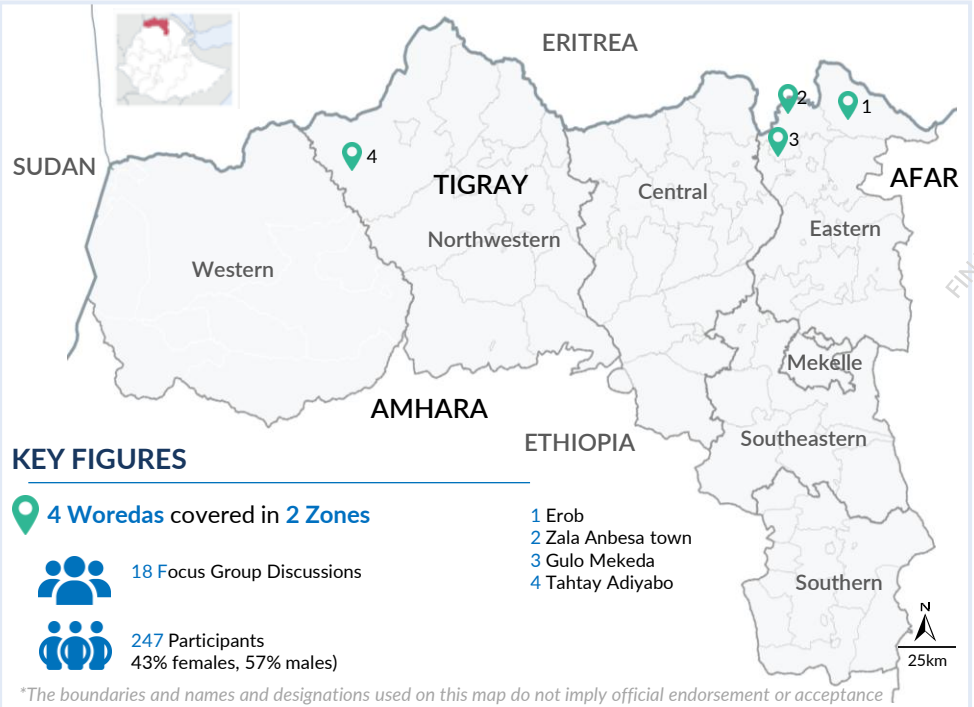
ETHIOPIA | PROTECTION MONITORING AND SOLUTIONS (PMS)

Tigray Region | Eastern and Northwestern Zones | July 2025

OVERVIEW

The EU-funded IM3 project provides sustainable support to individuals displaced by conflict and natural disasters, as well as to their host communities, across the Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Tigray regions. Implemented through a coordinated partnership led by UNHCR in collaboration with GIZ, IOM, ERCS, and IHS, the project aims to strengthen protection, livelihoods, and resilience among conflict-affected populations in Tigray. In line with its continued engagement since the onset of the conflict, UNHCR conducted Protection Monitoring and Solutions activities in selected woredas where the EU-IM3 project is being implemented, building on previous assessments undertaken in the Central Zone of Tigray.

UNHCR, in partnership with DRC, IHS, IMC, IOM, IRC, MfM, NRC, OSSHD, PAD, PIN, RADO, UNFPA, UNOHCHR, and WHO, conducted PMS Assessment from July 1–5, 2025



KEY FIGURES

4 Woredas covered in **2 Zones**

18 Focus Group Discussions

247 Participants
43% females, 57% males)

1 Erob
2 Zala Anbesa town
3 Gulo Mekeda
4 Tahtay Adiyabo

*The boundaries and names and designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

