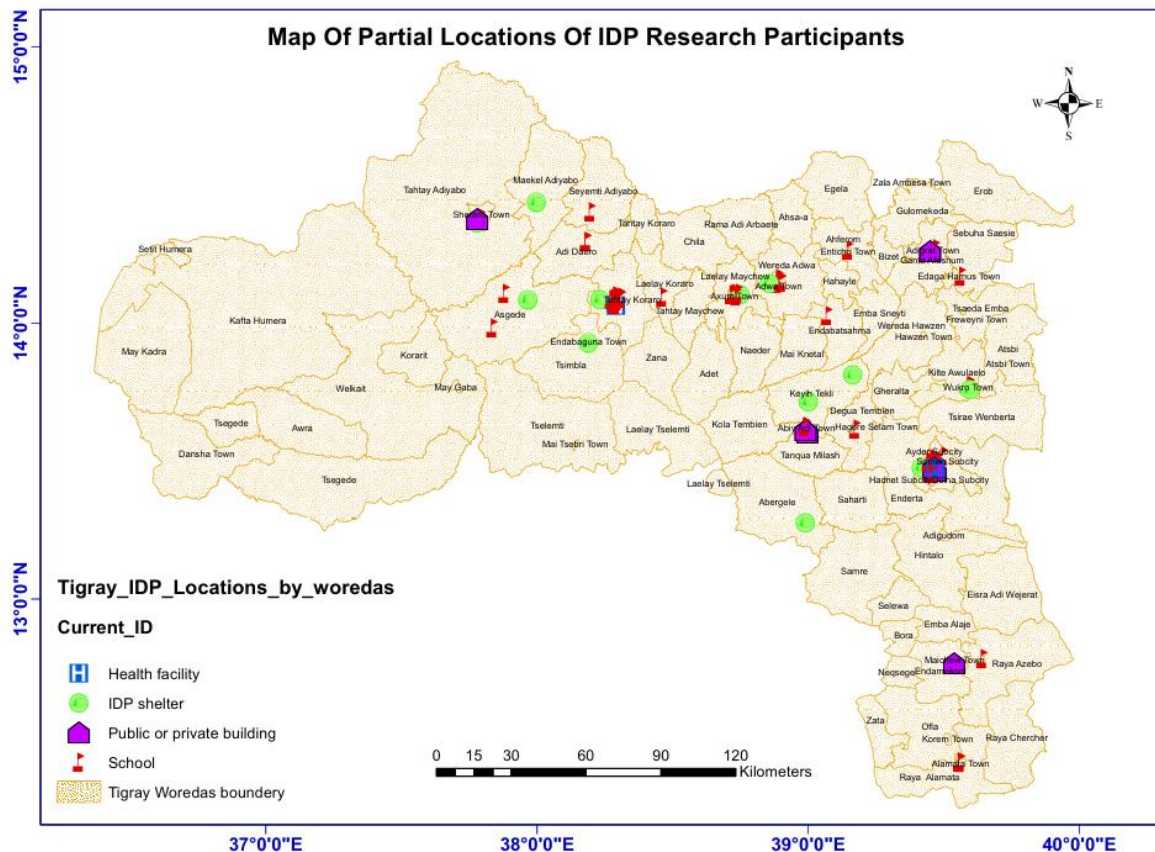
**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Shelter Type (Number and Percentage)**

<i>Type of shelter</i>	<i>Central</i>	<i>Eastern</i>	<i>Mekelle</i>	<i>North West</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>South Eastern</i>	<i>Grand Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Health Facility			23	16			39	0.9%
IDP shelter	226	5	162	471		51	915	20.2%
Public or private building	24		67	48			139	3.1%
School	721	166	324	1307	396	10	2924	64.5%
With the host community	153	56	91	60	122	35	517	11.4%
Grand Total	1124	227	667	1902	518	96	4534	100%

As it can be seen from the aforementioned table, IDP respondents surveyed live in several types of shelters including; 64.5% in public schools, 20.2% in IDP shelters established for temporary accommodation, 11.4% with host communities, 3.1% in unfinished public and private buildings, and 0.9% in public health facilities.

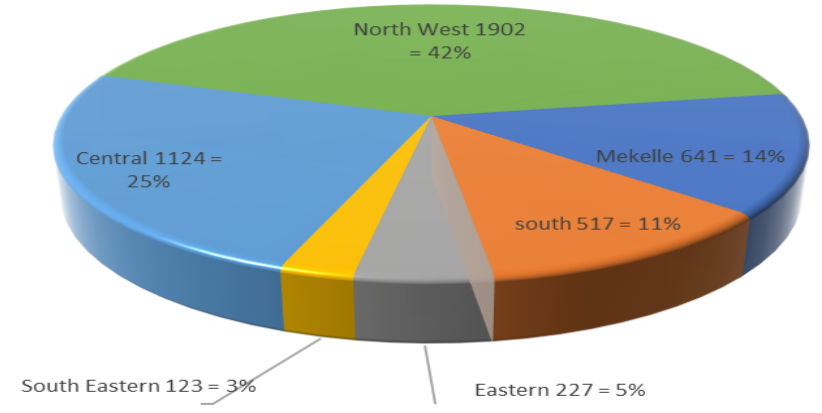
The subsequent location map also depicts the partial shelter locations of IDP of survey respondents.

**Figure 1- Map of Partial Locations of respondents**



Alongside to the above provided shelter-based allocation, the zonal distribution of IDP research respondents is proportionally aligned with the respective IDP population sizes across Tigray, as depicted below.

**Figure 2- Zonal Distribution of Respondents**



Accordingly, the Northwestern Zone accounted for the largest share, comprising 42% of the total respondents. This was followed by the Central Zone with 25%, and Mekelle with 14%. Southern, Eastern, and Southeastern zones, which have relatively smaller IDP populations, contributed 11%, 5%, and 3% respondents, respectively.

### **3.2. Data collection methods**

In terms of data collection, the study employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating quantitative and qualitative methods as discussed below.

#### **3.2.1. Quantitative data collection**

A total of 4,534 structured questionnaires were successfully administered across 92 IDP sites. Of these, 3380 survey respondents responded by recording the names and identities of death, forced disappearance and physical injuries of IDPs and 1,154 responded on the life conditions of IDPs throughout their stay. The quantitative data were collected through structured surveys to capture measurable indicators related to causes and displacement experiences, the living conditions of IDPs with an emphasis on access to food, nutrition, non-food items, water, shelter, education, and health services, WASH, protection, and perceptions on justice, security, and return issues. The questionnaires were completed by the IDPs, with the support of trained data collectors to ensure efficient and accurate data collection.

### **3.2.2. Qualitative data collection**

Qualitative data were collected from 685 respondents through in-depth interviews, aiming to explore the life conditions of IDPs. Of which 640 respondents were IDPs interviewed across 92 IDP sites and host communities to explore the cause and pattern of displacement, personal and family experiences of the victims of displacement, as well as access to basic services. The selection included individuals from diverse demographic backgrounds and vulnerability categories. The remaining 45 respondents were key informants from stakeholders such as relevant governmental and non-governmental institutions, including humanitarian workers, health professionals, local social affairs administrators, and camp coordinators. The key informant interviews were conducted for the purpose of ensuring the validity of the information obtained from IDPs and for understanding the coordination, response mechanisms and, institutional challenges.

Researchers and data collectors have also carried out field-based personal observations during data collection, which involved direct observation of the living conditions of IDPs, the available infrastructure, and other services, as well as hygienic circumstances and the quality of shelter, including the level of congestion. Data gathered through observation were used to substantiate the data collected from the questionnaire and interviews to identify discrepancies and uncover views and concerns.

### **3.3. Sampling techniques**

The study employed a multi-stage sampling approach to ensure both representation and inclusiveness across the IDP sites and within the sites. 92 accessible IDP sites were included from Central, Eastern, Southeastern, Southern, and Northwestern zones, as well as Mekelle city. Within these selected sites, a stratified sampling method was used to maintain fair representation across the different sections of the IDP population. IDPs living in IDP sites and with host communities were included in the research. In each IDP site and host community, female-headed households, persons with disabilities, the elderly, lactating women, and people with chronic illnesses were duly considered. Random sampling was applied to avoid bias in respondent selection. However, in terms of reaching the IDPs living in the host community, snowballing was applied. This combined strategy rendered a comprehensive and inclusive dataset, reflecting both the scale and diversity of IDPs' experiences in the region.



### **3.4. Data collection procedure**

Before commencing the data collection, Data collectors with the necessary skills and experience were selected and provided training on the investigation, its objectives, ethical issues, the questionnaires, and the specific tool employed for data collection. The training aims to ensure technical ability, consistency in data collection procedures, and ethical considerations. Data was collected from mid-March to mid-June, with regular monitoring and support provided by the researchers to ensure data quality and observance of data collection protocols. In-depth interviews with IDPs and key informant interviews with the humanitarian organizations and government officers were conducted by the researchers of the commission, and all ethical and technical protocols were observed.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

Quantitative data from questionnaires were collected daily and submitted to a server to ensure accuracy and prevent data loss. The collected data were exported into SPSS and Excel for analysis. Descriptive analytical methods, including frequencies and cross-tabulations were employed to summarize and interpret the findings. The qualitative data gathered from interviews were first transcribed into English, coded, and thematically analyzed in accordance with the major themes of the research, which include cause and condition of displacement, access to humanitarian aid, including access to food and non-food items, access to health and education, and security issues and concerns. The data gathered through in-depth interviews were triangulated with key informant interviews and the researchers' own observations to ensure reliability, reduce bias, and enhance the validity of findings.

### **3.6. Ethical considerations**

Prior to data collection, written informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Participation was fully voluntary, and the right to withdraw at any time was duly communicated to the respondents. The anonymity of informants was maintained to protect the safety and security of research respondents. The no-harm principle was applied in the overall research process.

#### **4. Scope**

This research focuses on the life conditions of IDPs in Tigray in light of the rights of IDPs and state responsibilities under international, regional, and national laws. Geographically, it encompasses 92 IDP sites located across the Central, Eastern, Southeastern, and Mekelle zones, and accessible areas of the Southern and Northwestern zones. The study captures the conditions of IDPs as observed between mid-March and mid-June, 2025. The primary aim of the assessment is to document and analyze the living conditions and experiences of IDPs during and since their displacement. The research does not attempt to make a legal determination of crimes committed before, during, and after displacement, though facts that may amount to gross human rights violations are incorporated.

#### **5. Legal frameworks for IDP rights and state responsibilities**

##### **5.1. Introduction**

Following the war in Tigray, Tigrayans have been forcefully evicted from their residence and homes. The scale of displacement is enormous, with millions having been evicted from Western, Southern, Eastern, Northwestern, and Central zones of Tigray. Many have experienced multiple displacements and have suffered from the absence of adequate protection and humanitarian assistance. The rights of these IDPs are protected under comprehensive legal frameworks that include international human rights laws, international humanitarian laws, regional treaties such as the Kampala Convention, and national legal instruments.

Core legal instruments guiding the protection of IDPs include the 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement; the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (here in after the Kampala Convention, 2009), which is legally binding for Ethiopia following its ratification in 2020 and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution of 1995, particularly Articles 14 to 44 which deal with fundamental rights and freedoms. This section explores the legal framework governing IDP rights in Ethiopia in the three phases of displacement, with emphasis on state responsibility and rights of IDPs.

## **5.2. Rights of IDPs and state responsibilities before displacement**

Before displacement occurs, individuals have fundamental rights not to be arbitrarily displaced. Arbitrary displacement is prohibited under the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement<sup>2</sup> which require that displacement be lawful, necessary, and proportionate. The Kampala Convention also mandates states to prevent arbitrary displacement.<sup>3</sup> The FDRE Constitution also guarantees liberty of movement and freedom of residence.<sup>4</sup>

The Kampala Convention under article 4(1) obligates state parties to respect and ensure respect for their obligations under international law, including human rights and humanitarian laws, to prevent and avoid conditions that might lead to the arbitrary displacement of persons. It further obligates state parties to regulate security and military operations to prevent civilian displacement, and criminalize displacement committed by state or non-state actors (Article 4(2)). These provisions are reinforced by the UN Guiding Principles, which prohibit displacement that violates the rights to life, dignity, and liberty, and call for early warning mechanisms (Principle 6(2) and 8). Furthermore, the Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions of the international humanitarian laws prohibits forced displacement (Article 17).

Domestically, the FDRE Constitution affirms the right to liberty of movement (Article 32(1) and the right to life and security (Article 14), but forced displacement without due process violates these rights. In the context of Tigray, as will be discussed below, many IDPs were forcibly expelled based on their ethnicity in violation of the aforementioned legal rights and state responsibilities.

## **5.3. Rights of IDPs and state responsibilities during displacement**

During displacement, IDPs retain their full spectrum of human rights and are entitled to protection, dignity, and access to essential services. This includes protection from violence, abuse, and discrimination, and access to food, water, shelter, healthcare, education, and legal services as guaranteed by the UN Guiding Principles (Principles 10-23), the Kampala Convention (Article 9

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<sup>2</sup> UN GUIDING Principles on Internal Displacement, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/1998/53/Add2 (1998), as stated under principles 5–9

<sup>3</sup> The African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention, 2009), article 4(4).

<sup>4</sup> The FDRE Constitution, Article 32

and 11) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Articles 11 and 12).

To be specific, the right to adequate food is emphasized in Principle 18(2) of the UN Guiding Principles, Article 9(2)(b) of the Kampala Convention, Article 11(1) of the ICESCR, and Article 41(4) of the FDRE Constitution. Thus, the state is responsible for ensuring a continuous supply of food and nutrition services, particularly to vulnerable groups.

The right to adequate shelter and housing is also protected under principle 18(2) of the UN Guiding Principles, Article 9(2)(b) of the Kampala Convention, and Article 11(1) of the ICESCR. The FRDE Constitution under Article 44(2) also obliges the state to provide alternative shelter and compensation for those displaced. The government must create dignified temporary shelters and long-term housing plans. IDPs are also entitled to safe water and sanitation under the aforementioned provisions of the UN Guiding Principles and Kampala Convention. These rights are also considered essential under General Comment No. 15 of the ICESCR. The state must ensure the availability of clean water and sanitation services to prevent disease outbreaks.

The right to health and medical care is further asserted by Principle 18(2) of the UN Guiding Principles, article 9(2)(b) of the Kampala Convention, article 12, the ICESCR, and article 41(4) of the FDRE Constitution. The government is obligated to set up health clinics, mobile services, maternal care, and mental health support in displacement areas.

Education for displaced children is a legal right. The right to uphold free and accessible primary education has been part and parcel of international and national laws. The state must ensure schooling in displacement settings and support both students and teachers as stated in principle 23(1)(2) of the UN Guiding Principles, article 9(2)(b) of the Kampala Convention, article 13 of the ICESCR, and article 41(3) of the FDRE Constitution.

Protection from violence and exploitation is also paramount. IDPs must be protected from inhumane treatment, sexual violence, child exploitation, and forced recruitment as required by Principle 11 of the UN Guiding Principles, article 9(2)(g) of the Kampala Convention, and Articles 18(1) and 36 of the FDRE Constitution. The government is responsible for preventing and responding to such violations through law enforcement, community systems, and safe reporting

channels. Access to legal remedies and justice is another vital right. Principles 20 and 27 of the UN Guiding Principles, Article 12(3) of the Kampala Convention, and Article 37 of the FDRE Constitution require that IDPs be able to file complaints, access courts, and receive legal assistance. The government, in this regard, is obliged to create accessible and impartial systems to ensure accountability.

#### **5.4. Rights of IDPs and state responsibilities after displacement**

Internally Displaced Persons have the right to return voluntarily to their homes, or integrate locally in conditions of safety, dignity, and sustainability. This right is grounded in principles 28-30 of the UN Guiding Principles, article 11 of the Kampala Convention, articles 40 and 44 of the FDRE Constitution, and article 12 of the ICCPR. The state is obligated to ensure that returns are voluntary, informed, and not coerced; that return areas are made safe; and that infrastructure and basic services are restored.

Furthermore, the state must provide restitution or compensation for lost property and work to address the root causes of displacement, particularly where ethnic cleansing or territorial disputes were involved. In the Tigray region, return has been especially challenging in areas such as Western Tigray, Northwestern, and Eastern Tigray zones due to continued occupation by Amhara regional forces and Eritrean troops against Article 10(5) of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA), signed in November 2022, which requires the Ethiopian government to facilitate the safe return of IDPs.

#### **5.5. Responsibilities of the international community**

Though the primary duties are imposed on states, the international community also has both legal and normative responsibilities to protect and assist IDPs, especially when national authorities are unwilling or unable to do so. These duties are grounded in international human rights laws, notably the ICCPR and the ICESCR. These treaties obligate states and the international community through cooperative mechanisms to ensure IDPs enjoy fundamental rights such as access to food, shelter, education, and non-discrimination. International and regional human rights mechanisms, such as the UN Human Rights Council and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, are tasked with monitoring compliance and offering technical support to member states.

Under international humanitarian law (IHL), especially the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols, forced displacement is prohibited. The international community has a collective obligation, as per Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions, to ensure respect for IHL by all parties to a conflict. This includes advocating for humanitarian access, condemning unlawful displacements, and supporting the work of organizations like the ICRC in conflict zones. When IDPs are victims of armed conflict, international actors must also press for accountability and restitution mechanisms.

Furthermore, the UN Guiding Principles on IDPs reflect and interpret existing international legal standards relevant to IDPs. These principles outline the responsibilities of both national authorities and international actors in preventing displacement, protecting the displaced, and supporting durable solutions. They are reinforced in Africa by the legally binding Kampala Convention, which explicitly obliges states to cooperate with international and humanitarian organizations and mandates the international community to assist in protecting and assisting IDPs, particularly in post-conflict reconstruction.

In cases of mass displacement arising from atrocity crimes, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine obligates the international community to take timely and decisive action, which includes diplomatic, humanitarian, or even military action when a state fails to protect its population from war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, or genocide. This is further supported by international criminal law, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which recognizes the forcible transfer or displacement of civilians as a war crime (Article 8) and a crime against humanity (Article 7). Through these legal frameworks, the international community is both empowered and obligated to protect IDPs and uphold justice.

## **6. Cause, experience, and pattern of displacement**

Interviews conducted with the IDP community in Tigray indicate that their displacement process was marked by extreme violence. The overwhelming majority of the research respondents of the IDPs across the 92 IDP sites reported being forcibly expelled from their homes by the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Amhara Forces (including Amhara Fano, Militia, and Special Forces), and the Eritrean Defense Force (EDF). In a structured survey, the research respondents

were asked what events led to their decision to leave their homes. The responses of the 1,154 survey participants corroborate the interview findings. About 85% reported leaving their homes after witnessing fellow Tigrayans being killed, while 83% stated that they were forcibly displaced or deported. Notably, 70% of respondents indicated that both factors, witnessing killings and experiencing forced deportation, were the reasons behind their displacement. Several interviewees added that the indiscriminate bombardment of their places of residence at the onset of the war triggered a mass displacement.

According to the testimonies of the IDP research respondents, these expulsions were carried out through brutal tactics, including the targeted shooting of ethnic Tigrayans and the widespread use of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment to instill fear and create life-threatening conditions.

Several accounts came from IDPs respondents, who described being rounded up in large numbers and detained in makeshift concentration camps with no food, water, shelter, hygiene, or other basic necessities. Besides, detainees were subjected to killings, beatings, torture, and forced disappearances. Some also reported witnessing civilians being taken away by armed forces, later learning they had been killed.

The testimonies of IDPs from Western Tigray describe that hundreds of thousands of people were forced to flee on foot for days, without access to food or water, in a desperate attempt to save their lives. Others were forcibly loaded onto large trucks and transported like cargo to the Tekeze River, effectively cleansing the zone of ethnic Tigrayans. According to interviewees, the journey itself was marked by repeated acts of violence, including rape, torture, and killings. Meharit, a displaced woman now living in Abiy-Adi, recalled: “On our way from Western Tigray, Fano forces stopped us at a checkpoint, forcibly took five women, and raped them brutally in Adebay.” Another survivor from the same camp, Gebru, shared his ordeal, “While marching to save my life, I was shot twice, in my hand and leg, by EDF and ENDF soldiers. I now live with permanent disabilities as a result.”

Several respondents also reported undertaking treacherous journeys on foot, many barefoot, from Western Tigray to Central Tigray. Denied the right to carry belongings, they traveled without food, spare clothing, or supplies. Many had been uprooted from farms, markets, or even places of

worship. Along the way, they witnessed numerous horrors: mothers giving birth under trees without any assistance; civilians killed by ongoing shelling; and dead human and animal bodies scattered and mixed, making it difficult to distinguish one from the other. One respondent recalled a particularly harrowing moment when a mother, fleeing the intense bombardment, was forced to abandon her six-year-old child in the bushes. “I don’t know if that mother ever found her child,” she said, with sorrow.<sup>5</sup>

Selam is a survivor and eyewitness to the massacre of Tigrayans in MayKadra. To protect her daughter and other children, she hid them in the home of an Amhara neighbor she had trusted for over ten years. She claims that trust was shattered. “Take the young girls out,” the neighbor told her coldly. “Go sit at your house if you want. Our government is coming; yours is leaving.”<sup>6</sup>

Forced to flee with other Tigrayans in the area, Selam reports she had witnessed unimaginable horrors along the way. “On the road, 30 women gave birth under trees and in carts. Three of them died. We cut umbilical cords with sharp stones,” she recounted. “I remember a woman lost both her legs and an arm in a car accident. Her sons sobbed over her body, begging her to wake up.”<sup>7</sup>

Selam eventually reached Hagereselam passing through towns under the control of ENDF and EDF. But her suffering did not end there. On December 13, 2020, on her way from Adwa to Hagereselaam, she was raped in May-Qnetal. She says, “They asked me, ‘How many did you kill in Maykadra?’ I said, ‘Why would I hurt someone who never harmed me?’” she recalled. “Three soldiers raped me, the woman who had sheltered me, and her two daughters. I had hidden the younger girls in water tanks. Thanks to God they didn’t hear us screaming, if they had cried, they would have been raped too.”<sup>8</sup>

Exactly one year later, on December 13, 2021, Selam was raped again, this time by a Fano member in Hagereselam who held her at gunpoint. “He tore off my clothes and humiliated me. People heard my cries and came out, begging him to stop. He was repeatedly shouting at me, ‘Are you from Maykadra?’” she says.

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Yemane, Nigiste Saba Number 1 School IDP Site, Adwa, April 2, 2025

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Selam, Hagereselam IDP site, Hagereselam, April 27, 2025

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Selam, Hagereselam IDP site, Hagereselam, April 27, 2025

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Selam, Hagereselam IDP site, Hagereselam, April 27, 2025



Later, Selam learned she was HIV positive. While treatment is available, it's often unreliable. "It's dangerous to miss HIV medication. Sometimes they tell me the drugs aren't available. What if I get malaria too? They just tell me to buy the medicine, but how am I supposed to afford it?"<sup>9</sup>

The case of Aregawi shows that Tigrayans from all walks of life suffered immensely. Aregawi, 27, was living in the Afar region, Elidare district, Dicheto sub-district. He ran a bakery and a small café, trying to build a peaceful life through hard work. But his identity as a Tigrayan made him a target. "They used to humiliate us simply for being Tigrayan," he recalls.<sup>10</sup> The hostility was not hidden—it simmered beneath the surface, growing more dangerous with time. Aregawi was forced to flee twice, but the third time, there was no escape. "They caught me and said, 'You filthy Tigrayan, where will you go now?'" he recalls. Six armed Afar militants dragged him into a nearby forest. Two of them, Aregawi recognized them by face; the other four were strangers. In front of him, they had already murdered another Tigrayan man. What followed was an act of unspeakable cruelty. The militants mutilated Aregawi with a knife, cutting off his penis and one of his testicles. "It happened in the afternoon, on December 27 or 28, 2020. I will never forget it." Left bleeding and unconscious, they assumed he would die. But Aregawi survived.

