

Eritrea

MIGRATION PROFILE

*Study on Migration Routes
in the East and Horn of Africa*

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Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG)



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1. Introduction

The State of Eritrea is a country in the Horn of Africa, bordering Sudan in the west, Ethiopia in the south, Djibouti in the south-east and the Red Sea in the east. In 2016, Eritrea had an estimated population of 5.9 million with the capital Asmara being the major urban area with an estimated population of 804,000 in 2015 (CIA, 2017).

Eritrea is a poor country with a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.420, which places it among the ten least developed countries, ranking 179th out of 188 countries and territories in 2015 (UNDP, 2016). Eritrea's HDI is below the average of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as the average of countries placed in the low development category overall. In addition, it is a very fragile state, especially when it comes to "justice for all; effective, accountable and inclusive institutions; resilience to social, economic and environmental shocks; and economic foundations" (GSDRC, 2016, p.3).



Source: CIA, 2017.

Table 1: Eritrea's Key Demographic and Development Indicators

Indicator	Eritrea
Total area, in sq km ^a	117,600
Population (2015), in million ^b	5.23
Urban Population (2015), % of total ^c	22.6
Population Growth Rate, annual % ^d	n.d.
Ethnic Groups ^a	Tigrinya 55% Tigre 30% Other 15%
Human Development Index (2015), country rank out of 188 ^e	0.420 179
GDP Based on PPP per Capita, current international dollars per capita ^f	1410.33
Life Expectancy at Birth (2015), years ^e	64.2
Unemployment (2015), % of labour force ^e	8.4
Youth Unemployment (2015), % ages 15-24 ^e	13.0
Multidimensional Poverty Headcount (2006), % ^e	n.d.
Gini Coefficient (2010-2015) ^e	n.d.
Foreign Direct Investment (net inflows, 2015), current USD millions ^d	49.32
Net Official Development Assistance Received (13), current USD millions ^d	92.11
Personal Remittances Received (2015), current USD millions ^d	n.d.

^a CIA, 2017; ^b UN DESA, 2015b; ^c UN DESA, 2014; ^d World Bank, 2017; ^e UNDP, 2016; ^f IMF, 2017.

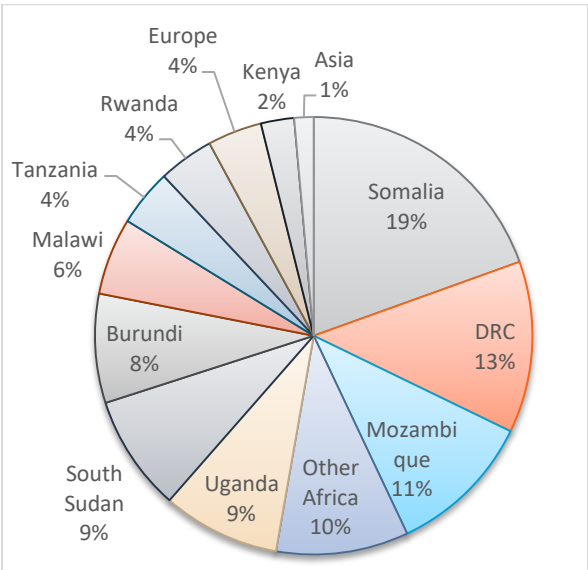
The autocratic and repressive rule of President Isaias Afwerki has produced a highly-militarized society by introducing mandatory national service, “sometimes of indefinite length” (CIA, 2017), which is among the main drivers of emigration of Eritreans (RMMS, 2016).

In the context of migration, Eritrea is mainly a country of origin (RMMS, 2016). Eritreans migrate mainly for economic, educational, social and political reasons (*push factors*), with many seeking refuge in neighbouring countries like Ethiopia and Sudan before migrating onward due to limited prospects of long-term (economic) integration (GSDRC, 2016; Marchand, Roosen, Reinold & Siegel, 2016; RMMS, 2016). Europe is a prominent destination for Eritreans; “Eritreans were the single largest group of migrants and refugees in Italy in 2015, totalling 39,162 or 25 [per cent] of all arrivals in Italy” (RMMS, 2016). Since leaving the country is restricted and exit visas can hardly be obtained, many Eritreans leave the country using smugglers, which also makes Eritreans vulnerable to becoming victims of human trafficking (CIA, 2017; Marchand et al, 2016; US Department of State, 2016; EASO, 2015).