Figure 1: Locations of PMS Assessment

The PMS assessment, conducted in 4 Woredas across the Eastern and Northwestern zones of Tigray. aimed to determine the safety and viability of return areas, many of which have been inaccessible and insecure. It focused on identifying protection risks for returning IDPs as well as ongoing concerns for IDPs and host communities, ensuring all groups' needs are considered in planning voluntary and safe returns. It also explored durable solutions by examining livelihood prospects, reintegration possibilities, and social cohesion. Engaging with communities and authorities helped identify potential tensions and support conditions for sustainable and stable long-term reintegration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Methodology and Limitations 1
Safety and Security 2
Protection Concerns 2
Humanitarian Needs and Assistance 3
Coping Mechanisms 3
Landmines and Unexploded Ordnances (UXOs) 4
Livelihoods and Economic Empowerment 4
Legal and Public Services 5
Community Structures and Participation 5
Contextual analysis and Considerations for Safe Returns 6
Key Recommendations 6

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The assessment used a quantitative and qualitative approach, combining focus group discussions with IDPs, IDP Returnees and Host Communities, and direct field observation.

- **18 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** organized for 247 participants of which 105 are females (43%) and 142 males (57%).
- The assessment covered **4 Woredas/ Admin3 Areas**: Gulo Mekeda, Erob, & Zala Anbesa town in the Eastern zone and Tahtay Adiyabo in the Northwestern zone.

Limitations included restricted access due to security constraints, exclusion of sensitive questions in areas with the presence of armed actors, and limited time on the ground, which constrained in-depth consultations. Consequently, the findings primarily reflect accessible areas recently vacated by external forces and may not fully represent locations still affected by ongoing military presence.

FINDINGS OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

This section reflects the findings of the 18 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) held with IDP returnees & host community/affected population to assess the durability of their returns, social cohesion, HLP issues, participation, safety and security, and participation in public affairs

A total of 247 (105F) respondents participated across 18 focus group discussions, providing valuable insights into the situation of IDP returnees, IDPs and host community as well.

18 Focus Groups

247 Respondents

43% Female

57% Male

Safety and Security

FINAL

39% Reported they FEEL SAFE in their areas or community

Woreda	Feel Safe	DON'T Feel Safe	No Answer
Erob	69%	23%	7%
Gulo Mekeda	56%	44%	0%
Tahtay Adiyabo	20%	75%	5%
Zala Anbesa town	0%	100%	0%
Total	**39%**	**57%**	**4%**

Only 39% of respondents felt safe in their communities, with severe insecurity reported in Tahtay Adiyabo (75%) and Zala Anbesa town (100%).

In Tahtay Adiyabo, insecurity persists due to armed groups, cattle theft, and abductions despite the withdrawal of external armed actors previously present in the area. Some IDPs have returned, preferring to face risks at home over poor conditions in displacement sites. In Erob and Gulo Mekeda, the absence of local administration fuels insecurity, while in Zala Anbesa town , proximity to Eritrea, damaged homes, and landmine threats sustain fear. Despite reconciliation efforts, residents feel unsafe and call for stronger regional government engagement.

Main Protection Concerns

The protection environment remains extremely concerning due to insecurity, the absence of local administration, and limited access to essential services, particularly for women, children, and persons with disabilities.

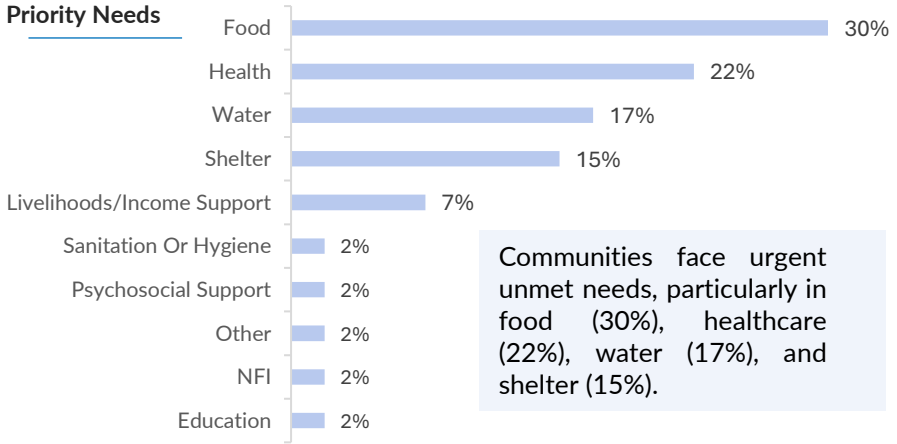
Women and girls face severe protection risks, including lack of reproductive health services (25%), GBV (21%), economic violence (13%), and trafficking (9%). Limited access to hygiene supplies, legal support, and livelihoods heightens vulnerability, while long travel distances for water often near areas with external forces further exposes them to violence. Communities also reported child marriage and adolescent pregnancy.