In agony, he managed to call someone he knew on his cell phone, and they helped him get to Ayder Hospital in Mekelle, where he underwent nine surgeries over a period of six months. The doctors told him he would need to go abroad for more specialized treatment, estimated to cost around four million birr. But Aregawi had no means to seek such treatment.

He says that he was not the only one to suffer. "Other Tigrayans in Afar were also arrested, tortured, and imprisoned. Many never made it out alive. Some who survived now live in IDP sites under extreme conditions, without enough food, medicine, or support," Aregawi says. The scars Aregawi bears are not just physical. They represent a deeper wound, a wound shared by many Tigrayans who endured persecution in Afar.

A survivor from Maykadra of Western Tigray described the massacre he witnessed as "the worst of all," recounting how the Amhara Fano, Militia, and Eritrean forces indiscriminately slaughtered

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Selam, Hagereselam IDP site, Hagereselam, April 27, 2025

<sup>10</sup> Interview conducted with Aregawi, Quiha IDP site, Mekele, April 24, 2025

Tigrayans, including elders, children, and lactating mothers. According to his account, the remaining were later handed over to the ENDF and imprisoned under harsh conditions in Addis Ababa. Others were killed as they attempted to flee to safety in Central Tigray. Another witness displaced from Maykadira stated that the Amhara Fano were issuing chilling directives such as, “Kill anyone named Hayelom or Gere,”<sup>11</sup> referring to peculiar Tigrayan names.

Another 33-year-old Tigrayan woman also shared her experience of being imprisoned in Maykadra for three and a half years. She later fled to Hamdayit in Sudan, and following the outbreak of a war in Sudan, returned to Axum via Addis Ababa. She witnessed widespread torture and killing of Tigrayans during her detention in a concentration camp in Maykadra. Similarly, a 67-year-old woman, evacuated from Maykadra, reported being brutally tortured by EDF and Fano forces. She described how they poured into her eyes traditional spice paste called ‘dilik,’ causing permanent visual impairment. Her two sons fled to Sudan; one died there, while the other eventually migrated to Libya.

A 50-years-old mother from Kafta Humera and currently living in Tsehay school IDP site in Shere testified that Amhara forces, Amhara Fano, Amhara militia, took about 70 civilians from her village around January 19, 2021 and she added that survivors told her all except two were killed on Tekeze bridge. She further told the researchers that the perpetrators left two survivors thinking they were dead. Hearing all the threats she fled a month later and testified that she saw the decomposed corpse of the victims while leaving towards Shire through Tekeze bridge empty-handed.<sup>12</sup>

Another survivor who used to live in Humera detailed how Eritrean forces were killing and torturing Tigrayans, including IDPs sheltered in Axum. He reported that EDF soldiers ripped off five of his fingernails, beat him with rifle butts, and struck his back with sticks. He said at least 45 other civilians were tortured with him. One of such victims sustained permanent immobility, and remains hospitalized at Ayder Referral Hospital in Mekelle.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Kedir, 38 years old, Areaya Kahsu Health College IDP Site, Axum, April 4, 2025

<sup>12</sup> Interview made with Leteyesus on 28 March 2025, in Tsehay IDP site, Shire

Desta, a 40-year-old mother from Maigaba, Wolkait district, says, “Armed men stormed our house at 3:00 A.M on Nov 10, 2020. I was just twelve days after giving birth. In the middle of the night, we ran with my newborn in my hand by foot leaving everything behind except the pajamas I wore.” After several days walking on foot, she reached Adi-Mehameday but after that she was unconscious all the way to Axum while traveling by car. Desta added “When the militants chased us, we fled to Adet and Jira and back to Axum in June 2021.” She says each place she set foot on was marked by death, fear, and inconceivable scenes of atrocities. She recalls, “We saw the corpse of an old man left rotting for days in Adet and dismembered bodies of several adolescents being eaten by dogs in Jira, and we passed shivering, covering the eyes of our children” Currently living in a tattered tent in Axum with her four children and a chronically ill husband, Desta endures hunger, disease, and despair.<sup>13</sup>

A 77-year-old respondent from Tsegede district, village Dedebeit, now living in the Shire IDP site, recounted a harrowing experience of displacement:

“My 23-year-old son was killed in front of me by ENDF soldiers on December 9, 2020, while he was at work, for no reason other than his Tigrayan identity. After burying my son, I was immediately imprisoned and held for seven months at Dansha Police Station, before being released on June 14, 2021, after paying a ransom.” While moving from Western Tigray, he remembers that a prison official who took the ransom warned him to conceal his Tigrayan identity by not speaking Tigrigna and instead imitating an Amharic accent and identifying as Amhara. He also recalled an EDF soldier telling him, “This is the moment we have been waiting for. We have waited for years to take revenge on you Tigrayans. We will eliminate you from this planet.”<sup>14</sup> Despite being old and suffering from poor eyesight, he traveled for an entire week to reach the Tekeze River. Upon finally reaching Shire, after enduring countless hardships, he received another devastating blow that his second son was killed by Fano forces in the same village of Tsegedie Woreda, Western Tigray.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Desta, Adolis IDP site, Axum City, 27 March 2025

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Nguse, 70 years old, Shire Preparatory School IDP Site, Shire town, March 30, 2025

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Nguse, 70 years old, Shire Preparatory School IDP Site, Shire town, March 30, 2025

Gebreselassie,<sup>16</sup> a 73-year-old man, used to live in the village of Adebay in Qafta Humera Woreda before being displaced. Despite worsening conditions, he remained in his home until November 2021, enduring 20 days of detention imposed by authorities installed by the Ethiopian federal government. He recounted that numerous villagers killed and abducted by Amhara forces. In November 2021, he and many others were forcibly loaded onto trucks and deported to Dedebeit, where he survived a deadly drone strike launched in an IDP site by the ENDF on January 7, 2021. Gebreselassie witnessed the deaths of dozens of people, including neighbors and friends. Eventually, he was relocated to Shire.

The war separated Gebreselassie from his entire family. Four of his children fled to Sudan and now they live as refugees, while a fifth son was abducted by EDF when they were traveling from their home place in Adebay of Kafta Humera district to Shire, after he sustained a painful imprisonment of 20 days and flogging, and his fate remains unknown. Gebreselassie testified that he saw many residents of Adebay being killed before he fled to Shire early in October 2021 substantiating his testimony with lists<sup>17</sup> of some victims. After the Pretoria Agreement, Gebreselassie's wife also fled to Sudan. Currently residing in Adi Menfito camp, Gebreselassie lives in isolation and struggles with multiple health issues caused by old age and abuse suffered during detention. Despite seeking medical help from Schul Hospital several times, he has not received treatment due to his inability to pay.<sup>18</sup>

Kahsu,<sup>19</sup> a 71-year-old man, was displaced from Qorarit Woreda in Western Tigray on November 10, 2020, along with his two daughters and grandchildren. With no access to public transport, they traveled by tractor, which overturned in May-Hanse, causing serious injuries to his grandchildren. After taking them to a hospital in Shire for treatment, Kahsu returned to May-Hanse to search for his daughters. Once reunited, he went back to Qorarit to check on his home and livestock. Upon arrival on November 21, 2020, he witnessed the Fano militia firing indiscriminately at civilians. He recalled a young man being shot in front of his father while returning from harvest.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Gebreselassie, Adi-menfito IDP site, Shire town, March 30 2025

<sup>17</sup> Melaku Tsehay Mekonem, Berhane Bezabih, Feseha G/Kidan, Haleka Hailencheal, Menasbew, and others whose names he has forgotten

<sup>18</sup> Interview made with Gebreselassie on 30 March 2025, in Adi Wonfito IDP site, Shire

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Kahsu, Tsehay Highschool IDP Site, Shire, March 28 2025

The violence in Qorarit intensified on December 5, 2020, leading to mass displacement. On December 6, 2020, Kahsu testified that he saw twenty Tigrayans fleeing the town killed by Amhara militia. Kahsu and others were later detained at a checkpoint near Tselimoy, where several were killed. He reports being personally threatened by an armed man, who was once his neighbor. He remained in the area until May 2021, enduring violence, displacement, and personal loss.

On November 18, 2020, Senayt, a disabled woman from the Irob, an ethnic minority in Northeastern Tigray, was forced to flee as heavy shelling by Eritrean forces engulfed her village. “My home was demolished by the bombardment before my departure,” she recalled.<sup>20</sup> Unable to walk, Senayt was carried on a traditional stretcher through the steep and unforgiving mountains of Irob, one of the most remote and rugged terrains in Tigray. The journey to Dohan, the district capital, was harrowing. The group navigated narrow mountain paths and exposed ridges while shielding Senayt and themselves from the artillery bombardment. “We thought we would be safe in Dohan,” Senayt said, “but the shelling followed us.” Eventually, she was displaced again, this time to Adigrat, enduring yet another trek southward. “I didn’t know if I would survive,” she added. Today, Senayt lives in a difficult situation as an IDP in Adigrat, far from her ancestral home, which remains under the control of the EDF.

Hiluf, a 78-year-old man from the same sub-district, recalled the chaos that forced him to flee his home in October 2020. According to him, EDF first sent spies into the area to disseminate fear and added, “they were killing anyone they found and thus we had no choice but to flee to save our lives, leaving behind everything we built over decades”.<sup>21</sup>

Most of the IDPs interviewed expressed deep fear and distress when asked to recall their traumatic experiences. Many had witnessed dead bodies along their routes to safety, scenes that continue to haunt them. They described the hunger and thirst they endured during their journey as unbearable. Several respondents shared separation from families during displacement, with some ending up as IDPs within Tigray while their loved ones became refugees in Sudan. Others reported being blackmailed, threatened with death unless they paid to be spared. As the conflict spread, many

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Senayt, Commission IDP site, Adigrat, November 18, 2025

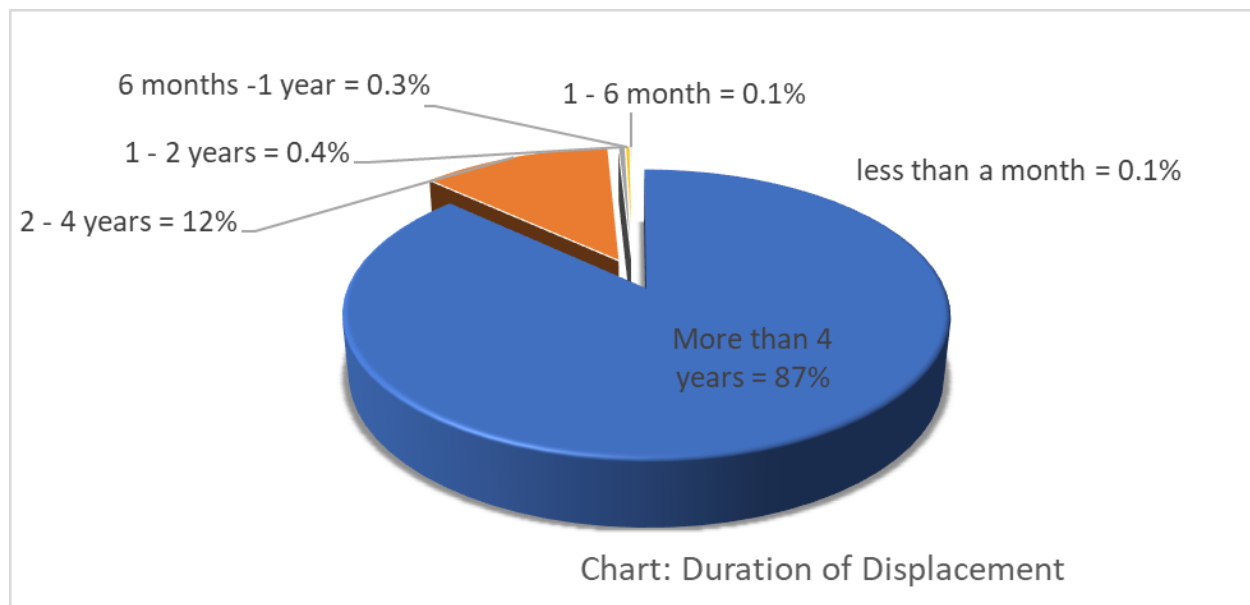
<sup>21</sup> Interview with Hiluf, Commission IDP site, Adigrat, November 18, 2025

were repeatedly forced to flee, even from temporary shelters they had managed to find. Still today many remain displaced.

## 7. Access to Basic Needs

Despite the OCHA guiding principles that indicate every human being has the right to be protected against arbitrary displacement from his or her home or place of habitual residence,<sup>22</sup> Tigrayans have been displaced and continue to be displaced arbitrarily from various parts of Tigray and other parts of Ethiopia, according to the findings of this report.

**Figure 3 -Duration of Displacement**



As it can be seen from the aforementioned figure, most of the IDP respondents who participated in this research (87%) stayed more than four years in the IDP sites. The finding also shows there are IDPs who stayed 1-2 years, 6 months-1 year & 1-6 months. These findings show that new displacements continued even after the Pretoria Peace Agreement.

This section of the research deals with the condition of access to basic needs of these IDPs in line with the international standards and other relevant domestic laws.

<sup>22</sup> UN GUIDING Principles on Internal Displacement, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/1998/53/Add2 (1998), as stated under principle 6

Ethiopia, as a signatory to the Kampala convention, has a duty to provide basic needs for IDPs. However, very poor conditions of access to basic needs have been significantly reported by IDP research participants. Access to basic needs refers to the availability of food and non-food items (NFI), shelter, WASH, health services, and education to IDPs.

Respondents of this study reported that the life condition of IDPs and their families remains critical, due to the significant barriers in access to basic needs. 89% of the IDPs that participated in this study stated that they had encountered different types of barriers in their efforts to access basic needs. In some zones, the degree of barriers is reported to be above the average.

Respondents reported that the barriers are becoming even more insurmountable with time. They characterized the access to humanitarian needs as “inconsistent, interrupted, and not based on the standard.” Others described “sometimes coming only two or three times a year.”<sup>23</sup>

IDPs reported that even the infrequent support is inadequate. In Adi-Mehameday, “out of the 6,340 IDP households, only 2,704 have been registered for aid which is said to be irregular and below the standard, at times.”<sup>24</sup> In the May-Hanse IDP site, “out of the 5,335 IDP households, only 1,200 households received aid.”<sup>25</sup> Conditions are even worse in Adigrat and Wukro IDP sites, where some IDPs reported they are not being acknowledged as IDPs.

Most IDPs stated that they had good living conditions before their displacement. Among the IDPs in our study, 48% were farmers or worked on farm-related activities. 38% were traders and 8% were employees in private institutions. Self-employed and government-employed IDPs constituted 6% each. Thus, the current IDPs were generating good income while some reported that they were investors running huge capital.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Mebrahtu, Shire preparatory school IDP site, March 28, 2025

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Desu, May-Hanse IDP site, Mayhanse, March 29, 2025

Nevertheless, currently only 10.5% of the IDP respondents in this study said they are engaged in some kind of income-generating activity to survive, of which 4% are intermittent daily laborers. Also, respondents who responded that they are engaged in some form of activities, except government employees, reported that their income has diminished significantly.

The following sections try to address the different categories of access to basic needs.

### **7.1. Food & Nutrition**

The Kampala Convention places a duty on State Parties to refrain from and prevent acts of starvation, among other obligations, and to provide adequate humanitarian assistance, including food.<sup>26</sup> The standard for aid to IDPs, set as a norm by the humanitarian agencies in Tigray, in terms of food, is 15 kg of wheat, 0.45 liters of edible oil, and 0.25 kg of lentils per month.<sup>27</sup> Roughly this amount constitutes 1,800-1,850 kcal/day, which is below the minimum international standard, set at 2,100 kcals per person per day.<sup>28</sup> Yet, even this is not practically met.

As a result of food insufficiency and aid interruption, the researchers observed emaciated IDPs in different IDP sites during the data gathering as depicted below.

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<sup>26</sup> The African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention, 2009), article 9(2) (b)

<sup>27</sup> This standard was reported by IDPs and NGOs workers in all the study areas.

<sup>28</sup> Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, The Sphere handbook, published by The Sphere project, 2011 edition. *The minimum international standard for food aid according to a custom delineated in the handbook of Sphere project, an initiative to develop a set of universal minimum standards in core areas of humanitarian response is 2,100 kcals/person/day.*



**Picture A - Starved IDPs at Abiy Adi IDP Site**



*Source: Tsilal Civil Society of Western Tigray*

The researchers encountered numerous reports from IDPs that the flow of food aid is irregular, ever-changing in amount, and unfair in distribution. At the time of the study, IDPs reported that food had been stopped for months. For example, within IDP sites in North-western Tigray, it was found that even the irregular and infrequent aid has been terminated for over 6 months.<sup>29</sup> Across IDP sites in South-eastern Tigray, IDPs reported that it had been terminated for over 5 months.<sup>30</sup>

IDPs in several sites reported that they had been excluded from the aid system for over two years, up until January 2025. For instance, IDPs from Irob and Zalambesa residing in Adigrat strongly asserted that they had been denied assistance because they were not officially recognized as IDPs. This claim was confirmed by the Adigrat City Social Affairs Office coordinator, who explained

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<sup>29</sup> IDPs in Adi-Mohameday IDPs reported it has been over 7 months and others in Hitsats, May-Hanse, May-Dimu, and Shire said it has been stopped for over 6 months according to Interviews conducted in late March and early April 2025.

<sup>30</sup> IDPs living with the host community in Aragure, Mlazat, and in Hagereselam responded that they have stopped receiving food aid for over 5 months in interviews conducted in April and May 2025.

that the problem stemmed from an absence of adequate supply despite repeated requests made to the relevant regional offices and humanitarian organizations.<sup>31</sup>

On top of its irregularity, suspension, and inadequacy, IDPs reported that the size of irregular food aid is diminishing in amount and content.

This research identified the following broad categories of IDPs in relation to food and nutrition-related aid.

### **7.1.1. Access to Food**

#### **7.1.1.1. IDPs Who Received Aid**

According to the survey result, 41% of the 1154 respondents did not receive any food aid, while only 59% have received some portion. Those who received food aid reported that aid is not based on their household sizes; besides, it is fettered, irregular, and below the standard size set per head. Respondents also raised that aid workers have never been fair in aid distribution. As indicated in the following table, those who replied they received aid described food aid is provided in a time interval that spans longer than three months.

**Table 2- Response about regularity of food aid**

Size, Regularity, & sufficiency of Food Aid	Yes	%
From three months' interval	53.00	7.8%
From two months' interval	74.00	10.8%
Irregular	257.00	37.6%
Longer than three months' interval	56.00	8.2%
Monthly	238.00	34.8%
Other	5.00	0.7%
Grand Total	683.00	100.0%

Some even mentioned that they were sending their family members to stay with relatives in the countryside to ensure their survival, while others reported that they did not know where to go.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Mr. Asmelash Hadush, Adigrat city Social affairs Coordinator, on April 27/2025

Despite the standard food aid ration in Tigray being 15 kg of wheat grain, 0.45 liters of edible oil, and 0.25 kg of lentils per person per month, IDPs reported that the actual amount of wheat grain provided fluctuated from 15 kg to 12 kg in March 2024 and to 9 kg in February 2025. The other components of the food aid were also reduced proportionally in line with the decrease in wheat grain.. A respondent from the Hitsats IDP site states “The lentils they gave us...I can show you. They are not even bigger than 150 grams per person. I am not saying a kilo and a half. It is not even 150 grams, I tell you.”<sup>32</sup>

Reports from IDPs and evidence on the ground indicate that food aid is not allocated based on family size. A letter written in February 2025 by the Tigray Regional State Interim Administration Social Development office of Western Zone of Tigray claims that in March 2024, food support to IDPs was reduced to a maximum of five members per household and to twelve kilograms per head. It also states, this amount was further reduced to 9 kilograms per head in February 2025.<sup>33</sup>

The deterioration relates not only to the quantity but also to the quality and type of food aid. The initial wheat grain has been reportedly replaced by low-quality grains of *sorghum and Maize* during the period of the data collection. Berhe, one of the coordinators at the Adi-Mehameday IDP site said, “They brought us Sorghum. I know the food aid is supposed to be wheat grain. When we ask why, the NGOs never give us an answer. We cannot eat it. Even the grains of the Sorghum they give us are very small in size, unlike the endemic Sorghum in Tigray.”<sup>34</sup> IDPs reported that sorghum and Maize grains are not as valuable as wheat in marketplaces when they try to sell them and they are unfamiliar with ways of preparing meals using them.

In Adi-Mehameday, Hitsats, and May-Hanse, IDPs reported that in November 2024, an NGO whose name they had disclosed to the researchers and that was in charge of food distribution in the area had presented them with rotten maize grain. They said the maize grain smelled foul and

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Leake, Hitsats IDP site, Hitsats, April 2, 2025

<sup>33</sup> A letter written by The Tigray Regional State Interim Administration Social Development office of Western Zone of Tigray to UNOCHA, WFP, the Ethiopian Ombudsman, Commission of Disaster Preparedness and Prevention of Tigray Region, the Tigray Bureau of Labor and Social Affairs, referenced ፱፱/ዘ/፳፻/፩/0077/17, dated on 17/06/2017 E.C

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

was badly rotten. Some IDPs refused to accept it and they reported that they had not been receiving food aid until the period of data collection of this research. When the IDPs refused to take the rotten maize grain, workers of the NGO loaded the maize grain into five trucks and left the IDP camp.<sup>35</sup> “There was some remaining from the rotten maize grain, another *NGO* came later and took it away,” says Berhe from Adi-Mehameday IDP camp.”<sup>36</sup>

IDPs reported that they sell the food aid to purchase other necessities including water, salt, pepper and other cooking ingredients.<sup>37</sup>

When IDPs are given wheat grain, it is assumed they can prepare it on their own. However, they need money to have the grain milled into flour. Berhe, an IDP in Adi-Mehameday IDP site , explains, “Due to the rise in fuel prices, which power the mills, the cost of grinding 1 kg of wheat into flour has increased to 5 Birr.” This cost is unaffordable for many IDPs, who often have nothing else besides the wheat they receive as food aid. A humanitarian Worker in Qola Tembien also affirmed that IDPs need money and energy to convert the food aid into actual food, and it is a miracle how the IDPs manage to survive. Salt, pepper, and other basic ingredients are also needed to prepare food, all of which require money. As a result, IDPs are often forced to sell a portion of the food aid they receive in order to afford these necessities. However, many report facing conflict with NGO workers when attempting to sell part of their aid, despite doing so just to make the aid consumable.

It is a striking paradox: IDPs have no option than selling parts of the food aid they receive in order to be able to eat the remaining small portion.

