pcgn
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Ethiopia

Country name	Ethiopia
State title	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
Name of citizen	Ethiopian
Official language[1]	Amharic (*amh*)[2]
Country name in official language	ኢትዮጵያ (Ītyop'iya)
State title in official language (romanized in brackets)	የኢትዮጵያ ፌዴራላዊ ዴሞክራሲያዊ ሪፐብሊክ (YeĪtyop'iya Fēdēralawī Dēmokirasīyawī Rīpeblīk)
Script	Amharic (also seen as Ge'ez or Ethiopic script[3])
Romanization System	[BGN/PCGN Romanization of Amharic](), 1967
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	ET/ETH
Capital (Conventional name)	Addis Ababa[4]
Capital in official language (romanized in brackets)	አዲስ አበባ (Ādīs Ābeba)[5]
Population	c.115 million[6]

Introduction

Ethiopia is a landlocked country in the Horn of Africa, sharing international boundaries with Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan and South Sudan. It is similar in size to South Africa and Egypt, and is the 2nd most populous country in Africa (after Nigeria). Until 1993, Eritrea was incorporated as part of Ethiopia. Ethiopia was occupied by Italy from 1936 to 1941, but otherwise has not been colonised by a European power.

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[1] As of February 2020, four regional languages have been elevated to the status of working federal government languages: Oromo; Tigrinya; Somali and Afar.

[2] ISO 639 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

[3] Ge'ez (or Ethiopic) is a group name for a number of alphabets, including Tigrinya and Amharic: they are 'abugida' scripts, in which each character carries an inherent vowel (e.g. ባ = 'ba'; በ = 'be').

[4] PCGN usually recommends using the conventional name in English text and the romanized form on maps, though determination as to the appropriate form can be made according to context.

[5] Finfinne in Oromo language.

[6] [UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2020 estimate]()

Geographical names policy

PCGN policy for geographical names in Ethiopia is to apply the BGN/PCGN 1967 Romanization System for Amharic to names in their original script forms. This system is used on official US and UK cartographic products.

The official body for geospatial information in Ethiopia is the Ethiopian Geospatial Information Agency (EGIA) (formerly Ethiopian Mapping Agency). This body has, in the past, collaborated with a number of external organisations to produce mapping over Ethiopia, including the UK Directorate of Overseas Survey in the 1970s. There is little current mapping available produced by EGIA, so names often need to be sourced from a variety of secondary or rather old sources. Most such sources will not be romanized according to the BGN/PCGN romanization system; if in doubt please contact PCGN. The US Board on Geographic Names Geographic Names Server can also be used as a source of names in Ethiopia.

Languages

Amharic is the national language. Only about 28% of the population are native Amharic speakers, and some 30%+ of the population speak it as their second language. It is the language of instruction in primary schools in Ādīs Ābeba and in most major towns (elsewhere the local language is used).

As of February 2020, four regional languages have been elevated to the status of working federal government languages alongside Amharic: Oromo (*orm*); Tigrinya (*tir*); Somali (*som*) and Afar (*aar*). Prior to this, Amharic had been considered the working language of the federal government, with English also widely used and this latter being the principal language of instruction in secondary and tertiary education.

In total, some 85 different languages are spoken in Ethiopia: Amharic and Oromo (also known as Afaan Oromoo or Oromiffa) are the most commonly spoken languages, accounting for over 60% of the population.

Script

Amharic uses the Ge'ez or Ethiopic syllabic script. This script is written from left to right and each symbol represents a syllable consisting of a consonant and a vowel. This script is unique to the horn of Africa; it is also used to write the Tigrinya language and a number of non-national languages in the region. The other federal languages, Oromo, Somali and Afar, are written in Roman script.

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Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings[7]):

The **BGN/PCGN Romanization system for Amharic** contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
Ā	0100	ā	0101
Ī	012A	ī	012B
Ē	0112	ē	0113

The system also includes apostrophes (encoding 2019) and inverted apostrophes (2018).

Map of Ethiopia

Note: this map is for illustrative purposes. It is not to be taken as necessarily representing the view of the UK Government on boundaries or political status.

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[7] See www.unicode.org. Characters can be manually input into Microsoft Word documents by typing in these character codes and then holding down the ALT key and pressing /x/. The code will change to the required character. The letter can be copied and pasted into other programmes if required. Alternatively, the 'Insert – Symbol' command can be used; the code can be entered into the 'Character code' box which will show the corresponding letter. A GeoNames Soft-Copy Keyboard can be downloaded from the NGA website and used to enter the required letter-diacritic combinations for a particular region: http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/gns_services.html

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Administrative structure

Ethiopia is divided into 12 regional states (Amharic = *Kilil* [sing.]) and two self-governing cities (Amharic = *Āstedader* [sing.]) - Ādīs Ābeba and Dirē Dawa – at the first-order administrative level (ADM1). Four regional states are recent creations: Sīdama was created from part of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples in June 2020 and Debub M'irab Ītyop'iya Hizboch (Southwest Ethiopia Peoples) in November 2021. The remainder of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples was split into Debub Ītyop'iya (South Ethiopia) and Ma'ikelawī Ītyop'iya (Central Ethiopia) in August 2023.

