

## Ethiopia

<b>Country name</b>	Ethiopia
<b>State title</b>	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
<b>Name of citizen</b>	Ethiopian
<b>Official language<sup>1</sup></b>	Amharic ( <i>amh</i> ) <sup>2</sup>
<b>Country name in official language</b>	ኢትዮጵያ (Ītyop'īya)
<b>State title in official language (romanized in brackets)</b>	የኢትዮጵያ ፌዴራልዊ ዲሞክራሲያዊ ሪፐብሊክ (YeĪtyop'īya Fēdēralawī Dēmokirasīyawī Rīpeblīk)
<b>Script</b>	Amharic (also seen as Ge'ez or Ethiopic script <sup>3</sup> )
<b>Romanization System</b>	<a href="#">BGN/PCGN Romanization of Amharic, 1967</a>
<b>ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)</b>	ET/ETH
<b>Capital (Conventional name)</b>	Addis Ababa <sup>4</sup>
<b>Capital in official language (romanized in brackets)</b>	አዲስ አበባ (Ādīs Ābeba) <sup>5</sup>
<b>Population / Area</b>	135 million <sup>6</sup> / 1.10 million km <sup>2</sup>

### 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

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

<sup>2</sup> ISO 639 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

<sup>3</sup> 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. እ = 'ba'; እ = 'be').

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Finfinne in Oromo language.

<sup>6</sup> UN Population Fund estimate, 2025

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## 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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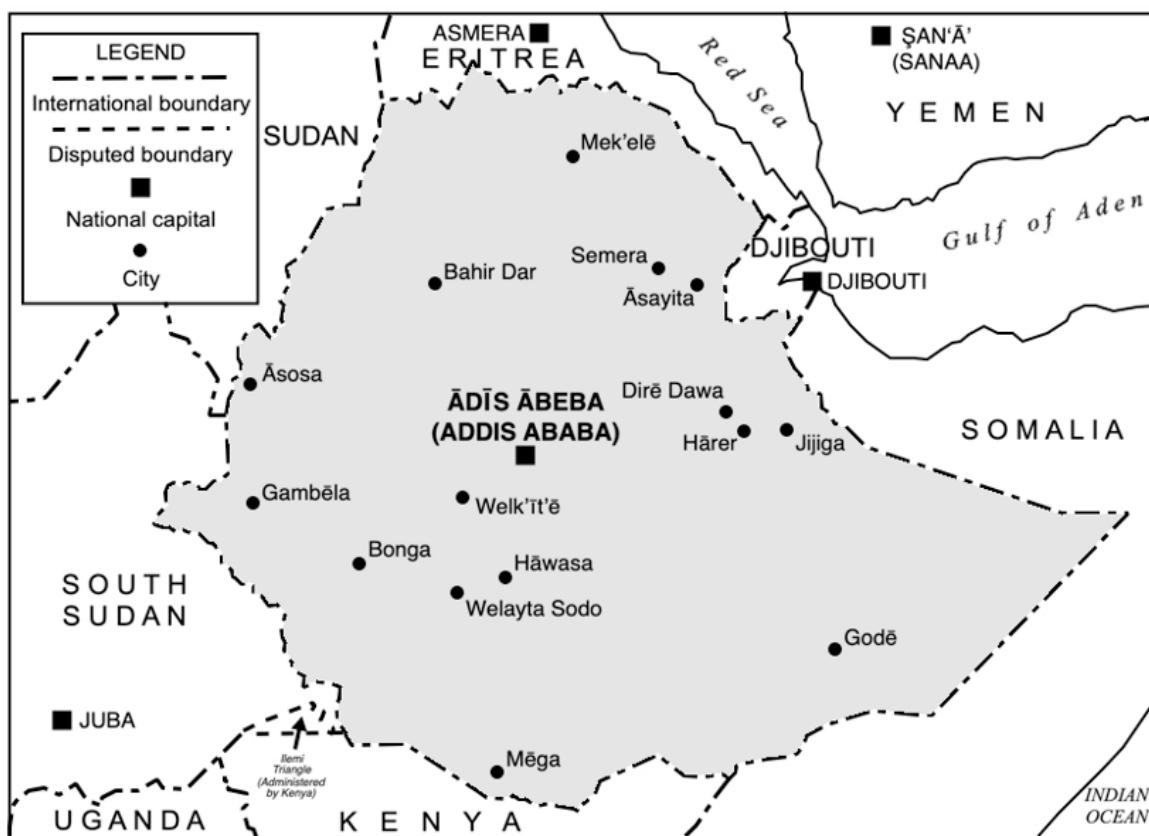
### Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings<sup>7</sup>):