Children are exposed to unsafe living conditions (21%), lack of education (17%), and risks such as school dropout (15%), family separation (13%), trafficking (8%), and child labor (6%). With no functioning schools in any assessed villages/kebelles, children, especially adolescent girls, are increasingly vulnerable to abuse and early marriage.

Community Group	Top 3 protection concerns *Percentages are out of the total FGDs*	Actionable Insights
Women and Girls	▪ Lack Of Reproductive Health Service (reported by 25% participants) ▪ Gender-Based Violence (21%) ▪ Economic Violence/Denial Of Resources (13%)	Expand access to reproductive health services, strengthen GBV prevention and response, and promote women's economic empowerment through livelihood opportunities and improved access to essential resources.
Children	▪ Unsafe Living Conditions (21%) ▪ Access To Education (17%) ▪ Dropping Out Of School (15%)	Improve living conditions, ensure inclusive and safe learning spaces, and provide support to reduce school dropout through targeted assistance and stronger child protection systems.
Children with Disabilities	▪ Inadequate Transportation (25%) ▪ Lack Of Accessible Facilities (25%) ▪ Limited Awareness Of Available Services (16%)	Improve transportation and facility accessibility, raise awareness on services, and strengthen inclusive support systems to enhance participation of children with disabilities.
Persons with Disabilities	▪ Limited Access To Targeted Services (28%) ▪ Lack Of Livelihood Options (22%) ▪ Limited Assistive Devices (22%)	Scale up inclusive services, provide livelihood opportunities, and ensure access to assistive devices and rehabilitation support through coordinated humanitarian and government efforts.

Humanitarian Needs and Assistance

Priority Needs



Communities face urgent unmet needs, particularly in food (30%), healthcare (22%), water (17%), and shelter (15%).

Organizational Assistance Coverage

46% of the FGD participants reported **organizations are providing assistance.**

FINAL

Only 46% of respondents reported the presence of humanitarian actors, mainly in Erob (72%) and Gulo Mekeda (97%). In Erob, where households have long depended on aid, the disruption of assistance has left families unable to meet even basic needs, increasing hardship and negative coping strategies.

Conditions are critical in Zala Anbesa and Tahtay Adiyabo, where humanitarian support is nearly absent. All respondents in Zala Anbesa (100%) and two-thirds in Tahtay Adiyabo (66%) reported receiving no assistance, reflecting a severe breakdown in humanitarian access in some of the most conflict-affected areas.

Woreda	Assistance Available	NOT Available	No Answer
Erob	72%	23%	5%
Gulo Mekeda	97%	0%	3%
Tahtay Adiyabo	21%	66%	13%
Zala Anbesa town	0%	100%	0%
Total	**46%**	**47%**	**7%**

The widespread lack of assistance and essential services underscores the urgent need for scaled-up and targeted humanitarian interventions. Without timely action, conditions in underserved and hard-to-reach areas are likely to further deteriorate, particularly affecting displaced families and returnees.

Available humanitarian assistance across the assessed woredas is primarily concentrated on food support, with additional services varying by location.