In terms of emigration, UN DESA (2015a) estimated that, in 2015, there were 499,916 Eritreans abroad, representing close to 10 per cent of the Eritrean population. Most Eritrean emigration is irregular and largely characterized by young men trying to escape Eritrean national service or to earn money abroad to provide for their families (GSDRC, 2016). As Figure 2 shows the majority of Eritrean migrants can be found in neighbouring countries like Sudan (33 per cent) and Ethiopia (32 per cent) and in Europe (19 per cent) (UN DESA, 2015a).

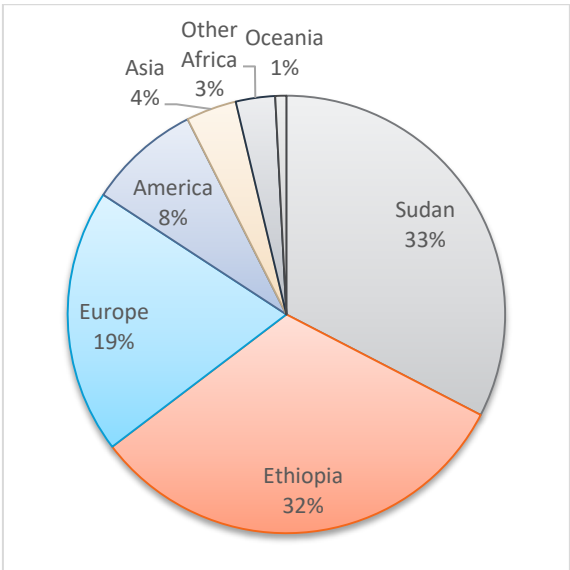
In 2015, the United Nations Trends in International Migrant Stock indicated a migrant stock in Eritrea of 15,941 highlighting that immigration to Eritrea is negligible even though immigration slightly increased since the 1990s. Most immigrants come from other countries in the region including Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda and South Sudan (see Figure 1). The female to male ratio among the immigrant population is split almost equally. In 2015, refugees accounted for 18 per cent of the migrant stock in Eritrea (UN DESA, 2015a).

Figure 1: Origin of Migrants in Eritrea, 2015



Source: UN DESA, 2015a.

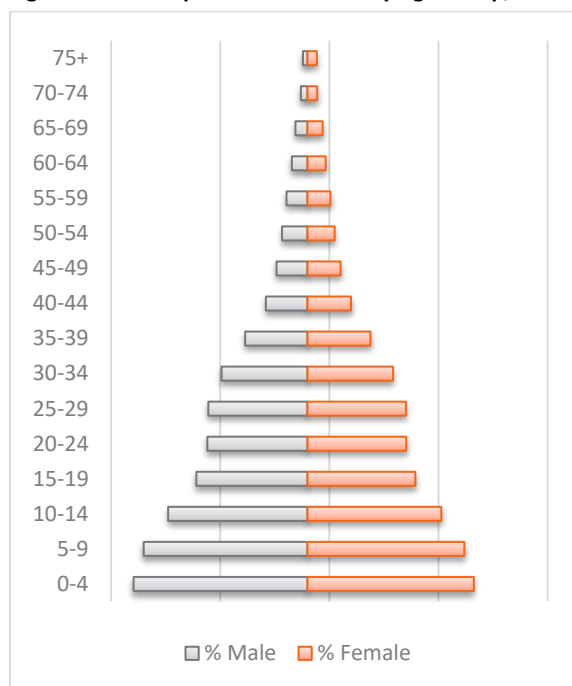
Figure 2: Destination of Migrants from Eritrea, 2015



Source: UN DESA, 2015a.

