

# GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX 2025: ETHIOPIA FACTSHEET

## OVERALL GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX SCORE:

**VERY HIGH RISK**

The Global Torture Index 2025 is the first analysis designed to assess the risk of torture and ill-treatment across 26 countries worldwide. This 2025 factsheet for Ethiopia includes an analysis of the country's overall performance, a breakdown by thematic pillars and key recommendations for driving meaningful change in the fight against torture and the promotion of human rights.

## AT A GLANCE

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Torture remains widespread and systemic in Ethiopia, significantly fuelled by ongoing internal conflicts and political instability. For 2025, the Global Torture Index classifies the country as facing a **very high risk** of torture and ill-treatment, based on data collected in 2023 and 2024. Key areas of concern include police brutality, conditions within detention centres and abuses facilitated under emergency laws, particularly in conflict-affected regions such as Tigray, Oromia, Afar, and Amhara. Key violations involve psychological pressure, physical violence, and forced confessions during interrogations and detention. Victims, including political opponents, journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers, judges, religious leaders and various ethnic minority groups like Tigrayans and Amhara, regularly face discriminatory treatment. Torture methods include severe beatings, confinement in cramped spaces, enforced stress positions for long periods, prolonged solitary confinement in military camps, sleep and food deprivation, lack of access to medical care, detention in harsh climatic conditions and the alarming practice of incommunicado detention, all aimed at silencing dissent or extracting confessions.

Following the promising reforms of 2018—which included greater civic freedoms, judicial and media reforms, and the closure of notorious detention centres known for torture—Ethiopia has experienced a sharp reversal since 2021. The country has entered a period marked by lawlessness and widespread repression, often justified under repeated states of emergency. These emergency declarations have paved the way for systemic human rights violations, enabling arbitrary arrests and prolonged detentions without judicial review. Human rights defenders (HRDs) have been disproportionately affected, with over 50 detained in 2023 alone. Ethiopia has failed to align its anti-torture framework with international standards. The current Criminal Code provides an [inadequate definition of torture](#) and imposes minimal penalties, undermining accountability and enabling abuse to persist with impunity.

Precise data on torture incidents remain limited due to underreporting, denial of access for detention monitoring, fear of reprisals, and ineffective complaint mechanisms. Nevertheless, documented reports indicate a notable increase in arbitrary killings and enforced disappearances involving state security forces. Detention centres suffer critical overcrowding, **with occupancy rates exceeding 120%, leading to conditions that facilitate systemic abuses**. Over the past three years, Awash Arba military camp, located in the Afar region, situated 220 kilometres east of Addis Ababa, has become the preferred facility for mass incarceration and torture of dissenting voices, particularly during periods of public protest and states of emergency. Human rights defenders frequently face arbitrary detention, prolonged incarceration without due process and charges under ambiguous anti-terrorism and hate speech laws, demonstrating the state's willingness to silence critics. The frequency and severity of these practices suggest torture and related abuses are significantly underreported, highlighting a concerning lack of transparency and accountability.

The Ethiopian justice system provides minimal effective remedies for victims of torture. Adequate legal aid, psychological assistance and meaningful access to justice remain rare. Complaint mechanisms lack independence and are marred by threats, intimidation, and reprisals against complainants and their families. There is no National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) in the country. Although the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) performs oversight functions, its effectiveness is limited by insufficient resources, a limited mandate and questions regarding its operational independence from the government.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

|  |  |  |  |  |   |   |
|--|--|--|--|--|---|---|
|   |   |   |   |  |  |        |
| <b>Type of government:</b><br>Federal Republic                                     | <b>United Nations Convention Against Torture:</b><br>Ratified                      | <b>OPCAT ratification:</b><br>Not ratified   | <b>Population:</b><br>128 million  | <b>People deprived of liberty:</b><br>110,000                                      | <b>Prison population (per 100,000 of national population):</b><br>99                | <b>Pre-trial detainees / remand prisoners (percentage of prison population):</b><br>14.9% |
|  |  |  |  |  |   |   |
| <b>Documented Detained Human Rights Defenders:</b><br>No Data                      | <b>Alerts Issued by the Observatory for Human Rights Defenders in 2024:</b><br>5   | <b>Prison Occupancy level:</b><br>120%   | <b>Homicide rate (per 100.000 people):</b><br>7.6                                  |  |   |   |