Survival is worse for those who need special nutritional support. On top of the shortage of food, children, pregnant and lactating women, and others are lacking nutrition. NGO workers participating in our study stated that there is an acute shortage of food. Getahun, an NGO worker in an organization operating in Shire<sup>38</sup>, said, “As per the standard, one individual should receive a minimum of 2,100 Kcal per day. This is true, especially with regard to children, pregnant women,

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Getahun, Health and nutrition team leader for NGO in Shire, on April 1, 2025

and elderly people, but now the reality on the ground is like the distance between the sky and the earth. Finding nutritious food is a luxury to the host communities, let alone the IDPs.” He adds, “On top of the challenges faced in the delivery of our services in a sufficient and regular manner, there is a delay and reduction of amounts due to unknown reasons either at the country program or at the regional coordination office level.”

In Abyi-Adi, a coordinator of an NGO claims that his institution is ‘the only humanitarian organization in the Qola Temben area as of April 2025.’<sup>39</sup> Robel, one of the coordinators of the NGO in charge of Qola Temben, said, “Our NGO is engaged in food assistance, in kind or cash. We do not have a mechanism for special assistance to the vulnerable sections of the IDPs. However, their vulnerability is used to prioritize them during the food distribution, especially when a shortage occurs.”

Many IDPs in our study described the meager food aid in Tigrigna as ‘Ayqetil ayedhin,’ meaning it neither kills nor saves lives.

### **Case Stories**

Letay was displaced from the Afar regional state by Afar militants.<sup>40</sup> Once a livestock owner and farmer, she now lives in a shelter improvised from a former kitchen with her four grandchildren. She says that Afar militants entered her home twice, threatened her with knives, and read her name from a kill list of Tigrayans. She narrowly survived, begging for her life in the name of their religion. Her brother's mouth was cut open and he now drinks through a syringe. Two of her sons died in the war. Her daughter fled, leaving two children behind. Letay survives by begging and occasional donations. But she does not have the energy to even go begging anymore. Asked about the availability of food aid she says:

*“I used to receive food aid in the past. But, for over five months now, there is nothing, and I live by begging home to home. These past 5 months have become 5 years for me. Some people give me food, others say, ‘You are becoming too much of a burden’. I would have tried searching for work washing clothes if I had the strength. But I don’t. I have a weak heart now. When walking even a*

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Robel, Coordinator of Local NGO in Qola Temben area, AbiAdi, on April 2, 2025.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Letay in Aragure IDP site, Aragure (in Enderta Woreda), April 2025

*short distance, I have to take a break.*”<sup>41</sup> Letay also reported that she faints repeatedly as she returns home from the beginning.

An IDP in Hitsats, Arsema said, “Everyone here is starving. I’ve lost my mobility, but others have lost the ability to work and feed themselves. A mattress or bedding is a luxury. All I ask for is food. I spend 700–1000 Birr a month on transport just to access basic aid. When I receive 9 kg of food aid, I pay 400 Birr to collect it and another 400 Birr for my HIV medication. I never get to eat the food; I lose it before I can use it. I’ve never been able to buy proper clothing for my daughter.”<sup>42</sup>

At the Milazat IDP site, Mekonen, an IDP displaced from Oromia regional state, said, “We used to receive aid. But for the past 4 months, we have not received anything. I have four children and a wife. How am I supposed to feed them? How can I pay rent? I cannot find work here, even as a daily laborer. There has been no aid for the past four to five months. We are in desperation. What are we going to do?”

In addition to testimonies, the research team tried to obtain from respective Social Affairs offices of all zones to triangulate complaints of IDPs on cut-offs and interruptions of food aid. The team also approached humanitarian organizations. Gidey, a humanitarian worker in an international organization in Shire said, “The reason why the rations of food are reduced or cut is, in 2023, the Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan had requested \$3.24 billion but only received \$796 million (22% funded) until November 2024. Hence, there have been ration cuts (20% reduction in cereal rations) since July 2024.”<sup>43</sup>

#### **7.1.1.2. IDPs who have never received aid**

Some IDPs reported that they have never received any food aid throughout their entire period of displacement. These groups primarily include households and individuals recently displaced from occupied parts of, Tigray, former members of the ENDF released from arbitrary detention in

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Letay in Aragure IDP site, Aragure (in Enderta Woreda), April 2025

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Arsema, Hitsats IDP, Hitsats, April 2, 2025

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Gidey, Shire area manager of an NGO, conducted on April 1, 2025

various parts of Ethiopia, and Tigrayans who returned from Sudan after seeking refuge there. Despite some IDPs having lived in IDP camps for years, they are still not included in the vulnerability-based targeting assessments. As a result, they are not officially recognized as IDPs and are excluded from all forms of humanitarian assistance, including food aid.

For example, a letter written on January 29, 2025 by the Social Development Office of the Western Tigray to the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention of Tigray Region describes that 3,177 IDP households (10,555 lives) that arrived recently from Western Tigray and Sudan have never received aid in any form.<sup>44</sup> It was reported that a minimum of 6 to 7 households arrive at the Adi-Mehameday IDP site daily.<sup>45</sup> One of the coordinators in the Adi-Mehameday IDP site reported, 3636 households have not received aid in the past (referring to the time before the interview).

Lemlem and her husband were separated when he fled to Sudan, leaving her alone with four children. Lemlem told the researchers that in 2025, her disabled husband returned from Sudan, only to find himself excluded from food aid due to his undocumented status.<sup>46</sup>

Particularly, in Adigrat, IDPs displaced from Irob reported they had not received any attention until January 2025, even though most of them were displaced at the beginning of the war in 2020. They reported that they have never been recognized as IDPs and were excluded from receiving any aid. The IDPs added, it was only in January 2025 that some of the IDPs began to receive food aid. This is due to a short-notice and one-day fingerprint registration which the remaining could not meet. The IDPs have not also received shelter until the time of the data collection except those households merged with IDPs from other Zones. An IDP from Irob, Agerelekuma, Hagos said, “What is surprising to us is not what EDF soldiers have done to us. But what is incomprehensible to us is that we were denied the recognition for our status of being an IDP in Adigrat until, at least partially, we got registered in December 2024, after tiresome pleading we made through a long

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<sup>44</sup> A letter written by The Tigray Regional State Interim Administration Social Development office of Western Zone of Tigray to Disaster Preparedness and Prevention of Tigray Region Referenced ፲፱፻፲፱/ዘ/፳፻፲፱/0017/17, dated on 16/06/2017 E.C

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Lemlem, 50 years old, Adihawsi IDP site, Mekelle, May 20, 2025

channel, from district to regional authorities, for the recognition of food aid commenced in January 2025”.<sup>47</sup>

#### **7.1.1.3. Complaints concerning the vulnerability-based target study, ‘fingerprints’**

Respondents strongly complain that the vulnerability-based targeting study should not have been applied to IDPs, since all displaced persons are inherently vulnerable and lack any alternative source of food. Instead, IDPs receive assistance through a fingerprint-based registration process known locally as “*Mieeshaar*” in Tigrigna. However, according to reports from the IDPs, this system has often left many excluded from food aid.

IDPs repeatedly recount how NGO workers break the news of their exclusion with phrases such as “*you are burned,*” “*the computer has deleted you,*” or “*you were all erased from the list.*” While fingerprinting is necessary, those who happened to be absent from the IDP sites on the random day fingerprints were collected and reported that they have been permanently excluded from support. Their repeated complaints about this injustice, however, have largely fallen on deaf ears.

Respondent IDPs from Irob claimed, tired of the repeated pleadings they posed to ‘whoever concerned’, they formed a committee of 13 people in September 2024 to represent them. Despite being reportedly told to ‘just be quiet about it! The IDPs never gave up hope and were heard by TIRA, who redirected them to the ‘concerned office in the Eastern zone of Tigray. After that, as Hagos and Hiluf described, “The humanitarian aid organization and concerned government offices fixed a single day in December 2024 announcing humanitarian aid eligibility registration. The date was not noticed by many. There were people who were not around for various reasons on that day; in addition, some due to illness, and others due to old age could not register.” As a result, the respondents complained that half of the IDPs from Irob are left out of IDP status consideration. “This is a manifestation of the double injustice we are facing after being displaced empty-handed from our homes.”<sup>48</sup> The concerned officials from Eastern zonal office and Adigrat City Social Affair office accept that the humanitarian aid could not cover the demand of all IDPs. However,

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Hagos, Adigrat in host community, April, 27, 2025

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Hagos and Hiluf in Adigrat with host community, April 25, 2025



they said the date set for registration was announced ahead of time. Moreover, the officials agreed there were IDPs excluded from registration in the vulnerability registration but it is beyond their mandate to include those who could not register on the fixed date.<sup>49</sup>

In a letter<sup>50</sup> written by the social development office of Western Tigray in September 2024, it is reported that the NGO workers carelessly fill forms for eligibility of IDPs for food aid, and they tell the new-arriving IDPs that dates for registration have already passed. They tell the IDPs they cannot receive food aid which literally means that they should have been displaced earlier!

Elders and persons with chronic disease, in particular, find it hard to go to the place where a fingerprint is taken. For example, Zebib, displaced from May-Kadra, is a volunteer caretaker in Hitsats IDP site. She takes care of over 76 persons, mostly elders and persons with chronic disease in what seems like a camp within the IDP Site.<sup>51</sup> They live in a place slightly away from the main IDP site in Hitsats. As a result, as they find it grueling to walk for about 20 minutes' to reach the main camp and get registered for aid, they have been told that they are not eligible for aid.

Zebib, choking on her tears, told our researchers, *"They are in a dangerous situation; there is no medical help, no one to notice us. We were 443 when we arrived here. But now there are only 76 of us here."* Despite some having gone to live as dependents of their distant families, most of the 443 have perished due to shortage of food, medicine and other basic needs throughout the three years.<sup>52</sup> One of the coordinators at the camp told the researchers that in Hitsats IDP site, a total of 325 IDPs have died so far due to food, medical, and other shortages.<sup>53</sup>

Zebib continues, "Almost every single one of them has some kind of chronic illness, has lost children or spouses in the war. There are IDPs with HIV, diabetes, and hypertension. None of them had a caretaker...they had children but many have lost them or have been separated due to the war." Zebib says that she has lost two brothers in the war herself. She adds that each elder had up

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<sup>49</sup> Interview made with Mr. Asmelash Hadush and Mr. Mehari Abay, in Adigrat on April 27, 2025

<sup>50</sup> A letter written by The Tigray Regional State Interim Administration Social Development office of Western Zone of Tigray to Disaster Preparedness and Prevention of Tigray Region Referenced #፱፱/ዘ/ሰ፱/፩/0017/17, dated on 21/01/2017 E.C

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Zebib, Hitsats IDP Site, Hitsats, April 2, 2025

<sup>52</sup> Interview with the coordinator of the IDP Site, Daniel, Hitsats IDP Site, Hitsats, April 2, 2025

<sup>53</sup> Interview with the coordinator of the IDP Site, Daniel, Hitsats IDP Site, Hitsats, April 2, 2025

to 6 children. But most of them are dead, and those that survive are living in IDP sites either in Sudan or elsewhere in Tigray. These survivors from Maykadra have witnessed one of the worst atrocities in the genocidal war before coming to the IDP site. “Several women here have been faced with the worst forms of sexual violence... some have even been raped with nails and other metal scrap. Thus, they cannot sit up, and complications related to the uterus, such as fistula and cancer are torturing them. Many of them cannot clean themselves or relieve themselves properly. They cannot even fetch water.”

Among the elders in the camp are blind men and women. Most cannot walk properly; one has lost his right leg and is mute. There are victims of burn, a woman who was raped with foreign objects and as a result has been told she has a cancer, and another who is searching for her long-lost only child are among the many victims in the camp. After the interview, Zebib gathered some of the 18 children living in the camp with her, who are either separated or unaccompanied. Some have lost their parents, and others have been separated from their families.

These IDPs report that there is no special accommodation to help them by the humanitarian organizations operating in Hitsats. They are rather excluded from receiving aid. The reason is, as mentioned above, these elderly and ill people cannot travel the 20-minute walk to the main part of the IDP site from which people’s fingerprints are being taken and aid is distributed, nor could they pay 400 birr to travel there. “As such they have been told they are unfit for aid. They are on the verge of death. They are dying in silence. They were once saved by a local donor. But now we urgently need food, water, and shelter.”<sup>54</sup>

Another person, who, due to his infirmity, has been excluded from receiving food aid, is Aregawi. Aregawi is a 27-year-old IDP from Ab’ Ala, the Afar regional state.<sup>55</sup> Aregawi was abducted by Afar militants in December 2021 and subjected to horrific torture. His penis and one testicle were severed with a knife. He was left for dead but rescued and treated at Ayder Hospital. Aregawi received aid six times before being abruptly cut from the registration system due to, as he puts it, a “fingerprint error.” He says he often cannot walk as his wounds cause burns and irritation when

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Zebib, Hitsats IDP Site, Hitsats, April 2, 2025

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Aregawi, Quiha IDP site, Mekelle, April 25, 2025

he tries to. He cannot walk to the location where NGO workers take fingerprints on random days as he seldom gets out of the shelter where he lives dependent on relatives. But the fact that he is not alert enough to run to the location of ‘giving fingerprints’ has made him unfit for food aid. He now lives entirely off the generosity of relatives. Despite filing repeated complaints, he remains excluded from humanitarian aid lists.

### **7.1.2. Nutrition**

Nutrition was reported to be a rare luxury for IDPs in Tigray. The nutritious and supplemental food that is expected to be provided for infants, lactating and pregnant women, and others was reported to be at the point of diminishing from time to time.

During the time of study, some IDPs even reported that nutritional provision to children, and lactating and pregnant women had been stopped months ago. The respondents in our study did not deny that a nutritious food aid was provided to children in the past by some NGOs, but benefited only a few children selected based on a measurement the NGOs set as a standard. However, the respondents also remark that all lactating and pregnant women and children in the IDP sites are vulnerable, and there should not have been such division among the IDPs’ lactating and pregnant women and children.

One of the coordinators of IDPs in May-Dmu, Tahtay Qoraro, Assefa, said, “Pregnant women are given some supplemental foods by [an NGO operating in May-Dmu]. But it is not given to all pregnant women. They refuse some children and women from receiving the supplementary foods after measuring their weight. Some pregnant women and mothers refuse to go for the measurement. They say, “Why would we go there? *To get the benefit of being tired only?*”<sup>56</sup> As a result, malnutrition is severe among the IDPs. For example, A letter written by the Adwa Health office to REST , a local civil society organization, on March 13, 2025, in Adwa city states that out of 1010 children under 5 screened, 663 of them are MAM, 24 SAM, and 01 died.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Assefa, May-Dmu IDP site, Shire town, March 31, 2025

<sup>57</sup> A letter written from Adwa town Health Office addressed to the Adwa district of the ReST (Relief Society of Tigray), Referenced as 16465/2133, dated March 13, 2025

## Case Stories

Helen is an IDP at the May-Dmu IDP site.<sup>58</sup> Helen was displaced from Qafta Humera in Western Tigray. She lives with her husband, who is disabled from the war, and her 5 children in a plastic tent. Despite her 5-month pregnancy, she has been refused nutritious and supplemental food aid repeatedly. She says, “I am 5 months pregnant now. When I think of giving birth, I get scared. I need money. I need nutritious food to help me with the birth. I am scared for my life as I have nothing. And since I sleep on a bed I have made from mud, I need bedding. My hips hurt. My legs hurt. I have mental stress, and I worry a lot. I do not get out of my shelter much, as I am often sick. I have never received nutritious food aid. I have never received a medical checkup or treatment, except for one vaccination from an NGO. But I have never received anything more. My five children have never received nutritious food aid. When I request to be registered for nutritious and supplemental food aid, they always pass me. I never even speak a word to anyone anymore.”

In another case, Maryamawit, an unaccompanied and separated child, was 15 when she gave birth to a son in the Endabaguna IDP site. When the father of her child, who is 20 years old now, offered her no support, Maryamawit, overwhelmed and alone, contemplated abortion but decided against it. ‘God knows,’ she told herself. With no family to rely on, her displaced mother, a struggling day worker in May Tsebri, and no income, she depended solely on a few loyal friends. They brought her bread, took her to a clinic when labor began, and helped raise money after the birth. Even her phone, her only property, was pawned when she gave birth. She lives every day under the shadow of hunger. ‘There are many days I go to sleep without eating anything,’<sup>59</sup>

IDPs participating in this study said they have been faced with starvation since the day of their displacement. But they add that starvation after the Pretoria peace agreement has become more severe, resulting in the death of many.

In the Endabaguna IDP site, Brhan, a government social affairs worker, reported that “within six months of 2025, 168 IDPs died due to shortages of food, medicine, and shelter.” She adds. “When you have lost 168 people within six months due to starvation, diabetes, hypertension and stress, it

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Helen, 38 years old, May-Dmu IDP site, Shire town, March 31, 2025

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Maryamawit, 17 years old, Endabaguna IDP site, Endabaguna, April 1, 2025

makes you wonder whether it will ever stop.”<sup>60</sup> In fact the cause of death the study respondents reported is based on what they perceived taking into consideration that the victims were in acute deficit of food and access to medical services and medical supplies which needs further professional study.

## **7.2. Shelter**

In the electricity-less and dark camp we stayed up late. After wrapping up our interview, one of the old women in the camp screamed for us to watch out. Occupied with collecting the interview equipment we failed to notice that there was a shiny-greenish snake creeping toward a shelter near where we were. He snuck inside the shelter of a visually impaired old lady. We all searched for it inside the shelter of the old lady armed with sticks and stones. But it was nowhere else to be found. One of the IDPs said, “Maybe it has slipped into the next shelter!” There was nothing to be done when people are lived in the natural habitat of these wild animals. (An incident witnessed in a report by our researchers about Hitsats IDP camp)

Shelter is one of the basic needs that must be provided to IDPs according to the Kampala convention, the OCHA guiding principles,<sup>61</sup> and other general human rights conventions.

In relation to what kind of shelter they live in, the researchers identified four main categories of IDPs. The categories are those of IDPs living inside shelters built from plastic sheet, IDPs that live inside classrooms or ‘rooms’ in other improvised forms, IDPs that live with the host community, rented or otherwise, and IDPs who are simply shaded under trees or living in the streets. Let’s briefly discuss the shelter conditions in each category.

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with the coordinator of the IDP Site, Berhan, Endabaguna IDP Site, April 2, 2025

<sup>61</sup> UN GUIDING Principles on Internal Displacement, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/1998/53/Add2 (1998), as stated under principles, article 7(2)

### 7.2.1 IDPs Who Live Inside Shelters Built from Plastic Sheeting

Observations by the researchers show that most plastic sheets in IDPs throughout Tigray are half erect, unable to withstand the sun rays, and become see-through and risky during the rainy summer.

**Picture B- Torn Out plastic sheet in Tsehaye IDP Site where IDPs live**



*Source: CITG*

The first category of IDPs, that live inside shelters made from plastic sheets, live, with few exceptions, in shelters built more than two years ago. Some have lived as long as four years inside a shelter that was built from a plastic sheet either donated by NGO's or bought by the IDPs themselves.<sup>62</sup>

Tedros, an IDP from Qorarit, currently living in Adimehameday IDP site, is living with his eight children in a plastic sheet he built by himself in late 2021. He explained the hardship as “*It has been four years inside that plastic shelter. During the day, we get toasted by the heat. During the night, the strong wind causes us misery.*”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> According to informants, IDP sites in Adi-Daero and Adulis in Axum were reportedly built in a relatively recent years when IDPs were relocated from schools in the respective cities.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Tedros, Adi-Mohameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

The UNHCR shelter standard requires the construction of plastic sheeting in consideration of the climate of a specific area.<sup>64</sup> However, IDP camps located in areas with extremely hot climates (such as Adi Mehameday) and very cold climates (such as Hagereselam) were found to be hosting IDPs in the same manner, all built from the same plastic sheeting, overcrowded, and in urgent need of intervention.

## Case Stories

Getachew, now a-19 years old, entered the Hitsats IDP site in late 2020. Displaced from Qafta Humera, he is the head of a household sheltering five unaccompanied children. Getachew and his 5 siblings live inside a shelter built from plastic sheeting. They came to the site with their mother, who died in the IDP site due to starvation and the unavailability of medical treatment. Getachew who was arbitrarily arrested for five months in Humera by the Fano before being released as a minor, told the researchers *that their father was kidnapped and taken to Eritrea forcibly*. They have not seen their father, nor heard of him, in nearly five years. The siblings are each aged 19, 15, 13, 11, 7, and 4.<sup>65</sup> Researchers entered their plastic shelter home. It had a thin plastic sheet that had turned into a see-through cover. The time was around 4:00 p.m., but the sun and its hot air inside the shelter would melt your face. Getachew explained about the shelter, which had rays of sun entering from its sides, saying, “As you can see, the shelter is about to collapse due to the wind. It is high risk to live in this shelter for the upcoming summer [which is a rainy season in Tigray]. We received this shelter when we got here in 2020...as you can see, the plastic roof of the shelter has been torn and has holes.”

Three of the six children were sitting at the edge of their improvised bedding. Getachew pointed to his siblings and said, “That is where we sleep in.” Sitting inside their untidy shelter, the children try to read. However, only one of them, Sami, 7-year-old, had a notebook. And he was holding it upside down as he *had not received proper education*. When asked about the temperature inside

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<sup>64</sup> Emergency Shelter Solutions and Standards, Available at <https://emergency.unhcr.org/emergency-assistance/shelter-camp-and-settlement/shelter-and-housing/emergency-shelter-solutions-and-standards>, Retrieved on August 2, 2025.

<sup>65</sup> The African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention, 2009), Art 9 (2) (c) states that IDPs with special needs, including separated and unaccompanied children, female heads of households, expectant mothers, mothers with young children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities or with communicable diseases must be provided with special protection and assistance.

the shelter, trying to play with his notebook, Sami said, “It is very hot!” The 4-year-old Fana just nodded, agreeing with her brother. Danayt, who at 13-years-old has been forced to become the cook of the family, added, “It is hot during the day! When we try to sleep, we almost die from the hot temperature here. We sleep in this bedding made from mud.” Asked whether they find living inside this shelter hard, Danayt answered our question with a question, saying, “What else can we do?”

The humanitarian workers also testify that the plastic shelters are below the standard. . Ataklti, an NGO worker in Shire says<sup>66</sup> “As I know and have read in Sphere Standard and IASC guidelines, a shelter should be safe, constructed, and made up of strong tent or corrugated iron, and in terms of size 3.52 or 3.56 m<sup>2</sup> living space per person and must be accessed with some type of carpet, blanket, cooking materials and Hygiene kits. But on the ground, I can say that all shelters are constructed with white plastic sheets or black plastic sheets called by the local people ‘Horeye or Kenda,’ they do not consider the number or size of families, demography, or health status of the residents. It was supposed to serve for a short period.”

#### **Picture C – Sample Flooded IDP Shelters of Shire and Mekelle**



*IDPs living in an uninhabitable environment [Shire IDP camp](#) Photo Credit*

*IDPs living in an uninhabitable environment @Mekelle idp Photo Credit Goytom*

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Ataklti, Former Child protection and GBV program officer and Current MHPSS officer, Danish Refugee Council, Shire, April 2025





Source: CITG

The observation of the researchers also shows that the shelters serving the IDP communities are below standard and keep failing to meet safety and dignity yardsticks.

### **7.2.2 IDPs Living in Impoverished Public and Private Indoor Spaces**

This category includes classrooms of public schools and colleges, training centers and rooms of former refugee camps (Hitsats and Endabaguna IDP sites), rooms that were improvised from former private institutions of some kind, and rooms in any public institutions, including administrative offices and health institutions. In many cases, any improvised room, including a toilet, was discovered inhabited by IDPs.