- In Erob, multiple actors including CARE Ethiopia, Catholic Church, and REST provide a combination of food assistance, livelihood support, school feeding, education materials, cash, and health services.
- Tahtay Adiyabo receives mainly food assistance and some livelihood support, though coverage appears less diverse.
- Gulo Mekeda benefits from a broader range of services, including food and nutrition assistance, protection and GBV support, NFIs, and psychosocial services provided by organizations such as the Red Cross and CARE.
- In Zala Anbesa Town, ICRC and ADCS focus on water supply, health, nutrition, and education-related support. Overall, the response is heavily food-focused, with other essential services provided unevenly across woredas.

Coping Mechanisms

Means to Meet Basic Needs

The majority of respondents reported relying on borrowing from relatives and neighbors (21%), followed by selling goods and properties (19%) and support from host communities (15%), showing heavy reliance on informal and community-based support rather than stable or institutional support.

Means to Meet Basic Needs	Percentage
Borrowing from relatives, neighbor...	21%
Selling goods and properties	19%
Support from host communities	15%
Others (specify)	13%
Remittances	11%
Support from humanitarian agenci...	11%
None	4%
Work/salary	4%
Support from government	2%

Coping Strategies

Households are resorting to extreme coping strategies, including begging (13%), skipping meals (13%), and engaging in child labor (11%). Other harmful coping mechanisms, such as migration and displacement (9%) and transactional sex (6%), underscore the profound vulnerability of affected populations and the erosion of protective environments.

Coping Strategies	Percentage
Begging	13%
Skipping Meals	13%
Engaging In Child Labor	11%
Consuming Less Nutritious Food	10%
Reducing Meal Portions	10%
Selling Assets	10%
Migration And Displacement	9%
Borrowing Money	8%
Reducing Expenditures	7%
Transactional Sex	6%
Other	2%

Landmines and Unexploded Ordnances (UXOs)

57% of the FGD participants reported they witnessed landmines & unexploded ordnances in their areas or community

Landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs) remain a major threat, with 57% of respondents reporting sightings in their communities. Contamination is highest in Tahtay Adiyabo (66%), followed by Erob (59%), Zala Anbesa town (50%), and Gulo Mekeda (31%).

These hazards have already caused civilian injuries and deaths, including among returnees and displaced families. Contaminated farmland and access routes are restricting movement, disrupting livelihoods, and limiting access to essential services.

The continued presence of landmines and UXOs also hampers humanitarian operations and heightens risks for children, farmers, and returning IDPs. Urgent action is needed, including mine risk education, clearance operations, and strengthened reporting systems, to reduce threats and enable safe return, recovery, and service delivery.

Woreda	UXO	No UXO	No Answer
Erob	59%	23%	17%
Gulo Mekeda	31%	67%	3%
Tahtay Adiyabo	66%	26%	8%
Zala Anbesa town	50%	50%	0%
Total	**57%**	**34%**	**9%**

FINAL

Livelihoods & Economic Empowerment

Livelihood support remains limited, with 30% of respondents lacking access to programs or training. Most rely on humanitarian aid (24%) or government assistance (16%). Persistent barriers such as insecurity, lack of capital, weak institutions, and limited skills training continue to prevent self-reliance.

These gaps threaten the sustainability of IDP returns, as limited opportunities and the host communities' weak capacity may strain resources and heighten tensions. Without targeted support, returns risk being unsustainable and could result in further displacement. Area-based livelihood programs are essential to support recovery and durable solutions.