## THEMATIC PILLAR OVERVIEW



### I. POLITICAL COMMITMENT

**INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK**

Ethiopia demonstrates limited political commitment to effectively eliminating torture and is hindered by significant legislative and practical gaps. Notably, Ethiopia has not ratified several critical international instruments, including the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture, the International Criminal Court, or the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR aimed at abolishing the death penalty. Additionally, the government has yet to accept the competence of the Committee Against Torture (CAT) to receive individual complaints under Article 22 of the UN CAT. The state has consistently delayed its reporting obligations to the UN CAT by almost 12 years, demonstrating limited engagement with international human rights mechanisms. Relations between the government and civil society organisations are strained, with CSOs frequently facing reprisals and limited consultations during human rights reporting processes. Moreover, there is no specific national law or public policy dedicated to the prevention of torture, and the government has allocated no budget to addressing or preventing torture. There is a fundamental lack of political will to systematically address torture and ensure compliance with international standards.



## II. ENDING POLICE BRUTALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

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**INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK**

Although the national legal framework in Ethiopia addresses the use of excessive force, it lacks effective safeguards aligned with international standards. Law enforcement officers sometimes employ physical violence, psychological intimidation and even forced disappearance during apprehensions and interrogations. Victims include political dissidents, journalists and individuals from marginalised ethnic communities, who often face discriminatory treatment and violence. **Ethiopia's frequent states of emergency** exacerbate these conditions, granting authorities expanded powers to detain suspects indefinitely without judicial oversight or adequate legal representation, heightening the risk of abuse. Several reports state that **incommunicado detention is practiced in Ethiopia**, often denying detainees access to lawyers and family members for weeks or even months. In politically motivated cases, the right to bail is often denied even after court decisions. Following the August 2023 state of emergency, thousands of individuals in the Amhara region, as well as ethnic Amhara people were reportedly detained arbitrarily. Moreover, the absence of mandatory video recording during interrogations or arrests makes the independent verification of police conduct difficult, further entrenching a culture of impunity. Complaints against law enforcement rarely result in accountability or disciplinary action, and investigations typically lack independence and effectiveness.



## III. FREEDOM FROM TORTURE WHILE DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

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**INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK**

Detention conditions in Ethiopia significantly compromise the right to freedom from torture. Facilities are critically overcrowded, **with occupancy rates exceeding 120%**, leading to inadequate sanitation, poor ventilation, insufficient lighting, and limited access to food, clothing and medical care. Upon arrival, detainees rarely receive mental health assessments or adequate medical attention. Medical examinations following the use of force are typically insufficient, lacking thorough documentation and judicial reporting obligations.

Punitive and degrading practices, such as corporal and collective punishment, denial of family contact, restrictive diets and restricted drinking water are frequently employed against detainees. Solitary confinement lacks adequate safeguards and is routinely applied, potentially affecting vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and mothers with infants. Ethnic groups, notably Tigrayan and Amhara detainees, are regularly subjected to discriminatory and intrusive body searches.

Moreover, complaint mechanisms are largely ineffective: detainees reporting abuses rarely receive independent medical examinations and often experience reprisals, including violence, intimidation, invasive searches, disciplinary sanctions and isolation. Ethiopian authorities rarely permit independent monitoring by civil society organisations; recently, even the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission was denied access to detention facilities.



## IV. ENDING IMPUNITY

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**INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK**

There are critical gaps in investigation, prosecution and judicial processes in the country. Torture cases are frequently downgraded by judges and prosecutors, characterised as lesser offenses such as ‘abuse of power’ or simple injuries, thus diminishing accountability for perpetrators. **Investigations conducted by military tribunals, as permitted by Ethiopian law, are often slow, and lack independence, thoroughness and impartiality.** Victims are burdened with proving their allegations, amplifying their vulnerability, and discouraging complaints. To make matters worse, **complainants usually have to file allegations at the same facilities where the alleged torture occurred, exposing them to reprisals and intimidation.** In 2021, the OHCHR–EHRC Joint Investigation concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that war crimes and crimes against humanity had been committed by all parties. No senior military or government officials have been prosecuted in relation to war crimes or crimes against humanity.