As English is also spoken widely in Ethiopia, an anglicised form of the region names is given in the second column. PCGN often recommends including these as a bracketed reference, or even alone, on maps and in text.

Romanized form (short form in bold)	Acceptable Anglicised Name	ISO 3166-2 code[8]	Centre	Location of centre
Āfar Kilil	Afar	ET-AF	Āsayita/Semera [9]	1134N 4126E/ 1147N 4100E
Āmara Kilil	Amhara	ET-AM	Bahir Dar	1136N 3723E
Bīnshangul Gumuz Kilil	Benishangul-Gumuz	ET-BE	Āsosa	1004N 3432E
Ye**Debub Ītyop'iya** Kilil	South Ethiopia	-	Welayta Sodo	0651N 3747E
Gambēla Hizboch Kilil	Gambela Peoples	ET-GA	Gambēla	0815N 3435E
Hārerī Hizb Kilil	Harari People	ET-HA	Hārer	0919N 4207E
Ye**Ma'ikelawī Ītyop'iya** Kilil	Central Ethiopia	-	Hosa'ina [10]	0733N 3751E
Oromīya Kilil	Oromia	ET-OR	Ādīs Ābeba*	0902N 3842E
Sīdama Kilil	Sidama	ET-SI	Hāwasa[11]	0703N 3828E
Sumalē Kilil	Somalia	ET-SO	Jijiga	0921N 4248E
Tigray Kilil	Tigray	ET-TI	Mek'elē	1330N 3929E
Ye**Debub M'irab Ītyop'iya Hizboch** Kilil	Southwest Ethiopia Peoples	ET-SW	Bonga	0717N 3615E
Ādīs Ābeba Āstedader	Addis Ababa	ET-AA	Ādīs Ābeba*	0902N 3842E
Dirē Dawa Āstedader	Dire Dawa	ET-DD	Dirē Dawa	0935N 4152E

*Ādīs Ābeba serves as the centre of Oromia region as well as being a self-governing city and the capital of Ethiopia.

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[8] The two newest states have not yet been allocated ISO 3166 subdivision codes.

[9] It is planned that Semera – a newly built city – will become the capital of the Afar Region. It is not clear whether this transition has yet taken place.

[10] On its creation some sources showed the centre as Welk'īt'ē, though it is now believed to have been authoritatively determined as Hosa'ina.

[11] Formerly Āwasa.

Territorial and boundary issues

After the long war of secession, resulting in Eritrea's independence in 1993, Ethiopia and Eritrea were at war again 1998-2000. The war centred on the boundary between the two countries, focussing most keenly on the border town of Badme (14° 43' 39" N, 037° 48' 11" E). The UN-founded Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) ruled in favour of Eritrea in 2002, and a subsequent demarcation phase concluded in 2007, though no peace agreement was signed until 2018 and it is believed that Ethiopia still occupies the town.

In late 2020, internal ethnic tensions became military action between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian forces, and this action has brought about an ongoing (as described by the UN) humanitarian crisis. It is believed that some 2 million people are now internally displaced and there are reports that Eritrean troops have also become involved in the Tigray war.

Other Significant Locations

PCGN Approved Name	Name in Amharic (with romanization)	Variant Names/Spellings and Notes	Location	Feature Type
Blue Nile (Ābay Wenz)	አባይ ወንዝ (Ābay Wenz)		12°00'00"N 37°15'00"E[12]	river
Badme	ባድመ (Badme)	*See note above*	14°43'39"N 37°48'11"E	town
Dalol[13]	ዳሎል (Dalol)	Dallol	14°14'20"N 40°17'36"E	settlement (ruined)
Danakil Depression[14]	*unknown*		14°14'30"N 40°18'00"E	depression
Danakil Desert[15]	*unknown*		14°14'30"N 40°18'00"E	desert
Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam[16]	ታላቁ የኢትዮጵያ ሕዳሴ ግድብ (*Talak'u YeĪtyop'iya Hidasē Gidib*)	Millennium Dam; Hidase Dam	11°12'55"N 35°05'35"E	dam
Lake Rudolf (Lake Turkana)	*unknown*	Principally in Kenya, but as an international feature, PCGN recommends using the conventional name rather than the Kenyan name in primary position.	03°35'00"N 36°07'00"E	lake
T'ana Hāyk	ጣና ሐይቅ (T'ana Hāyk)	Lake Tana	12°00'00"N 37°15'00"E	lake

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[12] The Blue Nile originates in Lake Tana so given coordinates are the same.

[13] Settlement with the highest recorded global average temperature.

[14] The Danakil Depression, within the desert and one of the lowest and hottest places on earth, is usually considered as lying solely within Ethiopia.

[15] The desert covers part of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti.

[16] A source of significant regional controversy because of the possible impacts on downstream water flow.

Useful references

- BBC Country Profile: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13349398
- BGN/PCGN System for the Romanization of Amharic
- CIA World Factbook: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/
- Ethnologue: http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=ET (for information on languages)
- FCDO Travel Advice: https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/ethiopia
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#home
- Omniglot: www.omniglot.com (for information on languages and scripts)
- PCGN Country Names list: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names
- Unicode: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: http://earth-info.nga.mil/gns/html/index.html

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