Thematic Area	Most Reported Issues *Percentages are out of the total FGDs*	Actionable Insights
Sources of Income	▪ Assistance from Humanitarian Actors (24%) ▪ Government assistance or welfare (16%) ▪ Income from small business (14%)	Diversify and strengthen income sources by promoting small business opportunities, enhancing government welfare programs, and ensuring predictable and sustained humanitarian assistance.
Community-Wide Livelihood Support Programs	▪ No livelihood support (30%) ▪ Farming (27%) ▪ Knitting (13%)	Expand community livelihood initiatives, strengthen agricultural support, and promote alternative income-generating activities to reduce dependency and create more sustainable opportunities.
Livelihood Support for Vulnerable Groups	▪ No livelihood support (41%) ▪ Farming (21%) ▪ Knitting (14%)	Scale up targeted livelihood programs for vulnerable groups, improve access to farming inputs and training, and support small-scale production activities like knitting.
Main Challenges to Livelihoods Access	▪ Inadequate government support (21%) ▪ Partners are not providing livelihoods support in the community (19%) ▪ Security (19%)	Strengthen coordination between government and partners, expand livelihood interventions in underserved areas, and address security concerns to improve program reach and impact.

A significant 84% of respondents reported having no access to education or skills training, highlighting a major gap in opportunities for personal and economic development. Additionally, while 19% have attempted to access loans from financial service providers, only half of them successfully obtained the loan they requested, indicating clear barriers to financial inclusion and limited access to credit for those seeking to improve their livelihoods.

Woreda	NO Training Access	Training Access	No Answer
Erob	80%	19%	1%
Gulo Mekeda	67%	17%	17%
Tahtay Adiyabo	89%	5%	6%
Zala Anbesa town	100%	0%	0%
Total	**84%**	**11%**	**5%**

Woreda	Tried to Access Loan	Get Requested Loan
Erob	20%	88%
Gulo Mekeda	72%	38%
Tahtay Adiyabo	6%	0%
Zala Anbesa town	0%	
Total	**19%**	**50%**

Legal and Public Services

32% of the FGD participants Reported public services are LIMITED
(SOME SERVICES are provided but major gaps remain)

Access to legal aid is limited, with 42% relying on customary dispute resolution, only 15% able to access formal legal institutions, and 12% having no legal support at all.The lack of functional civil administration significantly restricts access to public services.

In Tahtay Adiyabo, 75% reported the absence of schools, clinics, and administrative services, increasing community vulnerability and limiting essential support.

In Zala Anbesa town , civil administration is absent, with public functions managed temporarily by command posts or elders. Residents lack basic services such as civil documentation and legal registration, and the presence of non-ENDF forces further hinders service delivery, creating critical governance and service gaps.

Woreda	Very Good	Good	Moderate	Limited	No Services	No Answer
Erob	6%	6%	31%	57%	0%	0%
Gulo Mekeda	0%	0%	72%	28%	0%	0%
Tahtay Adiyabo	0%	0%	0%	22%	75%	3%
Zala Anbesa town	50%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%
Total	**8%**	**2%**	**27%**	**32%**	**30%**	**1%**

Judicial and Legal Aid Services

The majority of respondents (42%) reported relying on customary or traditional dispute resolution as the primary form of legal support, reflecting its strong role in community-level justice.

Meanwhile, formal legal services remain limited, with only 18% accessing legal awareness and information, 15% reporting access to formal judicial mechanisms, and 12% receiving legal representation.

Notably, another 12% indicated no access to any legal services, underscoring significant gaps in formal legal aid and justice systems.

FINAL

Community Structures & Participation

A vast majority of respondents (86%) are aware of the community leadership structures in their area, and of these, an impressive 93% consider the work of these structures to be useful, highlighting the strong recognition and perceived effectiveness of local governance in supporting community needs particularly in resolving disputes, coordinating community affairs, and supporting social cohesion, which is especially important in areas with limited government presence.

In Erob, Catholic priests and churches provide coordination, support, and dispute resolution, with Orthodox priests playing similar roles. In Zala Anbesa town , respected elders and young leaders guide community affair and maintain trust among stakeholders.

These community mechanisms are vital in the absence of formal institutions, but concerns about favoritism, limited transparency, and exclusion could undermine their legitimacy and effectiveness.