Legal assistance is scarce, particularly in rural and marginalised areas, and victims rarely have access to free, effective legal aid. Ethiopia lacks a specialised prosecution unit for torture and human rights violations, and budgetary resources allocated to investigations remain insufficient. Judicial procedures often lack independence; judges investigating abuses face threats or reprisals. Lawyers who provide legal advice and representation to torture victims have also faced harassment and threats, forcing them to withdraw their representation.



## V. VICTIM'S RIGHTS

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**INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK**

In Ethiopia, victims of torture face significant barriers to justice and effective rehabilitation resulting from fundamental gaps in the legal and institutional framework. There is no national law specifically defining who constitutes a victim of torture, nor is there legislation guaranteeing effective judicial remedies or specialised rehabilitation services for survivors. **The absence of explicit legal provisions severely restricts victims' access to adequate rehabilitation, justice and redress.** Officials who work with torture survivors rarely receive specialised training, leaving them ill-equipped to address victims' trauma with sensitivity. State-provided support and reparation mechanisms are severely limited. Victims rarely receive official acknowledgement, restitution of rights (such as employment or property), or public recognition of their suffering. Collective reparations for communities impacted by systematic abuses are nearly non-existent. There is a general lack of targeted rehabilitation programmes specifically for torture survivors, forcing victims to depend on generic human rights violation programmes with limited participation of NGOs. **Civil society organisations attempting to provide rehabilitation or support services often face significant restrictions and intimidation from authorities,** further limiting victims' access to adequate care, support and effective rehabilitation measures.



## VI. PROTECTION FOR ALL

**INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK**

In Ethiopia, the protection of vulnerable groups from violence, abuse and discrimination remains severely inadequate. Several grave human rights violations, including marital rape, intimate partner violence and femicide, are not explicitly criminalised, and state intervention is limited and insufficiently implemented. Although less common today than in previous generations, female genital mutilation (FGM) is still practised in Ethiopia. **Statistics show that 25 million women have undergone FGM in Ethiopia, making it the largest absolute number in Eastern and Southern Africa.** This figure represents 65% of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years. The incidence of femicide has significantly increased, yet effective state actions to combat the issue remain absent. Violence against children continues due to inadequate reporting mechanisms, ineffective prosecution and the widespread tolerance of corporal punishment under domestic discipline norms. Discrimination and violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals persist due to the criminalisation of same-sex relations, coupled with societal hostility and recent government crackdowns.

Indigenous communities frequently experience forced evictions and unauthorised military operations on their lands compounded by a lack of culturally appropriate protective measures. In national security contexts, anti-terrorist legislation is frequently misused to target non-violent political advocates or human rights defenders, who are often labelled as 'enemies of the state' or 'foreign agents.'



## VII. RIGHT TO DEFEND AND CIVIC SPACE

**INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK**

In Ethiopia, human rights defenders (HRDs) face severe restrictions and systematic harassment, significantly obstructing independent human rights work. The frequent declaration of states of emergency, such as the one initially imposed in 2023 and extended into 2024, has intensified an already hostile environment. These measures have been used to target HRDs, with prolonged detentions and arbitrary arrests becoming common practices. The continued use of the anti-terrorism legislation and emergency proclamations to suppress dissent indicates that further reforms are needed to ensure the protection of HRDs' rights. Human rights organisations have repeatedly voiced concerns regarding the misuse of emergency powers and anti-terror legislation to silence dissent, as ambiguous provisions are often weaponised against activists, journalists and civil society members.