One can find all over the IDP sites children learning in schools sheltering IDPs, simultaneously. In Axum city's Axum preparatory school, children attend classes in one block of school while simultaneously the IDPs live on the premises of the school, half in plastic shelters built in the late 2024 and half in the classrooms.<sup>67</sup> In Mekelle only, Adha Primary and Junior School, Yekatit 11 elementary school, Mesebo high School, May-Liham elementary school, Alene High School, Sewhi Nigus elementary School, are all homes to a large number of IDPs while at the same time providing educational services to their students.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Kndhafti, Axum Preparatory School IDP Site, Axum, 28, 2025

<sup>68</sup> Interviews on Mekelle IDP site s in May and June 2025

## Case Stories

The story of an unaccompanied minor, Maryamawit, and her current shelter is heartbreaking. When our researchers met her, she had watery eyes. Her eyes seem to cry every time she looks at you. She held a baby in her arms. Researchers reluctantly asked who the baby belonged to, and she answered, “It’s mine”. Then an interview was conducted with the frail 17-year-old Maryamawit. Maryamawit lives in the Endabaguna IDP site, which used to hold above 59,000 IDPs, the largest in Tigray in terms of density but probably the tiniest in size.<sup>69</sup>

“I left home alone in late 2020, when the war broke out. Soon, my family was also displaced. My mother was a single mother. I had five siblings. But when they were being displaced from our home in Welqayt, one sister died. She was 17 years old. I came to the Endabaguna IDP site with my friends. I used to vend fruits like Beles [cactus], papaya, and banana to survive.” In the IDP site, Maryamawit met a man who would soon abandon her. She became pregnant while living in an overcrowded shelter. ‘Afraid and ashamed,’ she says, she left the overcrowded shelter she once shared with over thirty others. “Now I live in a shelter improvised from a former public toilet. It is so small and I cannot move inside it. Trying to mask the stench, I had covered the hole of the toilet with earth. It is too hot, the room smells terribly,’ she says, ‘but when it’s windy, it’s a bit better.’ That is the space where she gave birth, where she sleeps, and where her infant cries through the night.

Overcrowding of shelters, whatever type they may be, is reported in all IDP sites included in the research. The public institutions that are changed into IDP sites are not designed to accommodate IDPs; they are not convenient for many basic services, including toilets, water supply, kitchen services, etc. Researchers observed that a single classroom in these public schools and other buildings was, in many cases, divided by plastic sheets into up to eight portions of spaces allotted to households with family sizes up to nine members each. These temporary ‘shelters’ are overcrowded, exposed to barriers of hygiene and sanitation, increased risk of insecurity, violence (including sexual abuse), and risk of transmission of diseases, etc. Some IDPs with large family

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<sup>69</sup> Endabaguna IDP site used to be a refugee camp for Eritreans. Now, after a sizable number of IDPs were relocated to May-Dmu IDP site and some ‘returned to their homes’, it holds over 7197 households (33,824 individuals), including those living with the host community. The IDP population used to be larger than the 43,000 original residents of Endabaguna town.

sizes reported, “As the shelters are not enough for all family members at a time, we are forced to enter into shelters turn by turn.”<sup>70</sup> In most instances, six, seven families consisting of more than 30-40 members live together in a classroom of approximately eight-to-ten-meter square. It is not merely the insufficiency of services that defines life in these camps; it is the persistent threat to human life and dignity.

**Picture D- IDPs living in overcrowded unfinished buildings without NFI**



Source: *MSF*

An IDP in Abyi Adi stated: “I couldn’t enter the IDP sites because they were already too crowded. My family and I have been forced to live in a ruined room for a year. We’ve seen stones falling from the walls. I fear that if the walls collapse again, we will be seriously harmed. We don’t allow the children to stay inside anymore.”<sup>71</sup>

There is no privacy, and males, females, young, and old all live together. They added that the crowded spaces are contributing to transmissible diseases within the camps. Temporary shelters improvised out of classrooms are not convenient, in particular for people with disability, the elderly, and children.

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with IDPs in Axum Preparatory School IDPs, Axum, April 4, 2025

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Binyam in Preparatory IDP site, Abyi Adi, on March 30, 2025

Situations are not stable; even those living within the IDP sites complain they have been forced to change camps repeatedly. For example, IDPs from Setit Humera who are currently residing in Kidus-Yared School IDP site reported that they have been forced to change camps four times so far.<sup>72</sup>

The current efforts to provide shelter solutions by some of the humanitarian organizations seem unable to solve the problem of overcrowding.

A protection officer for an NGO operating in the Endabaguna IDP site, Bri, reported that many women are being sexually abused. The case of Maryamawit, who was forced to become a single mother at the age of 17, is one example from the Endabaguna IDP site.<sup>73</sup> It is as a result of having to sleep in an overcrowded room with over thirty people that she became a single mother at such an age.

Bri further mentions a dilemma that the medical personnel faced when they had to treat an infant who had contracted TB. She says, “Take block 6 as an example, in one door-less shelter over 5 households live together. When I say a single household, it consists of 4-5 members each...Let me tell you a case we had recently. An infant was found to have contracted TB. We wanted to quarantine him, but it was impossible since we could not find a single shelter for him. Since his case is a very contagious one, we even considered building a new shelter for the infant and his family. But there is no free space here as the camp is very small in size. So, we just advised the family and cohabitants of the room to be ‘very careful’. He has been taking his medications for two months now. Since the space is very small in this camp, NGOs have tried to move many IDPs into May-Dmu. But still, there are plenty of complaints, and the problems have not been solved.”

The shelters of the IDPs in the Abi Adi area are found in Abi Adi preparatory school, Abi Adi TVET, Metal Shed, Animal Shed, Edaga Robue, Lisanu elementary School, and the former office of Qola Tembien Administration. The IDP centres range from rooms in blocks of school buildings

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<sup>72</sup> The IDPs were living in Bazen School then relocated to Edaga Betimhirti later to Worie School and lastly to the current Kidus Yared School IDP site. They are not certain about the future.

<sup>73</sup> The risk of sexual abuse and rape will be discussed in sections dealing with protection & Security.

to shelters made of metal sheets. respondents said, similar to IDPs elsewhere in Tigray, they live in very crowded and unsafe spaces. The respondents further added, especially when it rains, water and flood leak all over the shelters.<sup>74</sup> Insects like bedbugs are also common among IDP sites.

## Case Stories

“We are condemned to be fodder of the bedbugs,” says Hailu, 51, an IDP living in Fre-swu’at IDP site.<sup>75</sup> Hailu has experienced severe injury and partial visual impairment in an attack by individuals affiliated with the Amhara forces in his home village, called Ruwasa in Qafta Humera. He didn’t receive treatment at the time, which caused him a permanent disability. As if the attack was not enough, he was arbitrarily arrested for three years, along with his son, by the armed forces in Adebay town. After the signing of the Pretoria CoHA, he was expelled by the federal forces, leaving his son behind. He now lives in the camp along with his wife and six children, who fled their home back in 2020. He says, “We don’t afford to eat what we need now. We share the shelter with four other family heads crammed together. Our life is terrible. We can’t tolerate the stinging of the vermin. We are just food for the bedbugs. There is no pesticide to get rid of the bed bugs from our room.”

Tadesse, 48, an IDP from Qafta Humera now residing in Hitsats, recalls his life before displacement: “I was a wealthy farmer. I had 230 goats, 77 cattle, and a three-room house in the city. I produced sorghum on land plowed by three tractors. A single tractor’s land could yield 36 to 40 quintals. You can do the math.”<sup>76</sup> He was stripped of the 760,000 Birr in cash he carried and arbitrarily detained by Amhara militants. “In prison, the Amhara militants sold us a jerrycan of water for 10 Birr,” he recalls. After a grueling journey on foot, Tadesse reached the Hitsats IDP site, only to face continued suffering. “It was on June 9. One of my daughters died, and another broke her leg when the shelter we were living in collapsed.” The room had been previously damaged during the war. It had been partially burned by EDF soldiers and some former Eritrean refugees who lived in Hitsats refugee camp. When strong winds hit the area in June 2022, the already weak structure broke away. “There were six of us in the room. The falling structure killed

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Kndeya, in Preparatory IDP site in Abyi Adi on March 30, 2025

<sup>75</sup> Interview conducted with Hailu, 51 years old, in Fre Swu’at IDP site, on March 29, 2025

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Tadesse, Hitsats IDP site, Hitsats, March 30, 2025

a six-year-old daughter and broke the leg of an eight-year-old. All of us were injured. Many of our neighbors were also hurt that day. It was reported that over 300 households had their shelters collapse at different times. Not long after that, my wife died of starvation.” Tadesse lives with the constant fear of another disaster: “Even yesterday—just yesterday, a strong wind blew away the plastic cover of my shelter,” he says, stressing the vulnerability of his situation.

A similar incident occurred at the May-Dmu IDP site. An IDP named Hamelmal suffered a broken arm while trying to stop his shelter from being blown away.<sup>77</sup> He was inside when a powerful gust lifted the structure. As he grabbed the wooden frame to anchor it, the wind flung him into the air and hurled him against a neighboring shelter, causing injury to his arm and leg.

### **7.2.3 IDPs that live with the host community, rented or otherwise**

Those are IDPs who did not get the chance to join the overcrowded IDP sites. The IDPs do not have accommodations to live inside a camp, and they either live in rented houses, where the price rises every month; ask a relative to let them live in their premises; or live in unfinished buildings. In cases from areas with no space or overcrowded IDP sites, IDPs report that they were promised by NGO’s that their rent would be paid and that they would be granted a multi-purpose cash grant in addition to a constant food aid. But the grants stopped shortly after the exodus of the IDPs from overcrowded camps.

Key-informants reported that due to a shortage of tents in the IDP centers, many IDPs were forced to leave the sites and live outside, relying on NGOs to cover their rent, but neither of them received the funds from the NGOs nor got the chance to re-enter the IDP sites.<sup>78</sup> Many reported that they could not pay the rent for their mud-house, and that they were evicted by their landlords.

### **Case Stories**

Rahwa, a survivor of rape, and her 8-year-old son, Filimon, live in Mekelle, near Quiha IDP site. Both have been displaced from the Afar regional state. They live in the premises of the small Quiha IDP site, but are a little excluded from the other IDPs. Filimon is a non-verbal, neurologically

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Assefa, May-Dmu IDP site, Shire, March 31, 2025

<sup>78</sup> Interview in Axum Preparatory School Temporary IDP Center on March 2025

impaired child who wears skirts due to urinary incontinence. He spends his days tied by one leg to a wooden post to prevent him from running off and getting electrocuted by a collapsed meter box outside his metal sheet home. His mother says that his seizures began in infancy, initially misdiagnosed as malaria and later as diabetes. A wrongly prescribed diabetes treatment from the ‘doctors’ of Ayder hospital in Mekelle worsened his condition. Holy water treatments have offered some relief, but the lack of sustained medical intervention has left him mentally and physically unstable. Rahwa feels she has been abandoned by both the humanitarian system and social networks. She has no access to specialized care or basic shelter. Medical prescriptions issued for her post-rape trauma remain unfilled due to their high cost of “over 10,000 Birr.”

Both Rahwa and her son Filimon are currently living in a shelter made from a metal sheet. The area is a shed used for producing construction blocks, and they have been granted permission from the private owners to stay there. But Rahwa and Filimon live in constant exposure to hyenas due to their shelter's location. Rahwa says, “At nighttime, the metal sheet makes a clattering noise, and when he hears it, my son spends the whole night making more noise by beating the metal sheets of the shed. Hearing the sound my son makes, wild animals like hyenas come here and shake the shed every night. I want to live closer to the other IDPs. But I understand why they push me away from them. This child never sleeps, both day and night. He is my burden to carry.”

Rahwa adds that she would have preferred to live on rent, but she cannot afford it. The condition of her son has also prevented her from integrating into the community.<sup>79</sup> Rahwa has chosen to tie her son to a post all day long and wait for someone to support her.

Mesfin, an ethnic Tigrayan IDP who speaks Tigrigna mixing Amharic words, was born and raised in Addis Ababa. He used to be a driver before he was receiving repetitive attempts on his life from his former Amhara and Oromo friends at the NGO he used to work in, and threats from his neighbors at his Qebelle home. Mesfin was forcibly removed from his Qebelle home in Yeka sub-city and forcibly displaced to Tigray in June 2020. Despite his efforts to begin a new life in Tigray, his dream was destroyed by EDF soldiers who looted and trashed his small shop. He broke into tears many times throughout an interview with our researchers while describing his life as an IDP

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Rahwa, Quiha IDP site, Quiha, April 25, 2025

in Hagereselam.<sup>80</sup> “I live now with my wife and three children in extreme poverty. I live dependent on distant relatives. The IDPs who live in the school are being requested to get out of the school, so I cannot even live in an IDP site.” Mesfin reported. Mesfin fears that he, his wife, and his children have become too much of a burden for his relatives, but he cannot rent a home as he has no money.

IDPs in Shire, for instance, reported, “There are IDPs unable to pay house rents, and who live a life of humiliation and shame. Some have been prevented from using latrines and denied electricity to drive them out of their home by their landlords.”<sup>81</sup> House rents in all the research areas are skyrocketing, which is not affordable to IDPs.

Bri, a social worker in a certain NGO in Endabaguna IDP site, says, “When many IDPs came here first, the highest rent in town used to be at 700 birr. But now the tiniest room made from mud is rented out for 1,500. How can the IDPs pay that much money? I hear a lot of complaints as a social worker here. We could have reported the situation, but all the institutions are leaving now.”<sup>82</sup>

Another IDP displaced from the Afar Region, at the beginning of the war, Slas struggles to live among the host community through irregular support from individuals to pay rent.

Slas has a 16-year-old daughter, Kbra. Kbra, despite her age, appears no older than 3. She has never walked, talked, or developed bowel control. Her mother has spent the past 16 years as her sole caregiver, unable to work or earn a living. Kbra’s father was killed in a drone strike while trying to reach his family by bus. In a rented single room, Kbra lies on a futon, constantly soiling herself. Her pupils move erratically, and she remains largely unresponsive to the environment. Slas relies entirely on donations from individuals and has never received aid as an IDP. She says, “I asked for a shelter when I came here first, but they told me it was full. Now I live in a rented house. I pay 1,500 birr per month. People who pity my daughter pay for me. It is through their help that I am still alive. But I have never received aid as an IDP yet.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Mesfin, Hagereselam IDP site, Hagereselam, April 27, 2025

<sup>81</sup> Interview with IDPs, Five Angels IDP Site, Shire town, March 29, 2025

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Bri, Endabaguna IDP site, Endabaguna, April 1, 2025

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Slas, Quiha IDP site, Quiha, 2025



#### **7.2.4 IDPs who are just shaded under trees or living in the streets**

These categories are IDPs who live near the IDP sites but have not had the chance to enter the sites and just ‘live’ shaded under trees, on the compounds of churches, improvising plastic shelters, or without any shelter in the streets.

In Adigirat, IDPs displaced from Irob Woreda were not acknowledged as IDPs until January 2025. Even after recognition, they did not have access to any shelter. “Everybody neglects us,” says Hagos, an IDP from Agerelekuma, “... all concerned bodies tell us not to ask about shelter. They tell us that the focus of the government is on returning IDPs to their homes, if there is a possibility in the near future. But how can we survive until the lasting solution is obtained?” Hagos explains, “The IDPs are found scattered everywhere now. Some are sheltered in churches, some under trees, and others beg relatives and other private residence owners to give them any type of room.”<sup>84</sup>

#### **Case Stories**

A 50-year-old woman, who was raped by EDF forces, contracted HIV, and was displaced from the Irob Woreda with her six children, now lives in Adigrat city. She described her situation as follows, “I live moving from one church to another church beneath the trees. My life is worse than that of a dog. None, except God, protects my children’s lives and my property, though I do not have much property to lose.”

Another IDP from Wer’atle, Irob Woreda, Hiluf, reiterates that IDPs from Irob were not recognized as IDPs until January 2025, and even now only half of them have been recognized for food aid purposes.<sup>85</sup>

In the Adi-Mohameday IDP site, many ‘late-comers’ are living on the outskirts, a little further from the main IDP site. The flow of the ‘late-comer’ IDPs has not stopped yet, as between 2024 and 2025 alone, over 250 new IDP households, comprising more than 900 individuals, arrived at the camp from various areas of Western and Northwestern Tigray. The area has extreme weather

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Hagos, in Adigrat host community, April 25, 2025

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Hiluf, in Adigrat host community, April 25, 2025.

conditions and harsh sun. So, the ‘late-comers’ search for any plant with a hope for a little shade and simply start living underneath it.<sup>86</sup> On top of having to endure the harsh sun, the strong dusty winds, and the starvation and all other misery, compounded with security issues of robbery. ‘There are bandits around here,’ says Berhe, ‘some lucky IDPs go work in the farms of the local people, some try their hands at illegal mining, some lucky ones may have come here with a couple of livestock. But the bandits are taking it all.’<sup>87</sup>

Kalayu, 68, is an IDP displaced from Maykadra living in May-Hanse IDP site, alone.”<sup>88</sup> He says, “Now I live in an improvised shelter built from wooden frames only. It does not have any plastic sheet coverage. It does not have a roof. I have been living inside it for about four years now. I can say that we are living in a condition even worse than the atrocities we have witnessed back where we lived.” When rain seems to be coming, Kalayu goes searching for a shelter to cover him from the rain.

### **7.2.5 Energy Insecurity in IDP Shelters**

Access to energy is a fundamental component of dignified living. However, among IDP sites across Tigray, energy deprivation is both severe and chronic. IDPs report that the lack of electricity is not only undermining their basic human needs but also triggering broader social and environmental consequences. IDP sites have long ago become blind spots among the towns where IDPs are located. Most camps are, quite literally, in darkness in cities where electricity infrastructure is available. Many IDPs<sup>89</sup> interviewed perceive that the problem is lack of commitment of the government. They stated that the government does not consider them as its citizens who should obtain at least fair share of the public resources, and be specially treated as vulnerable section of society.

As the researchers personally observed and informed by the respondents in many places, the IDPs, whenever manage to obtain firewood, bake their Injera on exposed clay and mud furnace. The

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Kalayu, May-Hanse IDP site, Mayhanse, March 29, 2025.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Mr. Mesfin, Mrs. Letekidan, and Hailemariam, on 29 March 2025, Shire.

picture below shows an example of such defective option which difficult to use particularly during rain seasons.

**Picture E – A clay and mud furnace exposed to rain, at Shire, Agricultural College IDP Site**



Source: CITG

Observation by the researchers revealed that the majority of the IDP sites included in the survey had no access to functional electricity. In a few cases, electric poles were visible near shelters, but the IDPs have learned to settle for the faint flickers in the distance, symbols of an inaccessible necessity. Researchers entered shelters that were as dark as midnight, even in the daytime.

At Hitsats IDP site, a volunteer caretaker named Zebib guided researchers into Arsema’s shelter. “She eats here and sleeps here,” Zebib said, standing in total darkness. Only with the aid of mobile phone flashlights could researchers see the crude stone bedding on which Arsema sleeps.

Electricity is not only a matter of light; it is essential for preparing food and for warmth. Due to the absence of any alternative, IDPs are forced to collect firewood and fuel from surrounding areas. This practice, however, puts them in conflict with local communities and environmental regulations.

In the Hitsats IDP site, Kidan says, “The residents here watch over the local forests. We understand what they mean. But what can we do?”<sup>90</sup> In Adi-Mehameday, IDPs cut down trees both to cook their food and to sell wood or charcoal as a means of survival. “The land is already small for the residents here, let alone for us,” said one IDP.<sup>91</sup> “When we cut trees for our own use, the locals usually let it pass silently. But when we try to sell it because we have no other means, they get angry. And they’re right. But what choice do we have?”

In Alula Preparatory School IDP site, in Hagerselam, South-Eastern Tigray, the situation is even more desperate. Selam, a displaced woman, explains: “It’s extremely cold. We have no water, no electricity. We can’t afford firewood, so we buy eucalyptus gumnuts, 80 to 90 Birr for a small sack. We burn them for warmth and to make coffee. There is neither forest nor dried cow dung here. Everything is for sale. But where would we get the money?”<sup>92</sup>

The energy crisis in Tigray’s IDP sites is multidimensional. Cooking over open fires in enclosed spaces poses health hazards, especially to women and children. Desperate for fuel, IDPs are cutting trees, which leads to deforestation. This not only affects the local ecology but also escalates tension between IDPs and host communities. On the other hand, women and girls are disproportionately affected, as they are primarily responsible for food preparation and fuel collection. This puts them at risk of exploitation, physical exhaustion, and violence.

Energy deprivation in Tigray’s IDP is also a humanitarian emergency. The lack of electricity has forced displaced populations into a daily struggle for survival, placing their health, dignity, and safety at constant risk. It has strained relationships with host communities and is contributing to long-term environmental harm.

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with Kidan, Hitsats IDP site, Hitsats, March 30, 2025

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Fanuel, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Selam, Hagereselam IDP site, Hagereselam, April 27, 2025

### **7.3. WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene)**

Water, sanitation, and hygiene conditions were reported to be extremely poor by IDPs in our study area. A total of 49% of IDPs rated sanitation in their camps as very poor, while 42% rated it as poor. Only 8% described the sanitation as good, and a mere 1% considered it very good.

#### **7.3.1 Water**

As the saying goes, “Water is life.” However, for IDPs in Tigray, water remains scarce and one of the most contested necessities. According to the survey, testimonies, and researchers’ observations, IDPs are living under extremely challenging conditions, often with no connection to the main water supply lines of nearby towns and cities. Access to sanitation and hygiene is nearly non-existent, and a widespread shortage of water containers at private shelters in the camps compounds the problem.

In our study, 54% of IDPs reported that access to water was very poor, and another 38% described it as poor. Only 7% said it was good, while 1% rated it very good. No respondents reported excellent access.

In Axum, respondents from the Kidus Yared School IDP center stated:

“We are facing a water shortage. In the past, NGOs used to fill the water tankers, but they are no longer available. Now we only get water through the main line, and it comes infrequently. We can’t store enough water because we lack sufficient containers in our shelters. We have to buy contaminated water from pools for 5 to 10 birr per 20-liter jerry can.”

In the Adi-Mohammeday IDP site, where the sun is intensely hot, the water supply situation is even dire. Residents must wait for days to get just one jerry can of potable water. Genet (40), an IDP from May-Gaba, Western Tigray, explained, “We spend three to four days in line for one or two jerry cans of water. There is no water around here. We have a huge water supply problem. And about hygiene, there is none. We have no soap; we have a huge water crisis.”

In Shire, IDPs living in IDP sites and with host communities echoed similar concerns: “There is a lack of access to safe drinking water. We fetch water from untreated deep wells because buying

clean water is too expensive.”<sup>93</sup> According to respondents, the price of a 20-liter jerry can ranges from 15 to 20 ETB, which is unaffordable for most IDPs.

Mlaat, 71, who has lived in the Hibret IDP site for five years, described how access to water has deteriorated, “Four months ago, there were NGOs who provided clean water. But they stopped. Now we buy from those who bring water by cart. The price is expensive, and we don’t know where they draw it from, whether it’s polluted or clean. We just drink it because we have no choice.”

In many sites, IDPs must walk long distances to fetch water from rivers or private wells. However, it is not just the journey or the cost that burdens them; the water is often untreated and unsafe, leading to widespread disease and even death. One tragic case is that of Kidane, who died at Fre Swua’at IDP site after consuming untreated water.<sup>94</sup> Sisay (69), who has lived in the same camp for five years, told us, “We are sitting under a tent, mourning Kidane, who died three days ago due to a lack of medicine. He had been sick for months from abdominal illness caused by dirty water and poor sanitation. His relatives tried to help him, but ran out of money. He didn’t get free medical service. I know many others in the camp who died from hunger and lack of healthcare.”