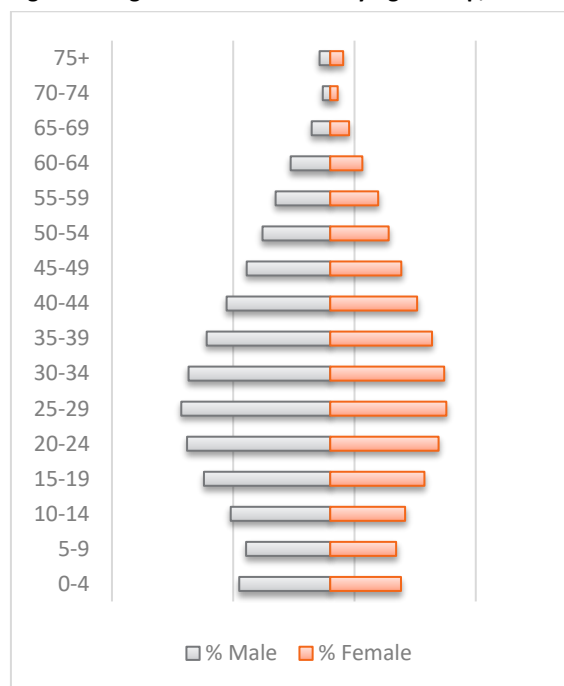
Comparing the population pyramids of Eritrea's population and its migrant stock, differences become evident. Eritrea's population pyramid based on UN DESA data for 2015 shows a typical pyramid structure with a large base, narrowing as age increases (see Figure 3). It is noteworthy that Eritrea's population is relatively young, as is the migrant population. The latter consists mostly of 'adult' individuals between the age of 15 and 39 (see Figure 4) (UN DESA, 2015a).

Figure 3: Total Population in Eritrea by Age Group, 2015



Source: UN DESA, 2015a.

Figure 4: Migrant Stock in Eritrea by Age Group, 2015



Source: UN DESA, 2015a.

2. Irregular Migration

Most Eritreans migrate irregularly. The reason behind this is that obtaining official travel and identification documents depends on the completion of national service, one of the major drivers of Eritrean migration, which is why for many Eritreans regular migration is not an option (GSDRC, 2016; RMMS, 2016). Due to the nature of irregular migration, there is a lack of data regarding the magnitude of these flows.

National service is regarded as the main driver of Eritrean emigration. It consists of two parts (military and civilian service), often exceeds the official term, and is associated with violations of workers and human rights, (EASO, 2015; GSDRC, 2016; RMMS, 2016). It must be performed by all Eritreans, including unmarried women, between the age of 18 and 40 and involves six months of military training as well as twelve months of performing services in other governmental work units related to military and development. In addition, high school students are forced to spend their final year before graduation in the Sawa military and educational camp as a requirement for receiving their high school diploma, which excludes them from tertiary education and certain jobs. Although military conscription below the age of 18 is prohibited under Eritrean law, evidence suggests that this law is not always complied with (US Department of State, 2016).

Consequently, irregular migrants from Eritrea are mostly individuals who are more affected by the compulsory national service; that is young men and unmarried women. Irregular emigration of unaccompanied minors from Eritrea is also an issue (OHCHR, 2016b).

To avoid being detected by Eritrean authorities, migrants commonly try to cross the border at night, travelling by foot or other vehicles. Migration from Eritrea often involves corruption, for instance in the form of bribing officials to be allowed to cross the border safely (RMMS, 2014; EASO, 2015; GSDRC, 2016).

Migrating irregularly is a dangerous endeavour. If migrants are detected by Eritrean authorities, it is likely that they are shot at the border, tortured, imprisoned and/or executed (GSDRC, 2016; RMMS, 2016; EASO, 2016). Concerns about the physical and psychological integrity of Eritrean irregular migrants explain why many other countries are hesitant to deport them and why UNHCR has stopped returning Eritreans (GSDRC, 2016; Marchand et al, 2016). Return of irregular migrants is still possible and may go unpunished under the condition that return migrants pay the diaspora tax and sign an apology letter. If they have not performed national service before leaving Eritrea, they are obliged to do so upon return (EASO, 2016). The high risks associated with irregular migration from Eritrea have, however, not stopped Eritrean migration (Marchand et al, 2016).