Woreda	Know community structures	Believe structures are useful
Erob	85%	100%
Gulo Mekeda	100%	100%
Tahtay Adiyabo	77%	81%
Zala Anbesa town	100%	100%
Total	**86%**	**93%**

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR SAFE RETURNS

The PMS assessment highlights the complex and differing challenges in Tahtay Adiyabo and Erob/Gulo Mekeda. These border communities have experienced severe impacts from the 2020–2022 Northern Ethiopia conflict, including alleged violations of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law and the continued presence of external forces. Many of these areas were also heavily affected by the 1998–2000 Ethio-Eritrean war, from which recovery has been incomplete. The current situation must be understood within a complex political and security context, including heightened tensions among Ethiopia, the Tigray region, and Eritrea.

Following perceived improvements in security and the lifting of movement restrictions, many IDPs have begun returning, either permanently or intermittently, despite limited essential services, weak or absent government structures, minimal civilian protection, and ongoing safety risks. Spontaneous returns are most common in Tahtay Adiyabo and, to a lesser extent, in Gulo Mekeda and Erob. Drivers of return include the desire to check on property, restart farming, and escape the hardships of prolonged displacement.

Overall, IDPs, returnees, host communities, and local authorities express cautious optimism about improving conditions. However, authorities and IDPs in Erob and Zala Anbesa town report that it remains unsafe for return. Assessment findings emphasize that safe IDP returns require:

- ❑ Formal government-to-government agreements for return
- ❑ Functional local administration, public services, and civilian protection (e.g., police and judiciary)
- ❑ Support for housing repair or reconstruction and provision of household items
- ❑ Assistance to resume livelihoods, including farming inputs and equipment
- ❑ Improved access to basic services and humanitarian assistance (water, food, health, education, electricity, UXO mitigation)

Currently, most assessed locations are not conducive for principled return. Humanitarian actors must balance the urgent needs of populations in return areas with the risk of creating "pull factors" that could prompt premature returns into insecure environments. Efforts should aim to improve conditions at places of origin while respecting IDPs' preference for return and prioritizing safety and stability.

FINAL

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Expand Lifesaving Assistance: Deliver multi-sectoral aid in food, shelter, health, and WASH, ensuring inclusion of non-displaced but conflict-affected populations.
2. Enhance Protection Services: Increase availability of general protection, GBV, and child protection services through mobile and fixed mechanisms, including safe spaces. Expand mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) with survivor-centered, community-based approaches.
3. Invest in Livelihoods and Skills Training: Complementing the initiatives of EU-IM3 being implemented in nearby woredas such as Adigrat town, to provide cash-for-work, vocational training, agricultural inputs, and microenterprise support, prioritizing female-headed households, youth, and persons with disabilities in the assessment locations as well.
4. Strengthen Civil Administration and Governance: Re-establish and reinforce local governance structures, collaborating with community leaders while addressing security challenges to rebuild trust and support sustainable recovery.
5. Conduct UXO Clearance and Risk Awareness: Scale up mine action operations to enable safe movement, farming, and rebuilding. Implement community-based risk education, especially for children.
6. Scale Up Protection Monitoring: Continuously monitor protection conditions in newly accessible areas to inform timely, evidence-based interventions in a volatile security environment.
7. Support Community-Based Structures: Empower local leaders and representatives to manage governance and humanitarian coordination in areas with limited formal administration until full governance capacity is restored.
8. Facilitate Housing Recovery and HLP Assistance: Support IDP Returnees and affected host communities to repair or rebuild homes while addressing housing, land, and property (HLP) rights. Prioritize risk-sensitive land assessments and coordinate with mine action actors in UXO-affected areas to enable safe and equitable access to housing, land, and livelihoods.

Donor Support

THIS PROJECT IS IMPLEMENTED AS PART OF A BROADER PROGRAMME BY

german cooperation DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT
Implemented by giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
IOM UN MIGRATION
ITALIAN AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION
DANISH RED CROSS