At Hitsats IDP site, Kidan reported the following: “We have a water crisis. We used to get one jerry can of water, but even that has stopped. We now fetch water from a coverless well contaminated by the urine of dogs and donkeys. There’s a cloth washing site near it, and the runoff enters the well. People drink from it. Children drink from it. Many have gotten sick. Hepatitis is rampant here; it’s killing countless IDPs. It’s the main cause of sickness.” Kidan also shared a heartbreaking account of her father-in-law’s death, “My father-in-law, an IDP, contracted Hepatitis. In 2022, when the Pretoria accord was about to be signed, an NGO visited the camp. They examined him and confirmed the disease. His hands and legs were swollen. I had only holy water to treat him. The NGO asked us to bring the worst cases. You wouldn’t believe the sight, people on improvised stretchers were lying everywhere. My father-in-law had six liters of water drained from his body. The personnel would have prescribed medication, but they left at 2:00 p.m. due to insecurity. The next day, he died.”

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with IDPs from Dehab Tesfay IDP site in Shire on March 27, 2025

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Sisay, 69 years old, Fre swu’at IDP site, Shire, March 29, 2025

These stories reflect the profound suffering endured by IDPs due to water scarcity, unsafe water, and the continued withdrawal of humanitarian actors. The lack of sustainable water provision has placed IDPs in an even more precarious situation, jeopardizing their health, dignity, and lives.

### **7.3.2 Latrine coverage**

The findings highlight a severe lack of safe, adequate, and dignified latrine infrastructure across IDP sites. In nearly every IDP site assessed, latrine coverage was found to be critically inadequate and unhygienic. In camps located relatively away from urban centers, many IDPs are forced to use nearby forests to relieve themselves. However, this arrangement poses serious risks, especially for young children, the elderly, and pregnant or lactating women, who may need to make multiple trips each day and are often physically unable to walk long distances safely. Even those who have access to substandard toilets share overcrowded public spaces. From those who have access to any type of latrine, 85% of respondents reported sharing their toilet with the public.

### **Case Story**

The case of Lwam from the Hitsats IDP site starkly illustrates the unimaginable hardship faced by some IDPs. Over 75 years old, Lwam was once a prosperous farmer in Qafta Humera, Western Tigray;<sup>95</sup> She lived a relatively comfortable life with her two children before the war. About a year into the conflict, she was forcibly displaced by the Fano militia, who were carrying out mass expulsions of Tigrayan civilians. During the displacement, she was beaten with sticks and thrown, along with many others, onto trucks. Upon reaching the Tekeze River, she was violently thrown off the truck, causing a severe back injury that left her unable to walk or care for herself. Now permanently disabled, she lives in constant pain and depends entirely on others for even the most basic tasks, including moving within her shelter, let alone to defect in a far remote area.<sup>96</sup> Currently, her physical condition has worsened due to the lack of medical care. She is unable to control her bodily functions, suffering from incontinence and being forced to relieve herself in a small hole in the ground, dug inside her shelter and covered only by a plastic bag. Her shelter is unsanitary, with the stench of her excrement filling the air around her. The conditions are deplorable, with minimal access to food or basic sanitation. The emotional toll of separation from

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with Zebib, Hitsats IDP Site, Hitsats, April 2, 2025

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Lwam, Hitsats IDP Site, Hitsats, March 31, 2025

her children, combined with the burden of her physical and psychological trauma, adds to her ongoing suffering. Her story exemplifies the compounded suffering endured by vulnerable IDPs in camps where access to basic sanitation is virtually nonexistent.

### **7.3.3 Hygiene**

In the heart of displacement lies not only the absence of shelter, food, and security but the quiet, yet devastating, erosion of dignity. One of the most fundamental elements of human dignity is hygiene: the ability to keep oneself clean, to live in a space that is sanitary, and to protect oneself and others from disease. Yet, in the IDP sites our research teams visited across Tigray, hygiene has become a forgotten luxury, a basic necessity turned into a privilege that few can afford. Conditions in these sites reveal a severe collapse of basic sanitation services. The lack of proper hygiene infrastructure has created an environment where the health and dignity of displaced individuals, particularly women, children, and the elderly, are under constant threat.

In Abyi Adi, most of the shelters where IDPs live are overcrowded and unfit for habitation. In some cases, over 40 people live crammed into a single classroom measuring just 7–8 square meters, offering no privacy whatsoever. The emergency shelters are poorly constructed and vulnerable to rain and flooding. In the Edaga Robue IDP center, a waste dumping site located nearby poses serious health risks and attracts wild animals, further endangering residents. With no access to electricity, IDPs rely on firewood for cooking. Traditional clay ovens known as ‘*megogos*’, used to bake Enjera, are often set up in open areas, making them highly susceptible to destruction by rainfall.

In such confined and overcrowded spaces, maintaining personal hygiene becomes nearly impossible. Individuals are forced to eat, manage bodily functions, wash, and attempt to stay clean, all without access to even the most basic sanitation facilities. When asked about the type of flooring in their shelters, 45% of IDPs reported living on bare earth. When wastewater mixes with the earthen floors, it creates not only unbearable odors but also a breeding ground for disease, compounding the already dire living conditions.

Zebib, a volunteer caregiver at Hitsats IDP site, has taken the responsibility of cleaning up the shelters of 76 people who are elderly, sick, and some with disabilities. She wakes up every morning



and takes their clothes to a nearby river to wash all the excrement and urine from the night before. She does so without enough gloves and detergents to protect herself from the mostly blood-infected excrement. “God will repay me!” is her motivating factor.<sup>97</sup> But she told us that she is also “scared” she might catch HIV, since there are many IDPs with HIV whom she is caring for.

At the Axum Preparatory School IDP site, researchers observed serious hygiene issues across the compound. The tents located on the western side are especially affected, as they are exposed to liquid waste seeping from the school’s toilets, creating highly unsanitary and unsafe living conditions for the displaced families residing there.

Most camps lack any form of latrine or designated washing areas. This forces individuals to defecate in open spaces or near their shelters, including areas where food is prepared and children play. The absence of private, functional latrines particularly endangers the safety and dignity of women and girls, and increases the risk of gender-based violence and disease outbreaks.

Merhawit is an expecting mother. Asked about the availability of latrines, Merhawit answered, “We have no latrines. We go to the extremely hot nearby wild to relieve ourselves. We relieve ourselves in the garbage places. Our children do so, and we do the same. Regardless of being a pregnant or lactating woman, or an infant, you have to go out there in the harsh sun.”<sup>98</sup>

The situation is also compounded by the withdrawal of many NGOs that once provided regular hygiene and sanitation services. Organizations that previously managed latrine maintenance, waste disposal, and hygiene education have now left or drastically reduced their operations, leaving camp residents to cope without any support. The daily management of hygiene, which requires consistent attention and resources, has all but ceased in many areas. The lack of proper hygiene facilities in IDP sites heightens the risk of communicable diseases, including cholera, diarrhea, respiratory infections, and skin diseases. In overcrowded and under-resourced settings, the consequences could be catastrophic.

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with Zebib, Hitsats IDP site, Hitsats, March 30, 2025

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Merhawit, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

IDPs in Shire High School and Hibret complained that they are suffering from an acute shortage of water and that their toilets are filled with a smothering stench resulting from a lack of water. As the shelters are overcrowded, one can observe women preparing food in mud ovens very close to the toilets. The sweltering heat the mothers endure while cooking food outdoors further amplifies the suffering in the camp.<sup>99</sup>

Urgent intervention is needed to restore basic hygiene services across IDP sites in Tigray. The current conditions, marked by overcrowding, inadequate shelter, and poor sanitation, pose serious health risks to displaced populations. Without immediate support, the current conditions will not only endanger the lives of displaced persons but also undermine the broader humanitarian response in the region.

IDPs are also entitled to access safe water and sanitation under the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the Kampala Convention. These rights are further recognized as essential in General Comment No. 15 of the ICESCR. The state is obligated to ensure the availability of clean water and adequate sanitation services to prevent disease outbreaks. However, despite the challenges outlined above, the Ethiopian government has failed to fulfill these duties.

#### **7.4. Non-Food Items**

Nonfood items are nonexistent, and IDPs report becoming dependent on the benevolence of the host community for goods of hygiene, clothes, and materials for food preparation. Several IDPs report that they had received non-food items when they were newly displaced, and most before two years. The provision of these items has since ceased, leaving many IDPs in an indescribable shortage. Some IDPs even report that they received clothes only once during their four-year stay in an IDP site.

Zenebe, an IDP in Hibret IDP site, said, “It has been a year since we saw soap or any other support. We are tormented by stings of lice and bedbugs. The temporal cold and heat are unbearable. We don’t have clothes. When we came here four years ago, we received just two blankets from the aid organizations. The blankets are never enough for all of us. Plus, they are now worn out by the

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with IDPs in Highschool and Hibret IDP sites, in Shire, March 30, 2025

heat.”<sup>100</sup> IDPs in Axum report that they occasionally received aid of non-food items such as cleansers, soap, kitchen supplies, solar lights, sleeping materials, and that this support has never been available since 2024. Additionally, it was reported that a dignity kit pack previously provided to women and girls has not been available for the past six months.<sup>101</sup>

## **Case Stories**

In the Hitsats IDP site, our researchers had a heartbreaking interview with an IDP named Arsema.<sup>102</sup> After finishing the interview, around 04:00 p.m., Arsema crawled and dragged her post-displacement disabled legs to the classroom where she was sheltered. Taking many breaks along her way, supported by both limping hands, applying force on her knees, she reached her room. To find out what kind of bed Arsema and her 5-year-old daughter slept in, the team followed her. But what the team saw there in the dark, since there is no electricity in all of Hitsats IDP site, and the rooms are very dim, was heartbreaking. Arsema sleeps on rocks or big stones laid one next to the other. The stones have a small amount of soil sprinkled on top of them. Arsema and her daughter sleep on top of a cold, shapeless, painful, and impossible-to-sleep-upon hard stone. The stone is covered by a single layer of a thin plastic sheet.

Rahwa and her son Filimon were displaced from Afar regional state and live in Mekelle, Quiha IDP site.<sup>103</sup> Filimon is a non-verbal, neurologically impaired child and has urinary incontinence. When Rahwa showed the research team that her son has urinary incontinence, she uncovered a soil bedding which is made up of construction blocks merely covered by thin plastic. She pleaded for diapers, hygiene items, and incontinence supplies.

IDPs reported that even when some humanitarian organizations try to distribute the items, they only go to a few IDPs. Others said that on top of the shortage, even those who manage to get such items are forced to sell them to cover the food shortage they suffer from. An interviewee called

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Zenebe, 67 years old, Hibret IDP site, Shire, March 29, 2025

<sup>101</sup> Interview with IDPs, All IDP Sites in Axum, Axum, March, 27-April 2, 2025

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Arsema, Hitsats IDP Site, Hitsats, March 30, 2025

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Rahwa, Quiha IDP site, Quiha, April 25, 2025

Zaid, for instance, stated, “Non-food assistance for IDPs is very limited. When such items come, they only go to a few people.”<sup>104</sup>

In Hagereselam, located in south-eastern Tigray within a humid climate zone, displaced individuals describe the weather as “extremely cold.” Most IDPs originate from Western Tigray, an arid region with sweltering temperatures. There, many are accustomed to sleeping outdoors without blankets. For them, Hagereselam’s weather is unbearably cold yet humid; it penetrates bone-deep, intensifying hardship in the absence of shelter, clothing, and adequate support services.

Selam, who lives at the Alula Preparatory School IDP site, shares the harsh realities of life in displacement. A survivor of two rapes that left her HIV positive, Selam now lives in a cold cement room with her teenage daughter, who is in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Conditions at the shelter are dire; IDPs often use a single plastic plate and cup per shelter for eating and drinking. “We sleep on bare cement floors without blankets,”<sup>105</sup> Selam explains. “Many mothers with babies are here. Just this year, two men and one woman have died from cold and starvation.”<sup>106</sup>

Hiwet once had everything: livestock, hotel equipment, and savings. Now she shares one cup and one plate with her family. She says, “IDPs in this camp have one plastic plate per household . We eat turn by turn. We use a single cup in a household to drink water. In my shelter, I even hesitate to let my daughter drink from my cup because I cough a lot. But we’re alive.”

Another IDP in Hagereselam, Mesfin, was displaced from Addis Ababa. Once self-sufficient and living a comfortable life as a driver for an NGO, he now faces dire conditions. With tears in his eyes, he says we may beg for food from the host community, but how would we eat it? His words capture both the desperation and the dignity lost through displacement.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with Zaid in Preparatory IDP site in Abyi Adi on March 31, 2025

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Selam, Hagereselam IDP site, Hagereselam, April 27, 2025

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Selam, Hagereselam IDP site, Hagereselam, April 27, 2025

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Mesfin, in Hagereselam IDP site, Hagereselam, April 27, 2025

Smret, an IDP living in Mekelle, says, “The life in the IDP site is indescribable. We have never seen soap and a dignity kit in years. It is through the benevolence of the people of Mekelle that we are surviving. They give us food if we beg them; they also give us clothes for our children.”<sup>108</sup>

Representatives of some NGOs have a similar tone of understanding about the deteriorating status of aid in terms of NFI. A protection worker of an NGO in Shire, not so proud of the work his organization has done, gave us the following testimony.<sup>109</sup> “Since December 2021, with the coming of many IDPs from western and Northwestern Tigray, our services in Shire, began by providing shelter and blankets to a few IDPs. The NGO worker admitted that the number of IDPs who received the NFIs is extremely small in number compared to the thousands of IDPs in each camp.

## **7.5. Health**

### **7.5.1 Physical health services**

Respondents in our study reported a rapid and persistent deterioration of health services across IDP centers and surrounding community health facilities in Tigray. In most camps visited, no functioning health facilities were available at all. Some NGOs offer mobile health services, but these are limited in scope: lacking laboratory services, referral systems, and essential medications. IDPs seeking public health care reported they are often told that the only available drug is a painkiller which many claim is the drug that gets prescribed regardless of their actual conditions.

Abel, an IDP in May-Hanse IDP site, says, “There is no medical treatment. All they give us are painkillers and malaria drugs. We are in pain; it is hard to talk about it.”<sup>110</sup>

Equar, a formerly wealthy farmer from Aba’ala, stated, “NGOs used to bring us medicines, and we received them for free. Now we’re told there are no medicines. People are starving, developing

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with Smret, Adihawsi high school IDP site, Mekelle, May 20, 2025

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Fisha, Protection manager of IHS in Shire, Shire, March,31 2025

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Abel, May-Hanse IDP site, Mayhanse, March 29, 2025

diseases from stress—some get TB, some are told they have kidney stones. Some cough all day long. There is no one without sickness.”

Even in areas where access exists, treatment is unaffordable. Goytaom, an IDP in Abi Adi, said, “Although we have access to free health services, medications are limited and we’re often forced to buy them from private pharmacies, which we can’t afford.”

Ezana, displaced from Wereda Raya Qobo, shared, “I have had bone tuberculosis since childhood and used to receive treatment. Now I also have hypertension due to stress. I’m forced to sell the little food aid I get to buy medications.”<sup>111</sup>

Due to this severe scarcity, many IDPs have developed informal systems to help one another. Naod, a coordinator for IDPs in Mlazat, said, “When someone is sick, we raise money for their medical expenses.”<sup>112</sup> However, such efforts are not always successful, and many continue to suffer.

Arsema, 38, displaced from Maykadra, has a 5-year-old daughter. She raises her daughter alone. She does not have any information about the whereabouts of her husband, who disappeared when the war broke out. She said, “I had full health. I came here with my daughter. But now, due to starvation, the cold, and repeatedly sitting with my legs folded, I cannot move my legs. My knees are not flexible, and I drag them when I have to move. I have not seen my husband since my daughter was 9 months old. She is 5 years and 10 months old now.”<sup>113</sup> Aresma broke down in tears during the interview, then continued, “I had two brothers who died in the war. I want my husband’s family to know he has a daughter. If anything happens to me, she will be left an orphan.”

She recounted the loss of her mobility: “I began feeling extreme fatigue when we were forced to flee. Although I was tired, I could still stand. But after EDF soldiers escorted us to the Tekeze River, starvation and thirst forced me to crawl the rest of the way. The Fano militia pushed us relentlessly. We were drained, delirious, and convinced we would be massacred.”

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with Ezana, Quiha IDP site, Quiha, April 24, 2025

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Naod, 48, Coordinator of IDPs in Mlazat IDP site, Mlazat, April 25, 2025

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Aresma, Hitsats IDP Site, Hitsats, March 30, 2025

When asked about medical care, Aresma said, “I’ve never received any. The medical personnel did not have the capacity to treat me. They say, ‘How can we treat her?’ and leave me behind. Because I can’t move, I get no help.”<sup>114</sup>

Despite their reported incapacity, the medical workers were shocked to learn Aresma hadn’t taken her HIV medication in over seven months. They told her it was a miracle she survived. She now suffers from other illnesses, including a suspected case of tuberculosis. A referral was written for treatment in Shire, but she has no one to accompany her, and so remains untreated. Aresma added, “I didn’t have HIV when my husband was alive, or when I gave birth. He doesn’t know I have it. I contracted it after I was raped. I’ve accepted my fate, but what burdens me is my child’s future. If I die tomorrow, who will take care of her?”

Inside her shelter, our team saw a wheelchair donated by well-meaning supporters. Zebib, a volunteer caregiver, explained, “It’s too high for her to use. She can’t sit on it or climb into it.” So, like Aresma and her daughter, the wheelchair sits unused in the dark, waiting.

Respondents in our study explained that some NGOs provide mobile health services, but with a limited number of medications, no laboratory, and no referral services. IDPs who visited the public health facilities also reported that there are no medicines, and they could not afford the price of medications in the private pharmacies.

Kidan, a mother of six in Hitsats camp, was six months pregnant during our visit. This is her second pregnancy since entering the camp. She had received a contraceptive implant from NGO workers, believing she would not conceive again. Tearfully, she said, “The implant must have expired.”<sup>115</sup>

Kidan spoke about the grim reality in the camp: “Many IDPs are dying here. The number of dead buried in the church graveyards exceeds that of locals. Death during childbirth is common. Infants die within five or six months of birth. The NGOs that used to help us are abandoning the camp.”

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with Aresma, Hitsats IDP Site, Hitsats, March 30, 2025

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Kidan, Hitsats IDP site, Hitsats, March 30, 2025

Pregnant and lactating women, and their newborns, are no exception to the widespread lack of medical treatment.

Mekdes, 28, has an infant son who is very sick, and she is afraid of losing him very soon. Mekdes herself is a survivor of mass forced displacement and imprisonment.<sup>116</sup> In 2021, she and thousands of other Tigrayans were rounded up by armed Afar militias, loaded into trucks, and taken to Samara, where they were imprisoned for nine months. She says, “They beat us. They raped the women. They killed the men. We were starved for six months before the Red Cross found us. Over 300 people died.” After release, they returned to Aba’ala, only to face more killings and looting. Her gold, jewelry, 200,000 birr, and all possessions were taken. Her husband left her when she gave birth to her youngest child while in exile. She adds, “We used to be traders. We had a cart, goats, and a home. Now, nothing. My husband left me. I gave birth at home. If I had prenatal care, my baby wouldn’t be like this.”

According to Getahun, an employee of an NGO health provider, services have fallen drastically short of standards from November 2022 to July 2024. He said: “Some services have stopped altogether due to lack of donor funding, corruption, and theft, from Addis Ababa to local communities. Medical supplies are stolen before and after distribution. A standard health center should serve 10,000 people, but we are far from that. Everyone knows we are not meeting standards, there are delays, and shortages of critical drugs, like insulin. Our mobile teams used to serve IDPs two to three times a week. Now, even those have stopped completely. Services in 18 sites around Shire Endasslassie have been suspended indefinitely.”

### **7.5.2 Mental Health**

The psychosocial condition of IDPs in Tigray requires a dedicated and comprehensive study with a specialized methodological approach by professionals in the field. This section offers only a brief snapshot of mental health conditions as observed by field researchers and data collectors during the study.

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<sup>116</sup> Interview with Equar, Aragure IDP site, Aragure (in Enderta Woreda), April 26, 2025



With dire conditions of access to basic needs, fragmentation with community networks, widespread grief as a result of loss of siblings, children, parents, and other loved ones, as the IDPs carry their pain without the comfort of extended family or cultural rituals for mourning, exposed to horrifying events during & before displacement, the prolonged displacement period that led to a pervasive sense of hopelessness among the IDPs, the toll of psychological trauma is very high leaving the IDPs with deep psychological scars.

Meseret is a 70-year-old woman residing in the Selekleka IDP site. Displaced from Humera, she sustained a serious leg injury during the drone attack on Dedebeit IDP site on 7 January 2022. Now permanently injured and separated from her two sons, who fled to Sudan in the early days of the war, she lives alone under the compounded burden of old age, trauma, and lack of support. Her life is marked by extreme hardship and ongoing psychological distress.<sup>117</sup>

Efforts to address the mental health needs of IDPs have often been inadequate. Observations by researchers and data collectors indicate a lack of effective interventions from local and federal governments, as well as international humanitarian organizations.

According to Fasika<sup>118</sup> an estimated 58.8% of IDPs suffer from PTSD, yet mental health services are virtually nonexistent or very limited, and some organizations which provided MHPSS service are now closed due to lack of funds. “Our organization has been providing community-based psychosocial support, such as lay counseling and psychological first aid for the victims, and in collaboration with other NGOs through referral pathways.”

These observations underscore the urgent need for comprehensive mental health interventions. For the purpose of this report, the mental health condition of IDPs is viewed from two perspectives: Individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions prior to displacement, and Individuals who developed severe mental health breakdowns following displacement.

Access to mental health services is also very limited. Efforts to address the mental health needs of IDPs have often been inadequate. Observations by researchers indicate a lack of effective

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<sup>117</sup> Interview with Meseret, 70 years old, Selekleka IDP site, Selekleka, March 29, 2025

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Fasika, MHPSS officer at NGO in Shire, on March 31, 2025

interventions from local and federal governments, as well as international humanitarian organizations.

Ethiopia has the responsibility to guarantee the right to health and medical care for all, including internally displaced persons, as reinforced by Principle 18(2) of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Article 9(2)(b) of the Kampala Convention, Article 12 of the ICESCR, and Article 41(4) of the FDRE Constitution. The government is obligated to establish health clinics, provide mobile health services, maternal care, and mental health support within displacement settings. However, as detailed above, the state has failed to fulfill these responsibilities for the IDP population in Tigray, resulting in inadequate access to essential health services and critical gaps in care.

## **7.6. Education**

In Tigray, schools have become more than educational institutions; they now function as shelters for IDPs. According to the study, 64.5% of the 92 IDP sites and host community that were part of this research were public schools. This overlap of shelter and schooling has created a difficult situation for displaced children, many of whom try to attend classes in the same overcrowded schools where they live. Parents reported that although some children enroll in nearby public schools alongside those from host communities, financial hardship remains a major barrier. Most families cannot afford basic educational necessities such as uniforms, notebooks, or writing materials. Given these dire circumstances, access to education for IDPs remains severely compromised. In addition to coming with all educational materials, IDP students are also required to pay school contributions, even in public schools. Selam, an IDP living in Hagereselam, originally from Maykadra, told the researchers, “I used to pay all contributions in the past. But now I have nothing left, and when my daughter was asked for a monetary contribution, I told the principal of the school about our situation as an IDP, and that we are unable to pay. But he replied, “I do not care...she has to pay!’ I went to the office of social affairs, and thanks to them, they told him to relieve her of the contributions.

