

BRIEFING

Conflict in Tigray: Risks for LGBTQIA+ people

June 2026

Tigray on the brink of renewed conflict

The Tigray region of Ethiopia is experiencing an escalation that threatens to **reignite the Tigrayan conflict**, which claimed an estimated 600,000 lives between 2020 and 2022.¹ The Pretoria Peace Agreement that brought an end to the fighting has not resolved its underlying causes. LGBTQIA+ community members have been in touch with The PRIDE Centre expressing serious concerns for their safety and security as tensions escalate and the urgency of fleeing the region. According to PRIDE Centre methodology estimates, there are **at least 125,000 LGBTQIA+ persons in humanitarian need** in the Tigray region. Key developments include:

- In **January**, clashes erupted in western Tigray between the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF), aligned with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), and the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), allied with Amhara militias.
- [Human Rights First](#), an Ethiopian civil society organisation, has reported that the TPLF has been engaging in forced conscription since **March**. This includes anyone who previously served in the TPLF and members of families who did not previously send a recruit. Young people are being targeted and taken by force at bars, football games, religious sites, and other gathering points.²
- In **May**, the TPLF reinstated the pre-war Tigray regional government, effectively voiding the Pretoria Agreement.³
- On **5 June**, the TPLF announced that a drone strike carried out by the ENDF had struck its troops near the Eritrean border.⁴
- Unverified reports by local journalists circulated since **June** have referenced a draft TPLF proclamation introducing severe criminal penalties – including prison sentences of up to 25 years – for individuals or organisations accused of discouraging military participation or engaging in activities deemed to undermine Tigray's defence effort.⁵

Specific risks facing LGBTQIA+ people in Tigray

Sexual violence

It is well documented that sexual violence against women, girls, men, boys, and LGBTQIA+ persons was committed by all parties to the conflict in 2020- 2022 and was brutal in scale. Sexual assault referral centres in Tigray were, and continue to be, overwhelmed. The caseloads of these centres are almost entirely composed of women and girls; interviews conducted by the PRIDE Centre indicate that boys and **people with diverse SOGIESC fear seeking treatment**. There are also credible allegations that those who have sought treatment have been turned away from government hospitals – meaning that LGBTQIA+ survivors of sexual violence in Tigray have likely received no medical care and have not been tested for HIV or other infections or complications.

Forced conscription

The PRIDE Centre has spoken with LGBTQIA+ individuals who are trying to flee the region due to fears of forced conscription. We have also interviewed LGBTQIA+ people who were forcibly conscripted in the

¹ Financial Times (2023) 'War in Tigray may have killed 600,000 people, peace mediator says', available at www.ft.com/content/2f385e95-0899-403a-9e3b-ed8c24adf4e7

² Human Rights Report (2026) 'A Brief Investigative Report on Forced Military Recruitment in the Tigray Region', available at www.hrfe.org/a-brief-investigative-report-on-forced-military-recruitment-in-the-tigray-region/?fbclid=IwY2xjawSPZjhleHRuA2FlbQlxMABicmlkETf6aHBqCEfhQUJVeUs3ZzNvc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODlwMDg5MgABHq4zrVjoCFERT9JL8-MYMo5uHNQHJROgnogK9Rp5hrwrLSHrjznSF-EvPu9_aem_W4DaB4B6MuyJyaCpbgfUOg

³ The East African (2026) 'Prime Tigray party restores pre-war government in threat to northern Ethiopia peace', available at www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/tigray-party-restores-pre-war-government-threat-ethiopia-peace-5449092

⁴ AFP (2026) 'Ethiopia's Tigray hit by deadly drone strike: dissident authority', available at www.standardmedia.co.ke/africa/article/2001549683/ethiopias-tigray-hit-by-deadly-drone-strike-dissident-authority

⁵ Ethiopian LGBTQIA+ activists have shared and translated Tigrinyan social media posts with the PRODE Centre.

2020 war, both of whom describe **sexual violence as being pervasive within the TPLF**. Queer and gender-diverse men are also targets of targeted violence if they are not perceived as sufficiently masculine.

Targeting under the draft proclamation

The TPLF's draft proclamation's broad provisions – criminalising anything that could be construed as opposition to the TPLF's armed struggle – create acute risks for LGBTQIA+ Tigrayans, who are generally viewed by authorities as a threat to regional security and unity. This risk is especially serious for individuals who have been involved in LGBTQIA+ civil society work.

Regional displacement

The PRIDE Centre's partners have informed us that they are in contact with LGBTQIA+ people who are **preparing to/attempting to flee Tigray**. Information we have received indicates these individuals intend to travel to either Addis Ababa or Kenya in search of safety.

Addis Ababa remains a dangerous destination for Tigrayans overall, and for LGBTQIA+ persons in particular. During the last conflict, the federal government conducted door-to-door searches in the capital, looking for Tigrayans and imprisoning them. Nevertheless, community sources inform us that most LGBTQIA+ Tigrayans they have spoken to are considering this route. Local assistance organisations in Addis have inadequate resources to support substantial new arrivals. In addition, these agencies are concerned about the security and risk exposure.

Some of the PRIDE Centre's partners in Kenya report that they have been contacted by queer Tigrayans who are considering trying to get to Nairobi. Information circulated within the queer Ethiopian community advises asylum seekers to avoid ending up in Kakuma refugee camp, where violence against LGBTQIA+ people is commonplace. The Nairobi-based refugee-led LGBTQIA+ organisations who have been contacted by these Tigrayans also lack resources to provide for them when they arrive.

Recommendations

The PRIDE Centre makes the following recommendations to donors, embassies, UN agencies, and international partners:

1. **Provision of targeted emergency cash assistance to LGBTQIA+ Tigrayans facing urgent protection risks.**
2. **Distribute medical kits and SOGIESC-appropriate dignity kits (including condoms and lubricants, HIV tests and medication, and post-rape care) through existing peer-to-peer networks within Tigray.**
3. **Urgently fund and resource organisations responding to the displacement of queer Tigrayans**
4. **Support the provision of safe shelter in places of displacement.**
