

# Ethiopia

## Ethiopia: Introduction

Blessing Chipanda

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Chart 1: Political map of Ethiopia

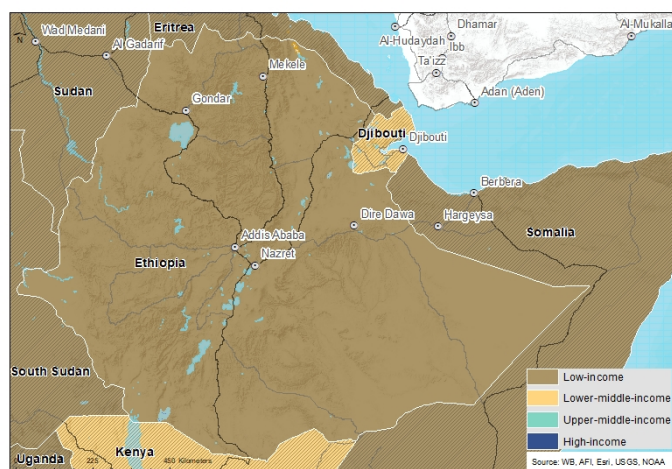


Chart 1 is a political map of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is a low-income country located in the northeast of Africa, in the area known as the Horn of Africa. It is bordered by Eritrea to the north and northeast, Djibouti and Somalia to the east, Sudan and South Sudan to the west, and Kenya to the South. Its proximity to the Middle East and Europe, together with its easy access to the major ports of the Horn of Africa, enhances its international trade. With the secession of Eritrea in 1993, its former province along the Red Sea, Ethiopia became a landlocked country. It is a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and a participant in the recently begun Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA).

It is the largest country in the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda) and the 10<sup>th</sup> in Africa in terms of land mass, occupying a total land area of 1 136 240km<sup>2</sup>. Its geography features rugged mountains, flat-topped plateaus, deep river canyons, rolling plains and lowlands. The Ethiopian highlands are divided by the Great Rift Valley, which starts in Palestine and runs down the Red Sea. Ethiopia has a diverse topography, which results in different climates and precipitation across its regions. Ethiopia's climate is typically tropical in the south-eastern and north-eastern lowland regions but much cooler in the large central highland regions of the country. The mean annual temperatures are around 15-20°C in the high-altitude regions and around 25-30°C in the lowlands. The country's mean annual temperatures are forecast to increase by around 0.44-1.47°C by 2030.

The country has three annual rainfall seasons: 1) *Kiremt* - the main rainy season, which occurs from mid-June to mid-September and accounts for 50-80% of the annual rainfall; 2) *Belg* - less rainfall which occurs from February to May; and 3) *Bega* - dry season rainfall which has colder conditions and occurs from October to December. The increase in *Bega* rainfall would increase crop harvest loss. Hence early planting dates and identifying short-maturing crops during the *Kiremt* are some of the climate adaptation strategies. The mean annual rainfall is estimated at around 2 000mm in the south-western highlands and less than 300mm in the south-eastern and the north-eastern lowlands.

Ethiopia is the only African country with its own Alphabet letters and numbers that date back to ancient times but ethnically diverse with between 45 and 86 spoken languages. Amharic is the official language and a widely used lingua franca. Oromo is spoken by over a third of the population as their main language and is the most widely spoken primary language. Tigrinya is the primary language for over 95% of the population in Tigray, and Afar is the primary language for

over 89% of the population of the Afar region. The country's religious landscape is richly diverse, shaped by a long history, varied cultural influences and deep spiritual traditions. The primary religions practised in Ethiopia are Christianity (with Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity being the most prominent), Islam, and indigenous African religions. Additionally, there are smaller communities of other faiths, including protestant Christianity and Judaism.

It is Africa's oldest independent country, liberated from a five-year occupation by Italy in 1941, through a combined effort of Ethiopian resistance fighters (known as the Arbegnoch Patriots) and allied forces, particularly from the British army. It derived prestige from its uniquely successful military resistance during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Scramble for Africa, becoming the first African country to defeat a European colonial power and retain its sovereignty. It is among the first African independent nations to sign the Charter of the United Nations, and it gave moral and material support to the decolonisation of Africa and to the growth of Pan-African cooperation. These efforts culminated in the establishment of the Organization of African Unity in 1963 (the African Union, since 2002) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), both of which have their headquarters in Addis Ababa – the largest and capital city of Ethiopia, with Dire Dawa and Mek'ele being the second- and third-largest cities. The country has a total of 94 cities and more than 80 ethnic groups, each preserving its own unique customs and traditions.

Ethiopia's political landscape is complex and deeply rooted in its historical, ethnic and socio-economic dynamics. The country is governed under a federal system (a system of government where power is shared between a central authority and smaller regional governments) based on ethnic identities, established by the 1995 constitution. Disputes over resources, land and political power often lead to violence and civil conflicts.

A clash between government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has had devastating effects. Although a peace agreement was reached between the federal government and the TPLF in November 2022, the rising insurgency in Oromia has further strained the country's stability. Despite these challenges, national elections in 2021 were conducted relatively peacefully, leading to a significant victory for the ruling Prosperity Party.

Classified as a terrorist organisation, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) (the largest ethnic group) has been engaged in numerous clashes with the Ethiopian government forces throughout 2024. In April 2024, the OLA forces clashed with the country's troops, which resulted in heavy casualties among government forces. The clash escalated to South Oromia's Guji Zone and other regions around October 2024, where local security forces suffered losses. Peace talks between the government and the OLA have occurred multiple times but have not yet resulted in a formal peace agreement.

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## About the authors

**Dr Blessing Chipanda** joined the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme in January 2023. Before joining the ISS he worked as an assistant lecturer/research assistant at the University of Pretoria, Department of Economics. He is particularly interested in tasks within the wider realm of international trade, development economics, public policy, monetary policy, and econometric modelling. Equally interested in economic and socio-economic activities that impact social welfare. Blessing has a PhD in economics from the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

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