Lack of food has also seriously impacted IDP students. For example, a letter written by an IDP coordination office in Adwa and sent to stakeholders confirms that 19 IDP students displaced from

Welqayt who were attending school from grades 1 to 9 in Adwa town have dropped out due to a lack of food.<sup>119</sup> A similar letter also confirms that eight students from Woreda Maikadra now living in Adwa town IDP site have dropped out of school due to a lack of food too.<sup>120</sup>

At the May-Dmu IDP site, respondents told the researchers during an interview that 240 students are out of school. They said, “We reported this to UNICEF and UNHCR representatives, but we have not yet received any response. There is a nearby school, but it used to accommodate 90 students in a single classroom. After our relocation from Endabaguna, the only available school stated it could no longer accept additional students. As a result, 240 children who were previously enrolled in school in Endabaguna have been left without access to education.”

The IDPs reported that public schools require IDP students to come fully equipped with all necessary learning materials, with little consideration for their status as displaced persons living in camps. As a result, many students are forced to drop out, as neither they nor their parents can afford the cost of these items.

For instance, in Aragure, among IDPs displaced from Afar and now living in rental homes within the host community, Macho reported “Our children go to school, but we cannot afford the educational necessities they need. My own daughter often tells me she does not want to go to school. Her classmates from the host community wear uniforms, and she refuses to go, saying, ‘I am not going without a uniform.’ She skips school for many days. She also says, ‘My friends eat bread, I’m not going there just to sit with them!’ But what can I do? How can I feed her like them? I just tell her, ‘We are poor.’”<sup>121</sup>

Similarly, in the seven IDP sites located in Abyi-Adi, respondents told researchers that while there is access to free public education, students lack basic school materials.<sup>122</sup> Some parents reported

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<sup>119</sup> A letter written from the Coordination office of the IDPs from Setit Humera Woreda of the Western Tigray in Adwa town addressed to Whom it May concern, 04/07/2017, Not referenced, available at the Adwa district of the ReST (Relief Society of Tigray)

<sup>120</sup> A letter written from Woreda Maikadra Adwa town IDP cluster addressed to the Adwa district of the ReST (Relief Society of Tigray), not referenced and not dated but documented by the ReST

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Macho, Aragure IDP site, Aragure, April 26, 2025

<sup>122</sup> Interview with IDPs in Abyiadi town, April 27 to May 2, 2025

being forced to purchase uniforms, as schools insisted that even IDP students adhere to the dress code. Tomas, an IDP in Abyi-Adi, stated: “Although our children attend public schools, they lack support in terms of school materials.”<sup>123</sup> Another respondent, Berket, added: “Our children do have access to public schools, but they lack essential supplies. At one point, they were even suspended for not wearing the school uniform, as they failed to meet the dress-code requirement.”<sup>124</sup>

Researchers observed IDP students attending school barefoot, without uniforms, and dressed in worn-out clothes. Many lack school bags and, in some cases, they carry only a single exercise book for all subjects. Some students, even those in uniform or carrying exercise books, were seen begging for food as they made their way to school. Some parents who participated in the study also reported experiencing ongoing emotional distress over their inability to financially support their children who scored high enough to enter university.

Ethiopia has a legal obligation to provide free and accessible education for displaced children, as affirmed by both international and national legal frameworks. This duty includes ensuring continued schooling in displacement settings and providing adequate support to both students and teachers. These responsibilities are clearly outlined in Principle 23(1) and (2) of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Article 9(2)(b) of the Kampala Convention, Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and Article 41(3) of the FDRE Constitution.

However, as the evidence presented in this report demonstrates, the Ethiopian state has fallen short of fulfilling these obligations. Many displaced children remain out of school or face severe barriers to meaningful participation in education, highlighting a significant gap between the legal commitments and the reality on the ground.

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<sup>123</sup>Interview with Tomas, 27 years old, TVET IDP site, Abyiadi town, April 30, 2025

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Bereket, 40 years old, Preparatory school IDP site, Abyiadi town, April 28, 2025

## 8. Protection and Security Concerns

Generally, 97% of respondents feel no safety at all, underscoring a pressing need for enhanced protective measures to ensure the safety and dignity of IDPs. From the 3,380 IDP survey respondents participated in this research, the commission documented 1748 death/killings, 915 forced disappearances and 1656 physical injuries on IDPs as illustrated in the following table.

**Table 3 - Victimized IDPs**

Type of Victim	Count			Percentage	
	Female	Male	Grand Total	Female	Male
Enforced disappearance	72	843	915	7.9%	92.1%
Death	392	1356	1748	22.4%	77.6%
Physical injury	579	1077	1656	35.0%	65.0%
Grand Total	1043	3276	4319	24.1%	75.9%
Over all %	24.1%	75.9%			

Source: CITG, Investigation report 2025.

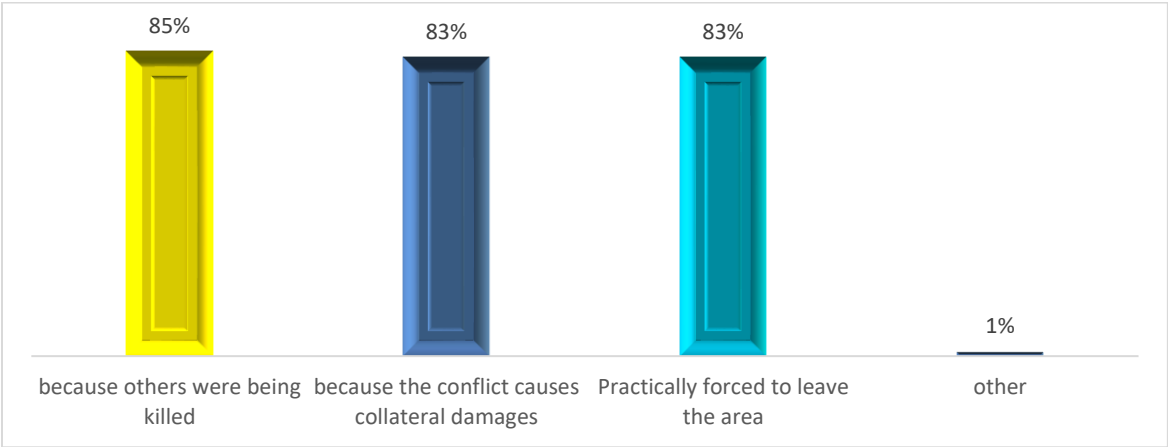
The data shows that out of the total 4,319 victims, 24.1% are female and 75.9% are male, indicating that men have been disproportionately affected across all categories of violations. Enforced disappearances overwhelmingly targeted men (92.1%) compared to women (7.9%), making it the most gender-skewed category. Deaths also show a clear gender imbalance, with 77.6% of the victims being men while 22.4% are women. Physical injuries, also show that 65% victims are men; women also involve a relatively higher share (35%) compared to the other types of the aforementioned violations. Overall, the data suggests that though men bore the larger share of killings, forced disappearances, and physical injuries, the same victimization by women is also appalling. This highlights both the gendered nature of victimization and the different forms of suffering endured by men and women.

### 8.1. Forceful evictions and direct attacks

Living under dire conditions with limited access to basic needs, the IDPs have been experiencing acute security concerns. The findings show the security and protection risks the IDPs have been facing since the outbreak of the war at home, on their way to ‘safe’ places, and even in IDP sites. Out of the survey respondents, 85% reported that they left their home fearing for their life because

they have seen other Tigrayans being killed while 83% of them were practically forced to leave their homes by the Amhara forces and the allied forces, exposing them to multiple protection risks. The following table summarizes the respondents’ reason for displacement.

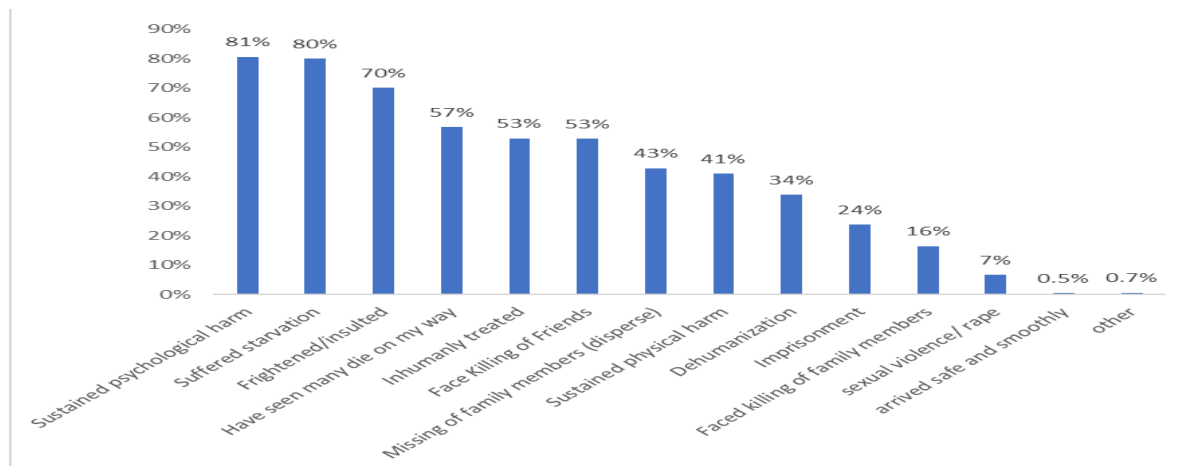
**Figure 4 - Respondents reason for displacement**



In their attempt to escape the massacre, the IDPs sought refuge in locations they perceived as ‘safe.’ However, they encountered numerous security threats in their routes. Beyond the deprivation of basic necessities for survival and the harsh environmental conditions, the IDPs reported being subjected to direct attacks by perpetrators, resulting causing physical security challenges, and violating their liberty, and the right to life.

Respondents were asked the specific experience of violence they encountered during their displacement and the replies are depicted below.

**Figure 5 - Experience of violence during displacement**



The graph shows that only 0.52% of the IDPs reported that they arrived safely at their hosting destinations. The remaining IDPs in the sample experienced one or multiple types of abuses including direct acts of violence causing psychological harm, starvation, insults, witnessing the corpses of civilians, inhumane treatment, the killings of family members, friends, and relatives, the loss of loved ones, physical injury, imprisonment, and sexual violence.

### Case Stories

Lemlem<sup>125</sup>, a 40-year-old woman, shares her multiple displacement experience. First, she was evicted from her home (Kafta Humera) on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020 to Sheraro. She shares a painful story of the death of her 13-year-old while fleeing on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020. She says, “After we crossed Tekeze and approached to Ademeyti, a village near Sheraro, the ENDF opened fire on us and killed my son with two bullets. They also prevented us from moving forward. I couldn’t even bury him. We spent three days there.” She adds, “Hearing that things were better back home, we were forced to return to Humera. But the situation was even worst. The Amhara forces beat us on daily basis. My husband then fled to Sudan, leaving me and my four children at home. We couldn’t work to survive because we were home arrested. Hunger was a daily experience because we could not engage in economic activity.”

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Lemlem, 40 years old, Adihawsi Highschool IDP Site, Mekelle, May 20, 2025

Again in 2022, the Amhara forces rounded them up and dragged them out of their homes along with many Tigrayans on trucks. Lemlem adds the Fano forces told us, “those of you who have Amhara blood, stay; others must leave...Then I left my home barefoot because the attack was sudden”. The eviction was spontaneous in which the victims had no time to carry food or clothes, let alone other properties. They crossed over the Tekeze River into the Hitsats village, which is found in Asgede. “We stayed at Hitsats until the outbreak of the last round of the war”. Lemlem was displaced from the IDP site for the fourth time, making her way to Mekelle on foot. “The trek from Asgede to Mekelle was too arduous. “I just remember my son, not my property,” she tearfully describes.

Kalayu<sup>126</sup> is a 68-year-old man displaced from Maykadra, currently living in the May Hanse IDP site in Asgede. While trying to escape from the attack, he was captured and attacked by the Fano forces until his jaw was fractured. As a result, Kalayu is suffering and is unable to eat food. To survive, he soaks biscuits in water and attempts to swallow them. However, it is only the water that trickles down his throat, not the biscuit.<sup>127</sup>

Another 67-year-old woman displaced from Maykadira in Western Tigray explains how the perpetrators seized a traditional spice paste, called ‘dilik,’ and struck her in the eyes with it, resulting in her visual impairment. Her two sons migrated to Sudan; tragically, one died there, while the other later migrated farther to Libya.

## **8.2. IDPs caught in active fighting**

During the war, some IDPs and their families were caught in active battles, exposing them to significant risks to their lives and safety.

### **Case Stories**

Yemane<sup>128</sup> is a 61-year-old man displaced from Badime Woreda, physically disabled, and has developed serious health issues, including diabetes, hypertension, kidney infections, and nerve problems. After enervating travel on foot, he arrived in Adwa town on November 13, 2020, but

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<sup>126</sup> Interview with Kalayu, May-Hanse IDP site, Mayhanse, March 29, 2025

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Kalayu, May-Hanse IDP site, Mayhanse, March 29, 2025

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Yemane, Nigiste Saba Number 1 School IDP Site, Adwa, April 2, 2025



Yemane was displaced again to another rural area called Hahayle in Feresmay Woreda of the Central Zone of Tigray, where his relatives live. On November 28, 2020, he says, when he returned from church, he did not find his kids at home. In spite of his disability Yemane rushed in search of his 15-year-old child and three younger siblings and found them trapped in a crossfire between Ethiopian and allied forces and Tigrayan forces. Desperate to protect his children, he hides them in a small terrace trying to shield them with his bodies. Bullets passed just above their heads, and their survival was nothing short of miraculous.

Bethelehem <sup>129</sup> another respondent displaced from Maykadira to Axum and stayed with a distant relative in Axum until November 21, 2020, and then escaped with her children to a village in rural Adwa called Mayweyni. Life in Mayweyni village was extremely difficult, marked by hunger and shelling from the Ethiopian and allied forces, particularly from an area known as Rahiya. She vividly remembers her 5-year-old son lamenting, “We escaped from Maykadra to Axum, and then to Mayweyni, where should we go now?”

### **8.3. IDPs Still Chased in the IDP Sites**

After the Ethiopian and allied forces controlled the places where the IDPs sheltered, many IDPs were chased from the IDP sites and from their hideouts by EDF, ENDF and Amhara forces. The following table shows the response by IDP respondents to the question “Have you experienced or witnessed any direct violence or exploitation since being displaced?”

The survey finding shows that 38.2% of the respondents have encountered different types of violence, including direct psychological violence, physical injuries, exploitation and abuse, sexual violence, and child exploitation in their shelters or in the host community they destined to live as IDPs.

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<sup>129</sup> Interview with Bethlehem, 33 years old, Areaya Kahsu IDP Site, Axum, April 2, 2025

## Case Stories

Bethlehem, 33-year-old, and her husband, were once investors, displaced from Woreda Maykadra in Western Tigray, and currently residing at the Areaya Kahsu Health Science College IDP Site in Axum. Bethlehem was repeatedly chased from the IDP site in Axum by the Amhara Fano, and she escaped hiding for a month in a distant relative's provided room in Axum. She says, "When you see me standing, I may look well, but I have developed diabetes, high blood pressure, and nerve. Bethlehem expressed her deep pain, saying, "I know both poverty and wealth, but I cannot convince my kids the kind of life we are leaving. They only know the prosperous life we had in Maykadra, but now they are leaving with lice." <sup>130</sup>

Shewit, 68, currently living in the Tsehaye IDP site in Shire, was taken by EDF soldiers from his IDP site in June 2021 at night with seven other IDPs and was beaten with the butt of a gun and shoes, and was taken to the outskirts of the town to a place called Guna. They were beaten mercilessly. They spent two days in the sweltering heat of the sun, awaiting their death, until they were freed by the pressure of NGOs. <sup>131</sup>

Nahusenay, an IDP in the same site, shares a story where 14 people were detained from his roommates, deprived of food and water, and tortured by the EDF soldiers for three days. <sup>132</sup>

Seifu, 77 years old, displaced from his home at Humera town, was captured from his relative's home in Nebelet while he was with his children, ordered to remove his clothes, and severely beaten by the ENDF. The soldiers threatened the old man, Seifu, saying, "You have sent other children to the front to kill us!" <sup>133</sup>

IDPs were also part of massacres committed in different parts of Tigray.

An IDP survivor displaced from Setit Humera reported that EDF forces killed and tortured many Tigrayans, including IDPs, in Axum city. He stated that the EDF forces ripped off five of his fingernails, beat him with the butt of a gun, and struck his back with a stick. <sup>134</sup> He is aware that

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<sup>130</sup> Interview with Bethlehem, 33 years old, Areaya Kahsu IDP Site, Axum, April 2, 2025

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Shewit, 68 years old, Tsehaye IDP site, Shire, March 28, 2025

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Nahusenay, 54 years old, Tsehaye School IDP site, Shire, March 28, 2025

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Seifu, 77 years old, Adihaqi Highschool IDP Site, Mekelle, May 19, 2025

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Haben, Displaced from Setit Humera, Kidus Yared School IDP Site, Axum, March 30, 2025

the Eritrean forces tortured around 45 civilians, including IDPs, whom he knows. He mentioned that one of the survivors is still in Ayder Referral Hospital and is unable to move on his own.<sup>135</sup>

A 70-year-old woman currently residing in the Seleklekha IDP site reported that she survived a severe injury, which escalated to the point of requiring amputation in her escape from a drone strike in the Dedebit IDP site.<sup>136</sup>

### **The Dedebit drone attack**

A devastating drone attack took the lives of many innocent Tigrayans at the Dedebit IDP Site in Northwestern Tigray on January 7, 2022, the eve of the Christmas holiday celebrated by Christians in the region.

A resident of Dedebit testified that the drone attack specifically targeted civilian IDPs. The witness recounted how the drone struck three times, instantly killing many IDPs. The bodies were dismembered to the point that distinguishing individual victims became impossible, with body parts even hanging from trees.<sup>137</sup>

Another IDP survivor from Setit Humera, now living in Selekleka IDP camp, reported being wounded all over his body, particularly in the head, resulting in visual impairment due to the drone attack. He noted that around 66 civilians, including children, women, and priests, were killed, asserting that the attack was deliberate.<sup>138</sup>

A third witness, Bahta, displaced from Humera town, recalled the initial stages of the war when perpetrators killed civilians using knives, axes, and machetes. Bahta described several civilians were rounded up, taken by truck from Humera to Korarit, and forced out into the jungle. He added that the perpetrators prepared graves and gathered materials like fuel and straw, ready to kill and burn the detainees. However, they received a sudden command to leave. Bahta was in site of the drone attack and testified the killing of more than 60 civilians, and others admitted later to Shire

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with Haben, Displaced from Setit Humera, Kidus Yared School IDP Site, Axum, March 30, 2025

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Meseret, 70 years old, Selekleka IDP site, Selekleka, March 29, 2025

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Lema, Resident of Woreda Asgede Dedebit Kebele, Dedebit, July 2, 2024

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Biruh, Selekleka IDP Site, Selekleka, July 2, 2024

Hospital. He himself suffered serious injuries to his leg and spinal cord and still carries bullet fragments in his body, despite the absence of any military presence in the area.<sup>139</sup>

Haregot from Asgede Woreda reported seeing many civilians killed, including seven individuals from one family, all buried in a single grave.<sup>140</sup>

Another survivor, Kichen, recounted her harrowing experience, stating she was severely wounded with her son and lost her father. She described being hit during the third drone attack while trying to evacuate her 75-years-old father, who was killed. Kichen disclosed that she knows more than 56 civilians died instantly, with several survivors passed away in Sihul Hospital days later.<sup>141</sup>

According to eyewitnesses, the victims were mainly civilians, children, mothers, and elders displaced from western Tigray. All interviewees reported that after the drone attack, IDP survivors fled to other parts of Tigray, primarily to Selekleka, where they continue to live as IDPs in a local school. They emphasized that there was no active warfare or military presence nearby and that the attack was sudden and unexpected.

#### **8.4. Security Concerns of Illegal Migration**

IDPs are also exposed to severe security concerns due to illegal migration. IDPs are forced to choose a bitter option, often illegal migration, from IDP sites mostly due to starvation.

A letter written by the Coordination office of IDPs from Wolqait Wereda, Western Tigray, located in Adwa town, confirms 20 IDPs from Wolqait Wereda alone have been migrated out of IDP sites to different countries like: Djibouti, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Libya.<sup>142</sup> A similar letter from the Interim Coordination Office for IDPs from Setit Humera, stationed in Adwa, reports that 25 IDPs have migrated, often through extremely dangerous routes, including Libya.<sup>143</sup> In another

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<sup>139</sup> Interview with Bahta, 65 years old, Selekleka IDP Site, Selekleka, July 2, 2024

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Haregot, 83 years old, Resident of Woreda Asgede, Tabya Dedebit, Dedebit, Town, July 2, 2024

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Kichen, 25 Years old, Selekleka IDP Site, Selekleka, July 2, 2024

<sup>142</sup> A letter written from the Coordination office of the IDPs from Wolqait Woreda of the Western Tigray in Adwa town addressed to Adwa town Affairs of Employees, Involvement and Community Benefits office, 04/08/2017 E.C, available at the Adwa district of the ReST (Relief Society of Tigray)

<sup>143</sup> A letter written from the Coordination office of the IDPs from Setit Humera Woreda of the Western Tigray in Adwa town addressed to Whom it May concern, 04/07/2017, Not referenced, available at the Adwa district of the ReST (Relief Society of Tigray)

unfortunate case in Adi-Mehameday IDP site, IDPs reported that 341 IDP youth have migrated out of the camp within only one year.<sup>144</sup> In the May-Dmu IDP site, Assefa reports, “We have many youth who are migrating to Arab countries. For example, there was this girl who used to read poetry and other inspirational writings to the IDPs in May-Dmu during holiday weeks. But I heard this week that she has been exposed to illegal migration. We are shocked. She was a very good poet, and now her parents have been asked for 140,000 Birr ransom for her release. Many migrated, but little is known about their life and safety.”

Rampant migration is happening to escape extreme hardship in IDP sites but it is understudied. The disturbingly high number of IDP youth migrating has not been properly documented either by the camp coordinators or any other concerned organ.

The issue of IDP parents being asked for a ransom to free their children was mentioned by Brhan, a representative of the office of the social affairs in Endabaguna town, a place where IDPs from May-Dmu were relocated. She said, “Many youths are migrating daily. When you go to churches early in the morning, many IDPs beg for money to pay as a ransom for the release of their children held in Yemen or elsewhere. When you see them hopelessly begging in churches for money ranging from 500,000-700,000 Birr to save their children. Particularly, youth IDPs cannot find job as the economy is malfunctioning.”<sup>145</sup> A representative for the office of social affairs in Endabaguna town explains that, in the absence of food for survival, youth IDPs are constantly faced with two options: either migrating or engage in robbery. When they engage in robbery, they are becoming criminals, when they migrate; they have to trouble their parents for ransom, which the parents cannot provide.”<sup>146</sup> A witness from the Mayhanse IDP site recounts, “Over 25 youth have migrated from the shelter and have been asked for a lot of ransom. We are begging everywhere to collect the ransom to free them.”<sup>147</sup>

### **8.5. Shelter related protection risks**

The assessment of protection and security for IDPs in different shelter conditions highlights a troubling situation marked by inadequate living environments, overcrowding, energy insecurity,

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<sup>144</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

<sup>145</sup> Brhan, Social Affairs Office Head of the Endabaguna town, Endabaguna, April 1, 2025

<sup>146</sup> Brhan, Social Affairs Office Head of the Endabaguna town, Endabaguna, April 1, 2025

<sup>147</sup> Desu, 48 years old, , Mah Hanse IDP Site, Mayhanse, March 29, 2025

lack of separate shelters and toilet rooms for girls and women, lack of lights, and other critical safety risks. The subsequent paragraphs present protection and safety risks related to shelter issues.