2.1. Human Smuggling

Human smuggling is prominent in Eritrea, since regular migration channels to leave the country are extremely restricted and leaving the country by oneself implies high risks.

While there is not much information about smugglers' characteristics, it has been reported that often Eritrean border officials or other 'guides' are involved in smuggling activities, which allows avoiding checkpoints and the associated risks of being caught leaving the country illegally described above (Van Reisen, Estefanos & Rijken, 2012; 2013; GSDRC, 2016). Smugglers originate from various countries, including Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and Libya. They work at different stages of the migration process depending on location, time of the year as well as supply and demand and are not necessarily part of greater criminal networks but can also operate individually (GSDRC, 2016; RMMS, 2014; Hamood, 2006). Evidence suggests that the costs for smugglers range between \$960 and \$9,600 (RMMS, 2014).

2.2. Trafficking in Human Beings

According to the US Department of State (2016), human trafficking from and within Eritrea is highly prevalent and often facilitated by Eritrean diplomats and officials, including the military and police. Children, women and men are trafficked for forced labour and sexual exploitation. As already explained, Eritreans commonly attempt to leave the country secretly by themselves or using smuggling services, which makes them vulnerable to becoming victims of human trafficking. Eritrean girls and women aiming to migrate to the Gulf countries as domestic workers are reported to become victims of sex trafficking in the destination country, which to a lesser extent is also true for girls and women migrating to Sudan and South Sudan. Evidence suggests that both men and women also become victims of sex trafficking in Israel. Furthermore, Eritreans living in or near refugee camps

in Sudan are reported to be abducted and forced into labour or held hostage to extort money from their families (US Department of State, 2016).

3. Forced Migration/ Displacement

3.1. Refugees in Eritrea

As already mentioned, Eritrea does not play an important role as country of destination. In 2015, there were 2,898 refugees living in Eritrea, accounting for 18 per cent of the total migrant stock (UN DESA, 2015a). As shown in Table 1, UNHCR registered 2,549 refugees in Eritrea in 2015, which almost exclusively came from Somalia (97.5 per cent), while only few refugees came from Sudan, Ethiopia and South Sudan (UNHCR, 2017). Refugees mostly live in Asmara, the Eritrean capital, and in Umkulu, Eritrea's only refugee camp (UNHCR, 2016).

Table 2: Refugees in Eritrea, 2015

Country of Origin	Refugees
Somalia	2,485
Sudan	28
Ethiopia	26
South Sudan	10
Total	2,549

Source: UNHCR, 2017.

Note: These numbers may not be complete because in some situations the figures are being kept confidential to protect the anonymity of individuals.

Since Eritrea lacks laws regarding the protection of refugees, they are usually not recognised by the state, but live in urban or semi-urban areas under UNHCR protection. The Somali refugee population, which had arrived in the early 1990s, was recognised as refugees on a *prima facie* basis and live in the Umkulu refugee camp (UNHCR, 2016; Marchand et al, 2016).

3.2. Refugees from Eritrea

According to UNHCR, the total stock of Eritrean refugees in 2015 was 411,321 and increased to 459,390 in 2016. The main countries of destination are neighbouring Ethiopia and Sudan hosting 61.7 per cent of the Eritrean refugee population. Israel was the third most prominent destination of Eritrean refugees even though one should note that during recent years, restrictive Israeli immigration policies decreased the countries attractiveness for Eritrean migrants, including refugees (GSDRC, 2016). As a consequence, Germany surpassed Israel as the third most popular destination country in 2016. The remaining top ten countries of destinations are all European (see Table 2). In total, European countries¹ host more than 30 per cent of the Eritrean refugee population. In Europe

¹ European countries hosting Eritrean refugees include Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, France, Malta, Belgium, Greece, Austria, Luxembourg, Spain, Hungary, Ireland, Finland, Portugal, Poland, Liechtenstein, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Iceland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Slovenia.

as well as other destinations, the majority of Eritreans asylum seekers are granted protection (recognition rate of 93 per cent in Europe in 2015) (RMMS, 2016; GSDRC, 2016).