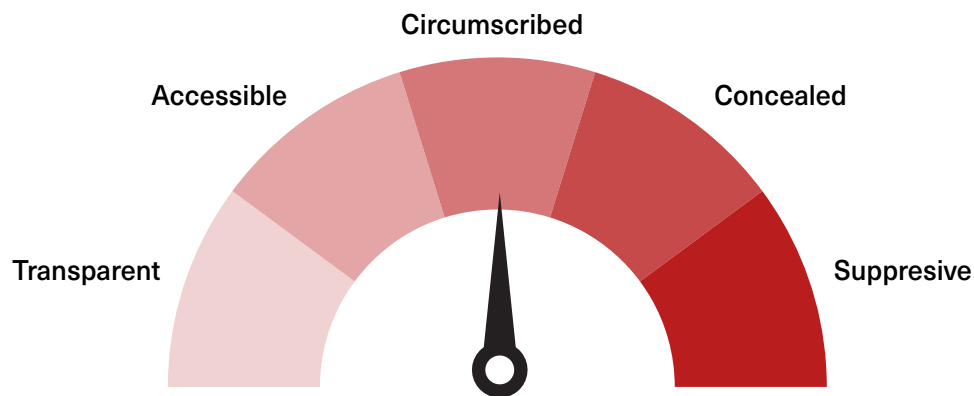
The legal environment compounds these threats. Ethiopian law does not provide specific protection mechanisms or policies for HRDs; instead, restrictive laws like the anti-terrorism proclamation and vague criminal code provisions related to national security, hate speech, the revised media law (recently adopted by the Ethiopian Parliament) and foreign interference severely hinder human rights advocacy. HRDs, including journalists, face smear campaigns designed to damage their reputations and silence their voices. The fear and uncertainty caused by harassment and the threat of detention lead many HRDs to self-censor to avoid legal repercussions and serious charges. Arresting HRDs and journalists under anti-terrorism laws, detaining them for long periods without conviction, and then releasing them after prolonged court proceedings has become common practices. **Over 50 HRDs were detained in 2023,** some of whom were charged under terrorism provisions. Moreover, women's rights defenders suffer additional violence and discrimination. More than 200 journalists have been forced into exile since 2020. Independent monitoring and human rights reporting have been severely curtailed, with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission recently denied entry to detention facilities, and its independence undermined by the recent leadership change, reflecting the government's broader reluctance to enable meaningful human rights oversight. In 2024, The Authority for Civil Society Organisations (ACSO) suspended 5 of the most critical human rights organisations allegedly for administrative non-compliance, such as failure to submit annual reports.

# TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

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The Global Torture Index rates the access to information and transparency available in each country when measuring and assessing the risks of torture and ill-treatment. It considers the availability of information, as well as the obstacles faced by civil society organisations in collecting data and their ability to access it. Data access must be guaranteed in every society, both in law and in practice, to ensure state transparency and accountability. It enables organisations, journalists and individuals to request information on public bodies, protocols, and statistics on human rights violations. This indicator reflects the challenges in accessing information within a country, with each country and territory assigned a rating as Suppressive, Concealed, Circumscribed, Accessible or Transparent.

Ethiopia's country score is **circumscribed** based on our evaluation of its current level of transparency and access to information.



# ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE IN ETHIOPIA: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Index includes 5 recommendations for Ethiopia, taken from the [Index webpage](#), which will serve as references in upcoming editions to monitor achievements within the anti-torture movement.

1. Enact a specific law to prevent and prohibit torture, providing a clear definition and criminalisation of torture in full compliance with the Convention against Torture.
2. Strengthen collaboration and communication with various mechanisms dedicated to the prevention of torture and the protection of victims, including the UN Committee against Torture, the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, the Special Rapporteur on Torture, the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, and Arbitrary Executions and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression.
3. Eliminate the practice of detaining individuals in unofficial detention centres and military camps, ensuring that every individual is granted legal protections and due process.
4. Prioritise and take decisive action to combat gender-based violence against women and girls, particularly violence perpetrated by intimate partners, and establish comprehensive legislative and institutional frameworks that provide proper protection for torture survivors, their families, and witnesses testifying against perpetrators.
5. Implement national legislation and adopt policies to protect HRDs, ensuring the release of those detained for their work, ending all forms of intimidation and harassment and fostering an environment that allows them to operate freely.



## FURTHER RESOURCES

For further information, the complete 2025 Torture Index—including detailed data visualisations, FAQs, the methodology, and more—can be accessed on our website: <https://www.omct.org/en/global-torture-index>. Should you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at [tortureindex@omct.org](mailto:tortureindex@omct.org).

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