IDPs residing in shelters constructed from plastic sheet face significant protection and security challenges. Many of these shelters, built over four years ago, have deteriorated, leaving individuals vulnerable to both environmental dangers, menace from wild animals, extreme heat during the day, and strong winds at night, posing risks of collapse and flooding. Such inadequacies not only compromise their physical safety but also their dignity, as they are forced to live in structures that fail to provide basic protection. The prevalence of weak plastic coverings exacerbates their vulnerability, making them easy targets for theft and intrusion, particularly given the absence of proper walls and fence around the camps.

The situation for IDPs living in improvised rooms, such as classrooms or public buildings not originally designed for IDPs, is equally precarious, characterized by overcrowding with multiple families sharing small spaces, leading to a lack of privacy and increased risk of diseases. This environment is particularly hazardous for vulnerable groups like women and children. The case of Mbraq, an underage mother sexually abused while sharing a room with 30 other IDPs, forced to live in a former toilet with her infant, underscores the extreme indignities faced by individuals in these conditions. The mixed-gender living arrangements in shelters make it difficult to maintain safety and privacy.

IDPs in the host communities find themselves in an unwarranted position, often living in rented accommodations that they can barely afford. The rising rent prices, coupled with the lack of financial support, leave many vulnerable to eviction and homelessness. This uncertainty not only threatens their physical security and the physical security of their children but also their emotional well-being.

For those IDPs who live beneath trees or streets, churches, in the absence of any formal shelter or support further exacerbates their vulnerability. These individuals are often denied access to basic services and live in constant fear of violence. The lack of shelter leaves them exposed to extreme weather hardships, wild animals, thieves, bandits, and natural disasters, as illustrated by the experiences of IDPs.

### **8.6. Energy-related security issues**

Energy insecurity is a pervasive issue among IDPs, significantly affecting their security, apart from affecting their quality of life. The absence of electricity limits their ability to cook, forcing many to rely on firewood. Women, girls, and children, who are primarily tasked with firewood collection, face heightened risks of violence and exploitation. According to testimonies, the IDPs are also becoming victim of attackers/hungers while moving in dark IDP compounds and latrines particularly at night. A lack of safety and dignity compounds the challenges already faced by IDPs. This dependence also creates conflicts with local communities.

The act of forced displacement which was also characterized by forceful deportation is a clear violation of the mandate of the Ethiopian government to refrain from, prohibit, prevent arbitrary displacement of populations and forced evacuations under the UN General Principles on Internal Displacement and the Kampala Convention which guarantees individual's right to be protected against arbitrary displacement in the same documents. The fact that the displacement was accompanied by the violations of: the right to life, dignity, liberty, protection from torture & security of those affected is also a clear breach of international human rights law, humanitarian law, and the special laws on the protection of IDPs.

Violence committed against IDPs by the state, non-state actors and foreign forces while being displaced, inside shelters or even in migration routes, due to lack of food and shelter, is primarily a result of the state's failure to dispose of its obligations. The obligation to provide sufficient and immediate protection and assistance to the IDPs is discussed under the Kampala Convention as well as in the UN General principles on Internal Displacement. Particularly, those acts of violence by the ENDF and allied forces are a blatant failure of the state's responsibility to ensure respect for the principles of humanity and human dignity of IDPs. The lack of access to shelter alongside with important facilities including electric power for IDPs, despite repeated requests to the government, constitutes a violation of the state's duty to respect the right of IDPs to peacefully seek protection and assistance enshrined under the Kampala Convention as well as the UN General Principles on Internal Displacement.

## 8.7. Protection and security conditions of vulnerable groups

### 8.7.1 Women and Girls

IDP women and girls have been disproportionately affected by various forms of gender-based violence (GBV). Particularly, amid displacement and the war, reports indicate heightened cases of sexual violence and exploitation, leaving lasting emotional and psychological scars on survivors.

Even in IDP sites, the protection of women and girls is critically compromised due to inadequate safety measures. Observations and reports reveal that these shelters lack basic protection schemes, with women and men sharing the same rooms and toilets. This arrangement not only undermines the dignity of women but also exposes them to heightened risks of violence and harassment. Furthermore, the absence of power supplies for lighting exacerbates their vulnerability, particularly at night; the lack of visibility creates an environment ripe for exploitation.

Many women IDPs reported feeling overwhelmed by economic pressures, particularly as they are often left as single mothers after the killings or enforced disappearance of their spouses by perpetrators or the death of their spouses in the war. There are also female leaders of households who committed suicide, hanging themselves. Some mothers abandon their children and disappear, out of desperation from their living conditions.<sup>148</sup> “Our women are turning to prostitution,”<sup>149</sup> a social affairs officer explains. Only in the Adimehameday IDP site of the Northwestern Tigray, 16 women died during childbirth or pregnancy.<sup>150</sup> There are also women living in the streets and under trees within in the host communities, exposed to different protection risks.

#### Case Stories

A 40-year-old woman having underage children displaced from Maygeba woreda of Western Tigray, currently living in Adimehameday IDP site, testifies, “I am overwhelmed with worry upon worry. On the one hand, I have no information about my husband's whereabouts. *On the other hand, I have children who are under age who expect me to provide them food.*” She describes the deep scar left by her husband's forced disappearance. “The Fano militia, who came from

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<sup>148</sup> Interview with Brhan, Social Affairs Office Head of the Endabaguna town, Endabaguna, April April 1, 2025

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Brhan, Social Affairs Office Head of the Endabaguna town, Endabaguna, April April 1, 2025

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025



Armachiho, along with armed residents I knew in May-Gaba, knocked at our door and took him. They may have killed him.” How can I provide food and clothing for my children? The stress is unbearable.” Comparing her past life as a trader in Maygeba, she feels as if her family has been “thrown from the sky to the ground.”<sup>151</sup> Genet explains, “I have no one to support me.” She works as a daily laborer and sends her five daughters to beg.”<sup>152</sup>

A pregnant mother of an infant in Adimehameday IDP site, Merhawit, explains she and her infant are sleeping in a torn-apart shelter she built with money borrowed from distant relatives on her first arrival in 2020. “If it starts to rain, we would be exposed to rain...during the sunny time, the shelter is extremely hot, and it drips water during the rainy season.”<sup>153</sup>

Maryamawit, a 17-year-old female, currently living in Endabaguna IDP site, with a one-year and three-month-old infant in her arms, when asked about the kind of support she needs, replied “Oh! My problems are uncountable!” She was sexually abused by a 20-year-old boy while she was sharing a shelter with other 30 people, who are mostly men. After she became pregnant, she felt ashamed of living with others, and she opted to live in a toilet by covering the hole with soil. She speaks with watery eyes: “I live with extremely bad toilet smells.” Her infant spent the nights crying and has never received any food or medical treatment except her breastfeed. She says, I had asked for help, but no one replied. There are many days when I go to bed without eating any food.”<sup>154</sup>

### **8.7.2 Children**

Child IDPs are also facing a traumatizing life since displacement. Children in IDP sites are at significant risk of abuse, starvation, lack of nutrition, and child trafficking and disappearance.

#### **Case Stories**

Hagush is HIV-positive mother of a one-and-a-half-year-old boy. While breastfeeding, her breast sometimes bleeds and health professionals have advised her to stop breastfeeding. However, she

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with Genet, 40 years old, Adimehameday IDP Siter, Adimehameday, April 19, 2025

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Genet, 40 years old, Adimehameday IDP Siter, Adimehameday, April 19, 2025

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Merhawit, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

<sup>154</sup> Interview with Maryamawit, 17 years old, Endabaguna IDP site, Endabaguna, April 1, 2025

has no alternative food and obliged to breastfeed her son. Hagush is deeply worried that her child may be contracting the virus through her breast milk, which can get mixed with blood.<sup>155</sup>

An Officer in the office of Social Affairs in Endabaguna town shared another shocking story. “When an IDP mother could not find anything to feed her children, she went to nearby the river banks. She saw leaves that she mistakenly thought were edible. She fed the plant to her six children. Six of them lost their consciousness right away. They have survived through the relentless effort of the residents but the desperation is paramount.”<sup>156</sup>

Nahusenay, an IDP currently living in Tsehaye School IDP site in Shire, remembers that he fled his home haphazardly and that some of his children were lost during the displacement. It was after a month that his two children were reunited with the family.<sup>157</sup>

Yemane, displaced from Badime and currently living in Adwa town, witnessed mothers fleeing and leaving their children behind, and saw toddlers crying alone. The lack of educational opportunities exacerbates child vulnerability, with many facing irregular attendance or complete dropout. For example, as IDPs from Endabaguna town were relocated to Maydumu, 240 students were forced to drop out of school as they could not get school opportunity in Maydumu.<sup>158</sup> Observations reveal that students often attend school barefoot, without uniforms, and sometimes with only a single exercise book for all subjects. Our researchers observed children wearing uniforms begging in the streets. The lack of a functioning educational support system reflects a profound moral failure. Parents express deep regret over their inability to afford education for their children who have the desire and qualifications to pursue education.

A father of four children displaced from Kafata Humera of Western Tigray and currently living in Firesuwue’at IDP site in Shire Endasilase town of the Northwestern Tigray explains the future of his children who have dropped out of school as “as dark.”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Interview with Hagush, 38 years old, Seleklekha IDP site , Seleklekha, March 29, 2025

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Brhan, Social Affairs Office Head of the Endabaguna town, Endabaguna, April 1, 2025

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Nahusenay, 54 years old, Tsehaye School IDP site , Shire, March 28, 2025

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Assefa, May-Dmu IDP site, May-Dimu (Woreda Tahitay Qoraro), April 2, 2025

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Hailu, 51 years old, Firesuwe’at IDP site, Shire, March 30, 2025

The bleakness of the overall educational landscape, the lack of food, and the erosion of hope for a better future have led the children and youth to seek illegal migration, risking their lives in dangerous journeys. As stated elsewhere above, in Adimehameday IDP site of the Northwestern Tigray, 341 young people have migrated from the camp to Arab countries out of sheer desperation.<sup>160</sup> Families are often extorted for ransom, compounding their children's suffering in the illegal routes. With no income or humanitarian support, IDP parents find themselves in desperation, many resorting to begging on the streets and churches to save their children, but often in vain.

### **8.7.3 People with Disability and Senior Citizens**

The IDP life has also become very difficult for people living with disability, the elderly, and their families. The IDP set up is not convenient for them, and they cannot afford the cost of living in the host community. Only in the Adimehameday IDP site of the Northwestern Tigray, 35 elderly individuals succumbed to hunger.<sup>161</sup> A humanitarian worker in Endabaguna town informed, "Many elders have never received aid, and especially those who live with the host communities are excluded in higher numbers."<sup>162</sup>

#### **Case Stories**

Mebrahtu, a 60-year-old man with a physical disability lives with his two mentally disabled sons in the Mekoni Preparatory School IDP site, Southern Tigray. He was displaced from Tsegede Woreda of western Tigray and currently shares a single school room with five other households. The eldest son was a medical student at Mekelle University, often displaying violent behavior towards his father, at times even threatening to "kill him."<sup>163</sup> The behavior of Mebrahtu's son has created fear not only in their family but also in the other five households sharing a shelter with them. He frequently searches for places of holy water with his sons, hoping to find a cure for their disorders, as he lacks the means to access proper healthcare facilities.

Kbrom, a 14-year-old boy, displaced from Abaala, in the Afar regional state, and living with his relatives in Quiha, has a severe, undiagnosed neurodevelopmental condition. He does not speak,

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<sup>160</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

<sup>162</sup> Bri, 39, IDP from Qafta Humera and a social worker under IHS, Endabaguna IDP site, Endabaguna, April 1, 2025

<sup>163</sup> Interview with Mebrahtu, 60 years old, Mekoni School IDP Site, Mekoni, April 27, 2025.

but communicates only through tongue-clicks and gestures, and suffers from frequent seizures. His condition began at age two and has worsened due to a lack of sustained medical care.<sup>164</sup>

He is physically strong but mentally vulnerable, often shrieking uncontrollably, especially when separated from his collection of eucalyptus gumnuts. His mother Meron says, “He never lets go of his gumnuts even when he sleeps. If we do that, he shrieks at the top of his lungs all night. He never sleeps until 1 or 2 a.m. He rarely sleeps.”

Kibrom suffers from insomnia, foaming seizures, and compulsive behavior. His family cannot afford consistent medication; his antiepileptic drugs cost 1,200–1,300 ETB per month and are rarely available. His mother, Meron, vends in the streets to survive.

His grandmother, Akberet (55), provides full-time care despite suffering from back pain. The family lives in isolation near the wild, stigmatized and excluded by the IDP and host community. Despite being repeatedly registered as a special-needs case, Natnael has never received targeted aid. “Other mothers in the camp shun him, fearing their children will ‘catch’ his condition.” says his mother.

In the Tsehay school IDP site, Sayzana’s 34-year-old son is unable to manage his toileting needs, placing an unbearable burden on his elderly parents, his 75-year-old father, Sayzana, and his mother. This burden is further exacerbated by the poor shelter and inadequate sanitary services in the camp.<sup>165</sup>

Meseret, a 70-year-old woman currently living in Seleklekha IDP site, separated from her two sons who migrated to Sudan, now grapples with the serious hardship with no support, and the permanent injury during the Dedebit drone attack makes her life miserable. She depends on the support of the young IDPs who assist her in cooking food and fetching water.<sup>166</sup>

#### **8.7.4 People living with chronic diseases**

Chronic diseases, including diabetes, hypertension, and respiratory illnesses, are prevalent among adults and the elderly in these camps. Unfortunately, there is minimal access to necessary

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<sup>164</sup> Interview with Meron, Mekelle, Quiha IDP site, April 26, 2025

<sup>165</sup> Sayzana, 75 years old, Tsehay School IDP site, Shire, March 28, 2025

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Meseret, 70 years old, Seleklekha IDP site, Seleklekha, March 29, 2025

medications and health services, leading many to suffer in silence, with some surrendering to their conditions without proper care.

### **Case Stories**

Adhanom, 62 years old, who is suffering from hypertension and diabetes, drinks a tea made from moringa leaves to moderate his sugar levels or reduce his blood pressure, as he cannot afford to buy the drugs.<sup>167</sup> With eyes full of tears, he says, “We are awaiting a silent death.”<sup>168</sup>

The exposure to violence, exploitation, abuse, and lack of protection of vulnerable groups in the community, including women and girls, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and individuals affected by chronic diseases, contradicts Ethiopia’s obligations under both general and specific human rights instruments designed to protect these segments of society. Furthermore, it violates the state's responsibilities under the UN General Principles on Internal Displacement and the Kampala Convention, which mandates member states to provide special protection and assistance to IDPs with special needs.

## **9. Issues on Return**

Except for some of those who are displaced from other regions of Ethiopia who have permanent security issues to return, the desire to return home is profound among the IDPs in this study. They see return as the only permanent solution to end the destitution they are going through. The emotional scars run deep, and during interviews, many IDPs struggle to contain their feelings, often breaking down in tears as they recount the trauma of losing their homes and the life they had.

### **Case Stories**

Genet, displaced from Maygeba with her five daughters and currently living in Adimehameday IDP center, said, “Whenever we hear of a meeting, we always ask, ‘What are they going to tell us now? Are they going to return us now?’ Similarly, a 76-year-old man, once a prosperous farmer in Maykadra, now living in Maichew town with the local community, shares the same feeling. He

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<sup>167</sup> Interview with Adhanom, 62 years old, Adi Menfito School IDP site , Shire town, March 30, 2025

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Adhanom, 62 years old, Adi Menfito School IDP site , Shire town, March 30, 2025

expresses that he and his family are “between death and life,” and his only prayer, filled with deep pain, is “to return and die in his home.”<sup>169</sup>

Yemane is a 61-year-old man displaced from Badime Woreda in Northwestern Tigray, who developed serious health issues, including diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney infections, and nerve problems. He said, “Unless IDPs are allowed to return home this year, we will not survive as human beings. People may lose their minds and get mad in the streets! If the world listens, we want to go home.” He sums up life in the IDP site as “below the living and above the dead.”<sup>170</sup> However, this longing is tempered by deep concerns over security and the current political landscape.

Many IDPs feel that returning to their homes, which remain under the control of those who have committed atrocities against them, is fraught with danger. By some, it is considered like “throwing a goat to a wolf.” The fear of violence looms large, as some perpetrators now living in the occupied land have openly threatened the IDPs, vowing to kill anyone who attempts to return. Many IDPs describe the threats they face if they attempt to return home without safety and protection measures. Particularly, IDPs from Western Tigray are filled with deep fear that the Amhara regional forces, backed by the federal government, are making military preparations for making smooth return impossible.

Efforts to return IDPs in Tselemti Woreda of Northwestern Tigray and Alamata of Southern Tigray are unsafe, forcing many to live under the oppression of those responsible for their displacement and compelling others to return to IDP status once again. An IDP currently living in the Maydumu site, breaking into tears, begs, “We are stressed about the politicians. They should convene and return us home. Death is inevitable for everyone. But dying without letting our children know their land and people makes it the hardest.”<sup>171</sup>

There are also IDPs from different parts of Tigray who returned by their own arrangements without any support or guidance. The regional interim administration also returned IDPs under pressure

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<sup>169</sup> Interview with Hadas, Maichew town with host community, April 27, 2025

<sup>170</sup> Interview with Yemane, Nigiste Saba Number 1 School IDP Site, Adwa, April 2, 2025

<sup>171</sup> Assefa, May-Dmu IDP site, May-Dimu (Woreda Tahitay Qoraro), April 2, 2025

without their willingness. Mehari, the Social Affairs Advisor of the Eastern Zone of Tigray, stated that the zone has returned more than 12,000 IDPs in 2017 E.C. to places under the TIRA's control without securing their consent and without any support for re-establishment.<sup>172</sup>

Based on the voices of IDPs and the observations of researchers and data collectors, IDPs are living in undignified conditions. Neither local nor federal governments have established IDP-oriented facilities, resulting in a lack of access to water, electricity, and meaningful educational resources. In many IDP sites, including Axum, Adwa, Adigirat, Shire, Wuqro, Mekoni, Abiyi Adi, Mekoni and Mekelle, internally displaced people do not have access to the public electric lines and water pipes. On top of this, IDPs complain that no government organ registered their property left behind, ransacked and damaged.

IDPs also point to the troubling experiences of those who have already returned to areas like Alamata of Southern Tigray and Tselemti Woreda of Northwestern Tigray, where they have faced renewed attacks from Amhara forces. Many returnees have found themselves re-displaced, forced by those who controlled the areas to flee back to IDP sites. For example, the social affairs head office of Endabaguna town informed us that IDPs who previously returned to Tselemti, Adiyabo, and other places have been displaced again.<sup>173</sup>

IDPs who returned to their home at their own initiative are also killed and disappeared. Only in March 2025, over 27 IDPs returned from Endabaguna to Tabya Wuhdet, Humera, but were captured in Rawyan, and all of them have disappeared.<sup>174</sup>

The ongoing violence against Tigrayans, including enforced disappearances and regular attacks in areas controlled by Amhara and Eritrean forces, heightens IDPs' anxiety about the safety of returning home. Coordinators of Adimehameday IDP site informed the researchers that a minimum of 6 to 7 displaced households arrive at the camp on daily basis.<sup>175</sup> In 2024 alone, over 250 new IDP households, comprising more than 900 individuals arrived at the camp from various Weredas

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with Dagneu, Advisor of the Eastern Zonal Administration of Tigray, Adigirat town, April 27, 2025

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Brhan, Social Affairs Office Head of the Endabaguna town, Endabaguna, April 1, 2025

<sup>174</sup> Bri, 39, IDP from Qafta Humera and a social worker under IHS, Endabaguna IDP site, Endabaguna, April 1, 2025

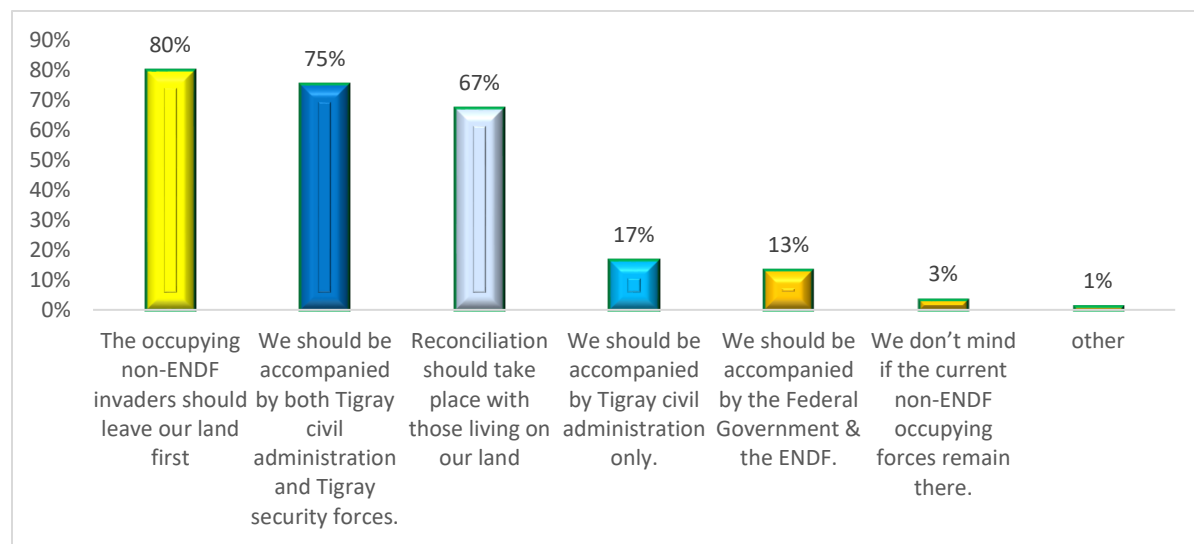
<sup>175</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

of Western and Northwestern Tigray.<sup>176</sup> The social affairs office of Endabaguna town also stated that IDPs from May-Tsebri are being displaced and coming through Waldba.<sup>177</sup> A social worker of a humanitarian organization in Endabaguna town informed that 56-107 IDPs arrive daily, mainly from Sudan, Tsegede, May Gaba, Humera, etc.<sup>178</sup>

A witness from Endabaguna town said, “I myself have a sister in Qafta Humera, Tabya Wuhdet. The Amhara forces never allow them to even call on the phone. They say, “Who are you calling? What information are you spying and sending to them?”<sup>179</sup>

Despite these overwhelming fears and challenges, the IDPs maintain a glimmer of hope. Many assert that as soon as their homes are secured, they will return immediately, expressing a deep longing to leave the IDP sites behind. The demand of the IDP respondents for safe and dignified return is indicated in the following graph:

**Figure 6- What do IDPs require for safe return**



According to the above graph, the IDPs demand the evacuation of the non-ENDF forces and reconciliation. Finally, they want to be accompanied by both the Tigray civil administration and the Tigray security forces. The IDPs emphasized the need for Tigray to have restored the status quo ante of its territories, insisting any act of return must be accompanied by a genuine security guarantee.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with Berhe, Adi-Mehameday IDP site, Adimehameday, March 28, 2025

<sup>177</sup> Brhan, Social Affairs Office Head of the Endabaguna town, Endabaguna, April 1, 2025

<sup>178</sup> Bri, 39, IDP from Qafta Humera and a social worker under IHS, Endabaguna IDP site, Endabaguna, April 1, 2025

<sup>179</sup> Bri, 39, IDP from Qafta Humera and a social worker under IHS, Endabaguna IDP site, Endabaguna, April 1, 2025



An IDP living in AbiAdi said, “I would only feel safe to return when the restoration is accompanied by withdrawal of the armed forces and proper reinstitution of the Tigrayan government.”<sup>180</sup> Another IDP underlined, “You have no idea how desperate I am to return to my home. However, the Federal Government & Tigray Interim Administration should make it secure first.”<sup>181</sup>

The IDPs affirmed that they are in desperate need of sufficient food, nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene, shelter, healthcare, education, etc, so long as they are in the IDP centers.