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.*

<sup>7</sup> See [www.unicode.org](http://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](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 <sup>8</sup>	Centre	Location of centre
<b>Āfar Kilil</b>	Afar	ET-AF	Āsayita/Semera <sup>9</sup>	1134N 4126E/ 1147N 4100E
<b>Āmara Kilil</b>	Amhara	ET-AM	Bahir Dar	1136N 3723E
<b>Bīnshangul Gumuz Kilil</b>	Benishangul-Gumuz	ET-BE	Āsosa	1004N 3432E
<b>YeDebub Ītyop'iya Kilil</b>	South Ethiopia	-	Welayta Sodo	0651N 3747E
<b>Gambēla Hizboch Kilil</b>	Gambela Peoples	ET-GA	Gambēla	0815N 3435E
<b>Hārerī Hizb Kilil</b>	Harari People	ET-HA	Hārer	0919N 4207E
<b>YeMa'ikelawī Ītyop'iya Kilil</b>	Central Ethiopia	-	Hosa'ina <sup>10</sup>	0733N 3751E
<b>Oromīya Kilil</b>	Oromia	ET-OR	Ādīs Ābeba*	0902N 3842E
<b>Sīdama Kilil</b>	Sidama	ET-SI	Hāwasa <sup>11</sup>	0703N 3828E
<b>Sumalē Kilil</b>	Somalia	ET-SO	Jijiga	0921N 4248E
<b>Tigray Kilil</b>	Tigray	ET-TI	Mek'elē	1330N 3929E
<b>YeDebub M'irab Ītyop'iya Hizboch Kilil</b>	Southwest Ethiopia Peoples	ET-SW	Bonga	0717N 3615E
<b>Ādīs Ābeba Āstedader</b>	Addis Ababa	ET-AA	Ādīs Ābeba*	0902N 3842E
<b>Dirē Dawa Āstedader</b>	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.

<sup>8</sup> The two newest states have not yet been allocated ISO 3166 subdivision codes.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> Formerly Āwasa.

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## 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 <sup>12</sup>	river
Badme	ባድመ (Badme)	<i>See note above</i>	14°43'39"N 37°48'11"E	town
Dalol <sup>13</sup>	ዳላል (Dalol)	Dalol	14°14'20"N 40°17'36"E	settlement (ruined)
Danakil Depression <sup>14</sup>	<i>unknown</i>		14°14'30"N 40°18'00"E	depression
Danakil Desert <sup>15</sup>	<i>unknown</i>		14°14'30"N 40°18'00"E	desert
Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam <sup>16</sup>	ታላቁ የኢትዮጵያ ስኩርና ግድብ (Talak'u Yełtyop'iya Hidasē Gidib)	Millennium Dam; Hidase Dam	11°12'55"N 35°05'35"E	dam
Lake Turkana (Lake Rudolf)	<i>unknown</i>	Principally in Kenya, Turkana is the Kenyan name, and as an international feature, PCGN recommends retaining the conventional name (Rudolf) as a secondary reference	03°35'00"N 36°07'00"E	lake
T'ana Hāyk	ጥና ሲያቅ (T'ana Hāyk)	Lake Tana	12°00'00"N 37°15'00"E	lake

<sup>12</sup> The Blue Nile originates in Lake Tana so given coordinates are the same.

<sup>13</sup> Settlement with the highest recorded global average temperature.

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

<sup>15</sup> The desert covers part of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti.

<sup>16</sup> A source of significant regional controversy because of the possible impacts on downstream water flow.

**TOPOONYMIC FACTFILE****Useful references**

- BBC Country Profile (no longer updated): <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](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](http://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](http://www.unicode.org)
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: <http://earth-info.nga.mil/gns/html/index.html>

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[www.gov.uk/pcgn](http://www.gov.uk/pcgn)  
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