Table 3: Eritrean Refugees in Country of Asylum, 2015-2016

Country of Destination	2015	2016
Ethiopia	155,231	165,548
Sudan	98,676	103,176
Germany	10,980	30,020
Israel	31,708	27,812
Switzerland	21,000	26,264
Sweden	20,203	25,968
Norway	13,490	15,062
United Kingdom	12,383	13,720
Netherlands	10,870	13,488
Italy	11,962	10,049
Other	24,818	28,283
Total	411,321	459,390

Source: UNHCR, 2017.

Note: These numbers may not be complete because in some situations the figures are being kept confidential to protect the anonymity of individuals.

Forced migration from Eritrea is an issue already since the Eritrean War of Independence, which lasted from 1961 to 1991, and continued with President Isaias Afwerki's authoritarian rule (RMMS, 2016). It reached another peak during the border conflict with Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000 (GSDRC, 2016). As explained earlier, reasons for fleeing the country are poor economic prospects, political, social and economic oppression and the mandatory military service (GSDRC, 2016). Along these lines a 2016 report commissioned by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2016a) based on 833 testimonies reveals crimes against humanity, including "enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, torture, persecution, rape, murder and other inhumane acts" (OHCHR, 2016a) for instance in military training camps and detention centres. The purpose of this so-called "campaign" (OHCHR, 2016a.) which started with Isaias Afwerki's inauguration in 1991 is to spread fear and thereby exert control over the Eritrean population. In addition, Eritreans flee the country because of religious and ethnic discrimination (GSDRC, 2016).

Due to the current situation affecting especially the younger Eritrean population, not only Eritrean adults flee the country, but an increasing number of Eritrean unaccompanied minors and children has been reported. Children from Eritrea were the largest group of unaccompanied minors arriving in Italy in 2014 and 2015, accounting for approximately 25 per cent (OHCHR, 2016b).

Forced migration from Eritrea is not expected to decrease in the short- and medium-term (GSDRC, 2016).

3.3. Internal Displacement in Eritrea

There is a lack of recent data relating to internal displacement in Eritrea. In the past, Eritreans were displaced internally because of the War of Independence, the border conflict with Ethiopia and environmental issues such as droughts (NRC, 2005). While a large proportion of these seem to have returned – either voluntarily or because they have been expelled by host communities (NRC, 2005; RMMS, 2016; GSDRC, 2016) - It is unclear how many are still living in displacement, mainly due to a lack of recent data and research reports.

4. Regular/ Labour Migration

4.1. Immigration

Labour immigration to Eritrea is negligible.

4.2. Emigration

Labour emigration from Eritrea is limited due to strict emigration rules enforced by the government (GSDRC, 2016; EASO, 2015). According to EASO (2015) regular migration is easier for the following groups, even though officials' decisions to issue the required travel documents can be arbitrary:

- Men above 54
- Women above 47
- Children up to the age of 13
- Individuals, who are exempted from national service, for instance for health reasons
- Individuals seeking health treatments abroad
- Former freedom fighters and their families
- Higher ranking government officials and their families
- In some cases, students, businessmen, sportsmen and individuals travelling to conferences abroad are also permitted to exit the country.

5. Internal Migration

Internal migration within Eritrea is restricted and requires certain travel documents and permits, which are controlled at internal checkpoints, which is also a system to ensure that Eritreans do not avoid national service or leave the country (GSDRC, 2016).

6. Migrant's Vulnerabilities and Protection Issues

The following vulnerabilities and protection needs have been identified for migrants leaving Eritrea (RMMS, 2016):

- The main driver of migration from Eritrea is compulsory military service. Military training camps and detention facilities in Eritrea are characterized by severe human rights violations,

including torture, rape, murder, enslavement, and other crimes against humanity (OHCHR, 2016a).

