

March 2022

Country – capital	State of Eritrea – Amhara
Population	6.1 million (est. July 2021). Ethnic groups: Tigrinya 50%, Tigre 30%, Saho 4%, Afar 4%, Kunama 4%, Bilen 3%, Hedareb/Beja 2%, Nara 2%, Rashaida 1% ¹
Geography	Eastern Africa, bordering the Red Sea, between Djibouti and Sudan ²
Languages – official / lingua franca	Tigrinya, Arabic, English (working languages – all languages are equal) ³ , Tigre, Kunama, Afar, other Cushitic languages ⁴
Writing system	Tigrinya, Tigre: Ge'ez (ግዕዝ), ⁵ Arabic script ⁶ ; both written from right to left
Education and literacy	Education in Eritrea is officially compulsory for children aged between 7 and 14 (5 years primary, and 3 years middle school). The second and final phase of compulsory education takes place at middle school in English. There are 2 streams of secondary education: science and commerce. All male and female pupils have to complete their 12th and final year of school at Sawa military training centre. This involves a combination of academic and military training and labour deployments. After 7-8 months academic school, military training follows, varying from 6 weeks to 6 months. ⁷ Tertiary education includes university, colleges and technical schools. ⁸ In 2018, adult literacy rate for Eritrea was 76.6 %. ⁹
Religions	Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Sunni Muslim. Other religions, i.a. Jehova's witnesses, are forbidden and persecuted. ¹⁰
Conflict history and overview	After independence from Italian control and then UK oversight, the UN established Eritrea as an autonomous region within the Ethiopian federation in 1952. Ethiopian annexation sparked a 30-year struggle for independence that ended in 1991. Independence was gained via a 1993 referendum. A border war with Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000, followed by a tense “no peace, no war” stalemate ended in 2018 with peace agreement. Eritrea has been ruled by its unelected president, Isaias Afewerki, since independence in 1993, with no legislature, no independent civil society organizations, and no independent judiciary. ¹¹ It has become a highly militarized society with an unpopular program of mandatory conscription into national service – divided between military and civilian service – of indefinite length (after the 12th school year). ¹²
Humanitarian situation	Life expectancy at birth: men 64.5 yr, women 69 yr. ¹³ Eritrea has a high level of malnutrition and vulnerability, esp. children. ¹⁴ Population below poverty line: 50% (est. 2004) ¹⁵
Human rights situation	Ongoing government repression, indefinite military conscription and forced labour; unlawful, prolonged and abusive detentions; severely restricted freedom of expression, opinion, and faith; sexual violence and child labour. Military service is compulsory for males 18-40 yrs, for females 18-27 yrs, duration often extended indefinitely. This is main reason to leave Eritrea. ¹⁶
Situation of women FGM – early marriages	Maternal mortality rate 501 deaths per 100,000 live births (2015). FGM is prohibited (2007) but prevalence in women 15-49 yrs is 83%. ¹⁷ Government tries to reduce FGM/C via public awareness campaigns at the local level targeting religious and community leaders. Certain regions were declared 100% free of FGM/C practices. ¹⁸ Legal minimum age for marriage (men and women) is 18, unless the woman is pregnant or has already had a child (then it's 16 yr for both). ¹⁹
Situation of LGBTI	2015 Penal code penalises consensual same-sex sexual acts “or any other indecent act” with 5-7 years prison. ²⁰ The government actively enforces this law. There are no known LGBTI organizations in the country. ²¹
Asylum / migration / internally displaced persons (IDPs)	IDPs within Eritrea >4000. ²² Nr of asylum applicants in Europe 201 (2020) ²³ Malta Eritrean sea arrivals 2020: 274 2021: 220 Malta Eritrean asylum applicants 2020: 226, 2021: 166 ²⁴

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- ¹ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/eritrea/#geography>
 - ² <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/eritrea/#people-and-society>
 - ³ <https://shabait.com/2009/10/01/eritrea-at-a-glance/>; <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/Eritrea-Report-Final.pdf>
 - ⁴ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/eritrea/#geography>
 - ⁵ <https://omniglot.com/writing/tigrinya.htm>
 - ⁶ <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/Eritrea-Report-Final.pdf>; <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/ER/status>
 - ⁷ <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/Eritrea-Report-Final.pdf>
 - ⁸ <https://www.scholaro.com/pro/Countries/eritrea/Education-System>
 - ⁹ <https://knoema.com/atlas/Eritrea/topics/Education/Literacy/Adult-literacy-rate>
 - ¹⁰ https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-04/2021%20Annual%20Report_0.pdf; <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/eritrea>
 - ¹¹ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/eritrea>
 - ¹² <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/eritrea/>
 - ¹³ <https://knoema.com/atlas/Eritrea/topics/Demographics/Age/Life-expectancy-at-birth>
 - ¹⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/eritrea/unicef-eritrea-humanitarian-situation-report-end-year-2021>
 - ¹⁵ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/eritrea/#economy>
 - ¹⁶ https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2019_EASO_COI_Eritrea_National_service_exit_and_return.pdf ; <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/eritrea/>
 - ¹⁷ <https://www.28toomany.org/country/eritrea/>
 - ¹⁸ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/eritrea/>
 - ¹⁹ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/eritrea/>
 - ²⁰ <https://ilga.org/state-sponsored-homophobia-report>
 - ²¹ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/eritrea/>
 - ²² <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/eritrea>
 - ²³ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.REFG?locations=ER>
 - ²⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/mt/figures-at-a-glance>

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This factsheet was compiled by Adri van den Berg for BDE. Adri worked for many years as a Country of Origin Information (COI) researcher, her final post before retiring being with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in Malta.