

Midyear update: Ethiopia

The honeymoon period of Abiy Ahmed is over
GENEVA



Maheder Haileselassie Tadesse/AFP

Remember those [10 crises and trends to watch in 2019](#) we presented back in January? We've been keeping an eye on them, reporting on how areas from climate change to political transitions in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo are

impacting humanitarian needs and response. With 2019 just about half over, it's time for an update.

Here's what's changed over the past six months, what we're paying special attention to, and how it may affect the lives and livelihoods of people on the ground. Look for two updates every day this week, including today with returning refugees and Ethiopia.

Be sure to share your thoughts – and ideas for our continuing coverage – at hello@thenewhumanitarian.org or [@newhumanitarian](https://twitter.com/newhumanitarian)

Ethiopia is a giant emerging from an era of tight political control while struggling to improve productivity and economic growth to keep pace with population growth. Chronic poverty and climatic shocks combine with an array of explosive political hotspots to form a complex picture of humanitarian risk.

What's new:

Ethiopia says it has thwarted a coup attempt, in the most serious challenge to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed so far. Hundreds have been arrested in a sweep following the 22 June incident, allegedly engineered by a former general from the Amhara region. Away from the high stakes assassinations and politicking, Ethiopia's low-intensity conflict multiverse continues to expand, with millions suffering humanitarian consequences from clashes and displacement. Added to that are severe power shortages, politicised census planning, a poor rainy season in the southeast, and heavy-handed treatment of the internally displaced population.

Why we're watching:

Abiy's honeymoon period is over. Despite his political reforms, heightened [identity-based violence](#), huge internal displacement, and youth unemployment remain worrying problems. The June coup attempt demonstrates the risks of relaxing previously draconian political controls: the ringleader had been released under Abiy's government after serving years in prison on earlier charges of coup-plotting. Peacemaking with Eritrea has stalled, with borders apparently sealing up after a period of euphoria. Reporting on [forced displacement of people in the Gedeo](#) region appeared for a while to have triggered a change of heart by local authorities on humanitarian access and a greater respect for the principle of voluntary movements. Nevertheless, 2-3 million people are estimated to be displaced due to violence or drought, while the government has embarked on a systematic attempt to send IDPs home, often to an uncertain future. [“Active hostilities” hampered humanitarian work on over 70 occasions in May alone.](#)

Keep in mind:

While Abiy is called upon to make peace in Sudan, he has to steady the ship at home, quell multiple simmering conflicts, and deal with a foreign currency crunch. Ethiopia's

economic reforms include a rich prize: opening up of its phone and data market, which has captured the attention of the communications industry. Other developments to watch: relations with Somalia and Somaliland, and new legislation that may liberalise the licensing and administration of NGOs, whose activities had been [tightly restricted in a 2009 law](#). Ethiopia is pushing a [massive return programme of displaced people](#), the outcomes are as yet unclear.

(TOP PHOTO: Eritrea President Isaias Afwerki, centre, is welcomed by Ethiopia Prime Minister of Abiy Ahmed, right, in Addis Ababa.)

<http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2019/06/28/ethiopia-humanitarian-Abiy-Ahmed>