An Important issue in relation to the right to return and resettlement of the IDPs is recovery and compensation of lost property. A typical step to realize this right of the IDPs is documentation and registration of lost properties.

Most IDPs were once successful investors, owning vast farmlands, big businesses, and buildings as depicted in the following table.

**Table 4- Property ownership of IDP respondents before displacement**

Type of Properties	Percentage %
Household equipment	91%
Food items/cereal	88%
Land	80%
Other household items	79%
Livestock	76%
Gold and other jewelries	57%
Buildings	57%
Cash	51%
Business-related items	40%
Vehicles	27%
Shop and Shopping Items	26%
Other	2%

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Binyam in Preparatory IDP site, Abyi Adi, on March 30, 2025

<sup>181</sup> Frew, 40 years old, Preparatory school IDP Site, Abiyadi town, April 27 2025

As can be seen from the table, the findings from the survey result reveals that 80% respondents owned land, 57% owned buildings, 76% owned livestock, 27% owned vehicles, and 40% owned different types of businesses. However, most of them reported they did not bring any evidence/documents proving the ownership of their assets, which makes it not only easy to bring legal action against those who looted or damaged their movable and immovable properties, but also difficult to access basic services as IDPs and during return.

IDPs reported that they did not have the enabling conditions to get important documents, including critical identification documents, passports, birth certificates, title deeds, and educational documents. Some also described that their documents were destroyed during their harsh travels. Others suspect that documents left behind at homes have been taken or damaged by forces that controlled their homes.

In conclusion, the failure to facilitate the return of IDPs to their homes constitutes a breach of duty by the relevant authorities to create conditions for the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of displaced persons, as required by the Kampala Convention and the UN General Principles on Internal Displacement and the CoHA. Additionally, the arbitrary deprivation of IDPs' rights to property and possessions violates these international legal frameworks. The lack of meaningful registration and documentation of lost or damaged properties, along with the failure to replace lost documents, neglects the duty to assist returned or resettled IDPs in recovering their property or receiving compensation for what they left behind or lost during displacement. This oversight further undermines the rights of IDPs upon their return, resettlement, or reintegration. Particularly, the lack of assistance of those who have returned by their own initiative, and the return of IDPs without support, and their willingness, is a clear breach of the mandate of the state under these international frameworks.

## 10. Enduring Injustice Under Displacement

Respondents were asked what justice mechanisms they seek. The replies are summarized in the following table.

**Table 5- What do respondents require for Justice**

<b>Respondents require justice</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Maintaining non-recurrence to violence	88%
Justice and accountability of perpetrators	87%
Freeing the occupation of their land and return home	86%
Redress for the damage and loss incurred	83%
Reunion with separated/missed family members	62%

The respondents highlighted multiple dimensions of justice as their priority needs. An overwhelming 88% emphasized the importance of maintaining non-recurrence of violence, underscoring their desire for long-term peace and security. Closely linked to this, 87% stressed the necessity of ensuring justice and accountability for perpetrators, reflecting their demand to end impunity. Likewise, 86% of respondents underscored the need to free their land from occupation and to return safely to their homes, making restoration of land and dignity a central concern. In addition, 83% highlighted the importance of redress for damages and losses suffered, pointing to the need for compensation and reparations. Finally, 62% emphasized reunion with separated or missing family members, revealing the social and emotional dimensions of justice that must also be addressed.

Vulnerability-based targeting studies, intended to identify those most in need, are often unjustly compromised. While some individuals in genuine and dire circumstances report their situation truthfully yet receive little to no aid, others exploit the system by manipulating the criteria to access resources meant for the truly needy. This inequitable distribution undermines fairness and leaves the most vulnerable without essential support. Moreover, committee members responsible for assessing vulnerability frequently feel unable to address these injustices due to fear of retaliation. This culture of silence allows exploitation to persist unchecked.

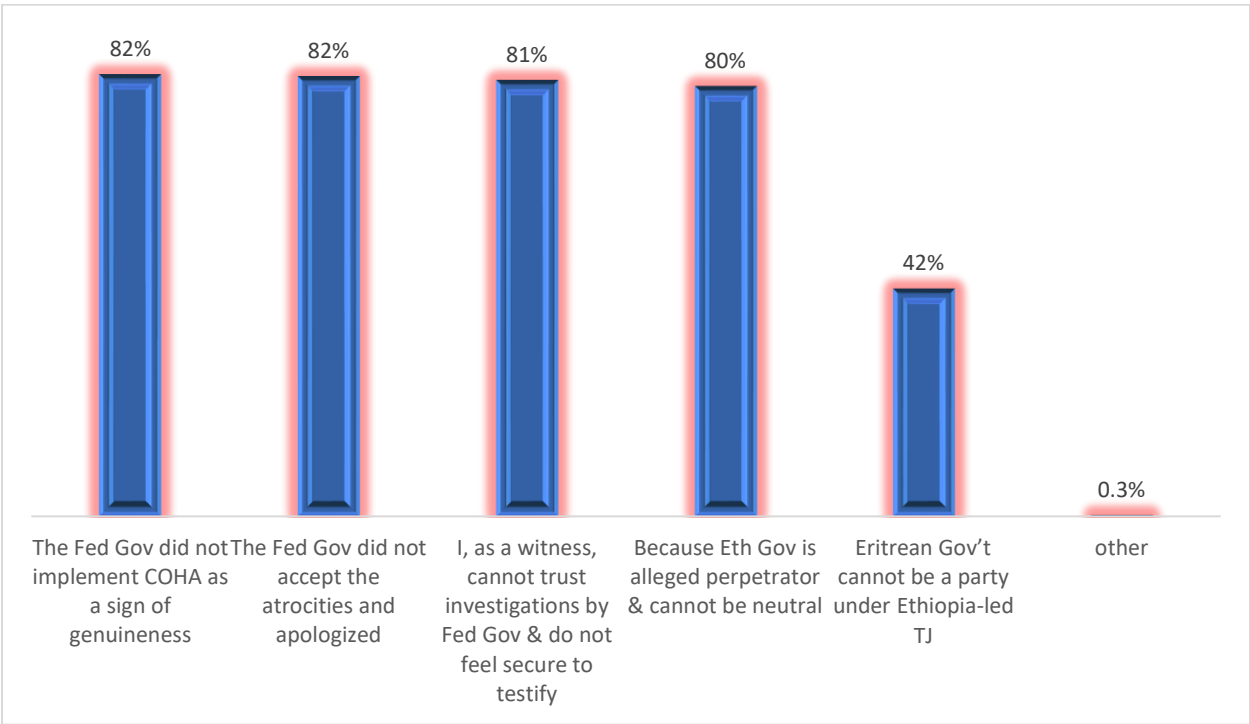
This manipulation of vulnerability criteria has also been acknowledged by state organs and humanitarian institutions. Dagneu, Advisor for Social Affairs in the Eastern Zone of Tigray,

admitted the injustice, noting that more deserving IDPs were excluded while those in relatively better conditions continued to be considered eligible.<sup>182</sup>

The quality and access to shelter represent another manifestation of injustice for IDPs. Respondents displaced from Irob Woreda in Tigray expressed deep frustration over the denial of shelter to IDPs from their community currently living in Adigrat. They explained that, despite repeated complaints submitted by their representatives to the regional interim administration, no shelter has been provided to them to date.<sup>183</sup>

The issue of justice extends to the broader context of transitional justice proposed by the Ethiopian government, with 93% of respondents indicating that they do not believe it delivers genuine justice.

**Figure 7- The reason why respondents reject the ongoing Transitional Justice**



The graph shows that most respondents reject Ethiopia’s proposed transitional justice model mainly due to a lack of trust in the Federal Government and its actions. 82% pointed to the

<sup>182</sup> Interview with Dagnaw, Advisor to the Social affairs of the Eastern Zone, Adigrat, April April 19, 2025

<sup>183</sup> Interview with Hagos, Hiluf, and in Adigrat host community, April 25, 2025

government's failure to implement the Pretoria Cessation of Hostilities Agreement and its refusal to acknowledge atrocities or issue an apology. Similarly, 81% said they cannot trust investigations carried out by the federal government nor feel safe to testify, while 80% see the federal government itself as an alleged perpetrator, undermining its legitimacy to lead the process. In addition, 42% stressed that the exclusion of Eritrea from the framework makes accountability incomplete. Overall, the findings indicate that the main barrier is the lack of credibility and inclusivity in the current transitional justice approach.

An IDP currently living in Abiy Adi town said, "I feel we are denied justice by the Federal Government. We could not even get a proper shelter though we want to return to our home."<sup>184</sup> Similarly, an IDP in the same town says, "Two years have already passed since the Pretoria agreement, which is a very long time. Justice for me is restoration to our homes and rehabilitation to our lives. I don't think the Federal Government will render justice to us."<sup>185</sup>

The lack of access to justice by the IDPs is, therefore, clear breach of the right of IDPs to file complaints, access courts, and receive legal assistance and government's obligation to create accessible and impartial systems to ensure accountability enshrined under Principles 20 and 27 of the UN Guiding Principles, article 12(3) of the Kampala Convention and Article 37 of the FDRE Constitution. Hence, the IDPs name their current situation as enduring injustice under displacement.

## **11. Community and Social Networks**

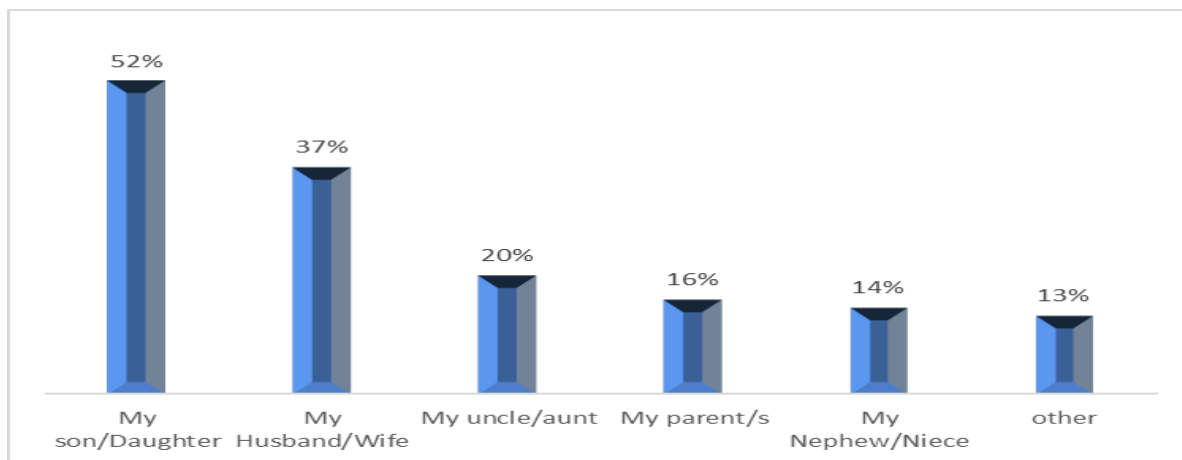
Many families of the IDPs have been torn apart and separated due to the devastating ethnic based campaign against Tigrayans. To escape the horrific attack, family members of a single household dispersed to various random directions some ending in other parts of Tigray, which they assume safe, while others fled to Sudan and to different destinations. This fact resulted in the unexpected separation of so many families as the detail data below indicates.

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<sup>184</sup> Interview with Binyam, TVET IDP Site, AbiyAdi, March 30, 2025

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Frew, Preparatory School IDP Site, Abiyadi, March 29, 2025

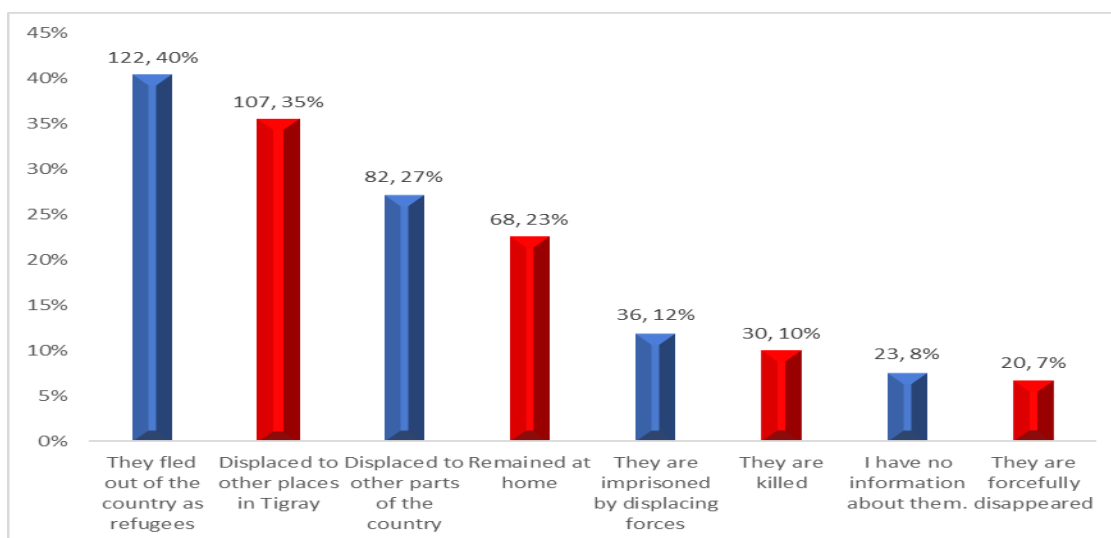
**Figure 8- Respondents who are separated family members**



The above graph reveals that the IDPs are separated at least with one of their immediate relatives, including their son/daughter, spouses, or parent/s. Accordingly, the fact that the separation levels as reported by the respondent states 52% with sons/daughter, 37% with Husband/wife, 20% with uncle/aunt, 16% with parent/s, 14% with nephew/niece, 13% with other relatives respectively reveal the intensity pain the IDPs suffering due to loss or separation and related anxieties.

The whereabouts of those separated immediate relatives of the IDPs are indicated in the following graph.

**Figure 9- The whereabouts of the lost families**



In another question that addresses the level of satisfaction of IDPs with the family reintegration and reunion efforts, only 14% of the respondents are very satisfied or moderately satisfied with family reunion, while 86% are dissatisfied, having issues of reintegration with their families.

On the other hand, community networks that once provided support and solidarity, such as local groups like Tsebel, have been severely disrupted. The breakdown of these social ties means that IDPs often do not meet or connect with others from their communities, further exacerbating their feelings of loneliness and despair. The researchers observed that many elders and priests, who reported they once had strong religious connections with their neighbors, clergy, and religious institutions, now feel deeply neglected.

One reflection of hope is that, in most areas covered in the research, the interactions between IDPs and the host communities have been remarkably positive and encouraging. The generosity of local churches, the sharing of food by the local communal, and the inclusion of IDPs in social events are remarkable. The IDPs in almost all areas of Tigray reported that residents have demonstrated remarkable solidarity by bringing food to IDPs on a turn-by-turn basis. This communal approach not only alleviates food insecurity among displaced families but also strengthens bonds within the community. The integration of IDPs into social events further exemplifies the positive relations between these communities. However, IDPs have reported that the host community appears to be running out of capacity to maintain regular and organized support for them.

The fact that the effort of the government to maintain social networks and reunification of separated IDPs is below the standard required under the UN General Principles on the Internal Displacement and the Kampala convention, which demands reunification “as soon as possible.”

## **12. Responsibility of humanitarian organizations & the international community**

The performance of the international community and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in supporting internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Tigray reveals significant shortcomings. While international human rights laws, such as the ICCPR and ICESCR, establish obligations for states and the international community to protect IDPs, the realities on the ground indicate a broad deficiency in upholding these responsibilities. Reports highlight alarming deficiencies in access to

basic needs. The inadequacy of services provided to IDPs not only violates the fundamental rights of the IDPs and the normative mandates of the international community. This failure to meet basic needs underscores the inadequacy of the international response, which is expected to advocate for humanitarian access and ensure compliance with IHL. International humanitarian law (IHL) further emphasizes the obligation to prevent forced displacement and protect the displaced. The Geneva Conventions mandate that all parties to a conflict respect these laws, yet the situation in Tigray reflects a lack of compliance and accountability.

Moreover, the UN Guiding Principles on IDPs and the Kampala Convention outline the responsibilities of both national authorities and international actors in preventing displacement and supporting durable solutions. However, the ongoing situation in Tigray indicates a lack of effective action. Reports of arbitrary reductions in food aid, as well as the substitution of preferred cereals with less familiar options, highlight the inconsistencies and failures in humanitarian assistance. The process of vulnerability registration has also come under scrutiny, with many IDPs excluded from aid due to logistical oversights and a lack of awareness. This systemic failure to ensure equitable access to humanitarian assistance is particularly concerning, as it disproportionately affects the most vulnerable, including the elderly. The case of individuals being unable to register for aid illustrates a critical gap in the humanitarian response, raising questions about the effectiveness of NGOs in reaching those in need.



## **Conclusion and recommendation**

### **Conclusions**

This study provides a comprehensive and alarming account of the protracted suffering endured by IDPs in Tigray. The findings, drawn from 5,219 respondents across 92 IDP sites and from IDPs living in host-communities in 18 cities and sub-cities in all zones covered in this research using a mixed-methods approach, reveal a humanitarian catastrophe rooted in ethnically motivated displacement and followed by systemic neglect.

The research found out that displacement has been forced by ENDF, EDF, and the Amhara forces often accompanied by serious human rights violations, including targeted killings, mass sexual violence including insertion of foreign elements to victims' vaginas, torture, starvation, enforced disappearance and inhumane treatment, including labor under bushes of women.

Even after displacement, IDPs were subjected to acts of violence and lack of humanitarian aids. Despite Ethiopia's legal obligations under the Kampala Convention, UN Guiding Principles, and its own Constitution, the living conditions of IDPs remain dire. Food aid was found to be inconsistent, insufficient, and often replaced with substandard. The flawed biometric or fingerprint system has excluded many from aid, especially the most vulnerable. Nutritional and NFI support stopped a long time even though the size was not proportional to the demand of the IDPs at the time it was occasionally provided. Though the humanitarian organizations have been trying their best, many IDPs reported that they received only a few months during their four-years stay and others never received anything since their displacement particularly those who are newly arriving.

Another dreadful experience the IDPs are enduring is about the shelter conditions they are accommodated in. The existing shelter conditions are so congested with many relying on plastic-sheet tents erected before three years ago in most cases, exposing the IDPs to extreme natural and man-made risks. Others are still living in unfinished buildings, schools and health institutions and others even in improvised toilets though more than half of the IDPs did not get similar access. Protection mechanisms are nearly nonexistent; IDPs, particularly women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, face heightened vulnerabilities. While the health conditions of the IDPs are complicated, the health services remain rapidly and persistently deteriorating causing the death and suffering of many. The very high toll of psychological trauma and a pervasive sense of

hopelessness among the IDPs, which left the IDPs with deep psychological scars calls for a dedicated and comprehensive separate study.

Access to education for IDPs is also severely limited characterized by a lack of access to any school and, unsuccessful struggle to afford basic educational services. The weak educational conditions compounded with harsh living conditions in the IDPs have led IDP students' high turnover and illegal migration risking their lives in dangerous journeys.

Though the IDPs had a bright hope of return to their homes after the Pretoria Peace Agreement, no significant steps for return are made even after the CoHA. The research found that IDPs feel as if they are abandoned begging for a dignified and secured return to their homes.

This research concludes that the Rights of IDPs, as recognized under international and domestic laws have completely worsened and the Ethiopian government has failed to fulfill its obligations under international and domestic laws. Despite their obligations, the international community, civil society organizations and humanitarian organizations are decreasing their efforts to uphold the rights of IDPs.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the aforementioned findings, the following recommendations are provided for immediate implementation:

The FDRE government and TIRA shall ensure the safe and dignified return of displaced persons to their places of origin, in line with CoHA, the FDRE Constitution, the Kampala Convention and the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. UNHCR and IOM shall provide technical support and independent monitoring. Failing to enable safe return could prolong the suffering of IDPs, and hinder peace-building efforts, thereby violating both the spirit and letter of the CoHA agreement and the aforementioned national, regional, and international laws.

The FDRE government, in coordination with TIRA and supported by development partners such as UNDP and ILO, shall prioritize sustainable livelihood interventions upon return, including skills development, microfinance, psychosocial support, and employment creation, with particular attention to women, youth, and persons with disabilities. Without such measures, returnees risk falling into chronic poverty and aid dependency, jeopardizing long-term peace and economic recovery.

As the study shows that some of the IDPs displaced from other parts of Ethiopia do not want to return to their original places due to security concerns, the Federal Government and TIRA should work together to integrate and establish them in Tigray.

The FDRE government, supported by the Tigray Interim Regional Administration, shall guarantee unimpeded humanitarian operations in accordance with constitutional, regional and international legal obligations. UN agencies and humanitarian organizations should support aid delivery and advocate for increased funding. Failure to fulfill this duty leads to worsening humanitarian conditions, civilian suffering, and violation of national and international laws and a breakdown of international trust.

UNHCR and IOM, in collaboration with the Tigray Interim Administration, shall establish and maintain a comprehensive IDP registration system that is regularly updated and free from exclusionary barriers. Neglecting this duty may result in the exclusion of the most vulnerable IDPs,

such as women, children, and persons with disabilities from vital humanitarian assistance, thus compromising the effectiveness of aid violating the principle of non-discrimination.

The TIRA Bureaus of Women and Social Affairs, Justice, and Security, in partnership with the federal government and relevant UN agencies and other humanitarian actors, shall establish an inter-agency protection coordination platform to safeguard the IDPs in general and the vulnerable populations, particularly women, and children, people with disabilities, elders, those suffering chronic diseases etc. Failure to do so may leave vulnerable populations, especially women and children, unprotected and at risk, while also undermining international human rights obligations.

Given the painful life the IDPs are enduring, we call upon all citizens, diaspora communities, and the international community to extend their vital support and solidarity to alleviate the suffering of the IDPs until they get a lasting solution through returning to their original places and reestablishing.

The TIRA, Human rights organization, Civil Societies, local and international media, diaspora, and the public at large should vigorously advocate for a dignified life and the lasting solution of the IDPs who are in a harrowing situation.

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