- The government strictly controls emigration and emigrants may be sentenced to life imprisonment or capital punishment, so most migration occurs through irregular channels. During irregular movement, Eritrean migrants are vulnerable to smuggling, physical and sexual exploitation, extortion, and abduction. Abduction of migrants from refugee camps is common, especially in Eastern Sudan (OHCHR, 2016a).
- Although the minimum age for military service is 18, Eritrean children are often recruited by force and subject to indefinite terms. Those unaccompanied minors who try to emigrate to avoid indefinite conscription often become victims of physical and sexual abuse, human trafficking, abduction, detention, etc. (Sahan Foundation & IGAD, 2016).
- Eritrean migrants are subject to a higher risk of detention in Sudan; in 2016, more than a thousand Eritreans were arrested and deported (IRIN News, 2016a). The risk of detention is also high when Eritreans travel through Egypt; many migrants have been detained in Cairo and deported back to Eritrea (IRIN News, 2016b).

7. Relevant National Policies

Eritrean migration legislation and policies provide mainly for administrative rules and procedures regarding entry, registration, residence, exit, rules to obtain work permits, and possibilities for naturalisation (see Table 4. Labour emigration from Eritrea is limited due to strict emigration rules enforced by the government (GSDRC, 2016; EASO, 2015). According to EASO (2015), regular migration is easier for some people including men above 54; women above 47; children below 13; individuals exempted from national service; those seeking health treatments abroad; former freedom fighters and their families; and higher ranking government officials and their families. In some cases, students, businessmen, sportsmen and individuals travelling to conferences are also permitted to exit Eritrea. Nevertheless, officials' decisions to issue the required travel documents can be arbitrary.

Table 4: Eritrea's Key Migration Policy Responses

Law/Policy	Content
Proclamation Issued to Amend Proclamation No. 24/1992 Enacted to Regulate the Provision of Travel Documents, the Entry Into and Exit from Eritrea and Residence of Foreigners in Eritrea (2011-04-01)	Amendments concern fines imposed on migrants who stay in Eritrea after their visa expired and who do not obtain/possess a valid residence permit; in addition, the types and durations of residence permits are defined.
Regulations to Issue Work Permit to Non-Nationals (Legal Notice No. 80/2003).	Defines the duty to obtain a work permit for non-Eritreans, the rules and procedures concerning the application and issuance of work permits
Proclamation to provide for the Requirement of Registration of Foreigners who reside, work or engage in Business in Eritrea (No. 127/2002).	Defines the requirement of registration and penalties for non-compliance.
Proclamation No. 24 of 1992 Issued To Regulate The Issuing Of Travel Documents, Entry And Exit Visa From Eritrea, And To Control Residence Permits Of Foreigners In Eritrea	Defines the rules and procedures regarding entry into, residence in and exit from Eritrea, as well as the registration and expulsion of foreigners
Eritrean Nationality Proclamation, No. 21/1992.	Defines conditions under which individuals receive the Eritrean nationality as well as possibilities for naturalization,
Eritrean Transitional Criminal Code, Art. 65	Prohibits trafficking in women and youth for sexual exploitation
Eritrean Transitional Criminal Code Art. 565	Prohibits slavery
Labour Proclamation 118/2001	Prohibits forced labour

Sources: ILO, 2017; RMMS, 2016.

Eritrean law also prohibits human trafficking, slavery and forced labour. As previous sections of this report show, it is questionable whether the State itself complies with these provisions. According to the US Department of State (2016) the Eritrean authorities fail to sufficiently address human trafficking, including the protection of victims of trafficking (VoTs) and the prosecution of perpetrators. Although the government tries to raise awareness regarding the risks of trafficking, it

lacks knowledge to differentiate different forms of migration and/or offences like transnational migration, human trafficking and smuggling (US Department of State, 2016).

Additional information on migration governance as well as remaining policy gaps within Eritrea is scarce and requires further research.

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