

ERITREA

(Last updated 2023)



Country of the Horn of Africa, located on the Red Sea. The country is bounded to the southeast by Djibouti, to the south by Ethiopia, and to the west by Sudan. Eritrea's **capital** and largest city is **Asmara** (Asmera, 500.000 inhabitants).

The Dahlac Islands archipelago, located in the Red Sea near Massawa, consists of two large and 124 small islands. They are currently largely uninhabited: only on four islands is there a permanent population, on some others a temporary resident population. Ancient necropolises can be found on some of them.



Official name: State of Eritrea (the name Eritrea is an Italianized version of Mare Erythraeum, Latin for “Red Sea”)



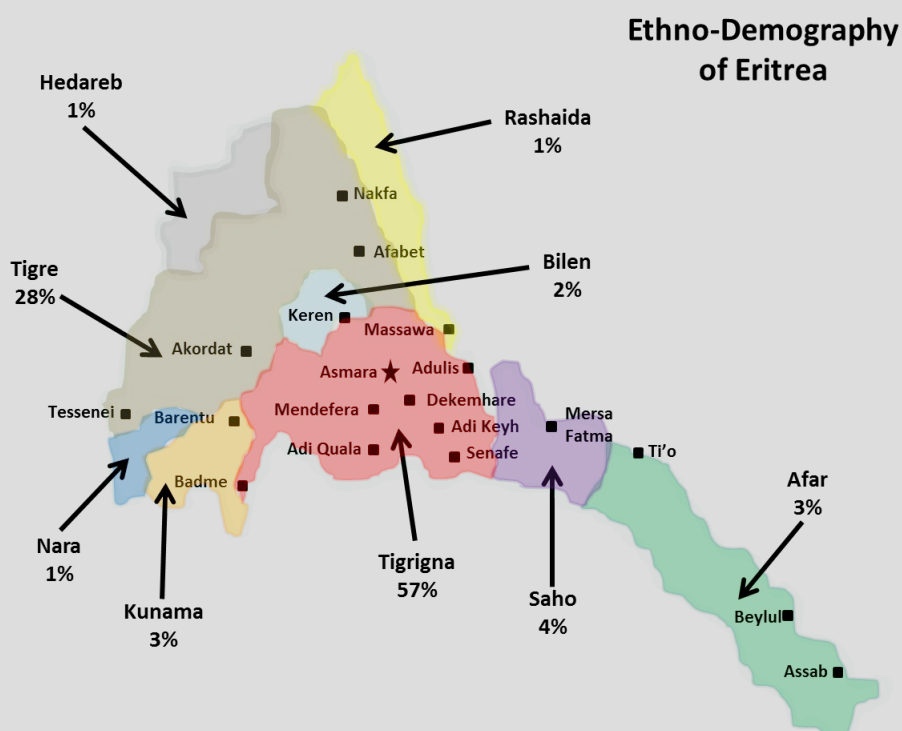
State organization: Presidential Republic. The democratic constitution, drafted in the late 1990s, has never entered into force. As a result, there is no charter guaranteeing the most basic civil rights, no regular elections are held and it is de facto a dictatorial regime, with no political freedom and freedom of association, no judiciary and no independent sources of information.

President: Isaias Afewerki (since 1993).

Population: 6,209,262 (2022 est.) Eritrean population is growing annually. Migrants constitute 12% of the total population (607,900 people), while refugees represent 9.6% (486,200). Eritrea's population consists of several ethnic groups, each with its own language and cultural tradition.

The Eritrean population is composed of nine officially recognised different ethno-linguistic groups (2021 est.):

- **Tigrinya/Tigray (50%):** the Tigrinya language is one of two major indigenous languages in Eritrea. Most are Orthodox Christians living in the Eritrean highlands and in the cities of the lowlands. The Muslim Tigrinya minority is referred to as Jeberti. Catholics are distributed mostly in parts of the southern highlands.
- **Tigre (30%):** the Tigre people, who speak Tigré, are mainly Muslims who make their living from livestock farming. They are concentrated along the Red Sea coast and in the hills and lowlands of the west, and divided into many clans; the largest of these, the Beni Amer, can be regarded as a transitional ethnicity sharing many characteristics with the Beja or Hedareb. The language spoken by the Tigre has many distinct features but mutually intelligible regional dialects.
- **Saho (5%):** a predominantly Muslim people who are closely related to the Afar in linguistic and cultural terms and who live in the hills and lowlands to the south-east of Asmara and south of Massawa and in northern parts of Ethiopia.
- **Afar (5%):** pastoralist Muslim people who live along the Red Sea coast and in the Danakil Desert in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Eritrea. Like the Somali, the Afar are divided into clans.
- **Kunama (4%):** are of Nilo-Saharan origin, like the Nara. They live in South-Western Eritrea as subsistence farmers or livestock owners along the Gash, Setit and Barka rivers. Most Kunama are Muslim, but a minority practise their own faith and others are Christians.
- **Bilen (3%):** live in villages to the north of Keren and are mostly sedentary farmers. Around half of the Bilen are Christian and half are Muslim.
- **Hedareb (2%):** mainly live as nomads along the border with Sudan, where they are known as Beja and their language as Bedawiyet. The Hedareb are Muslim, the Halenqa subgroup mainly speaks Arabic. Some of the Beni Amer who live in western Eritrea and eastern Sudan speak the same language as the Hedareb or Beja and are therefore sometimes regarded as belonging to this ethnic group. In Eritrea, however, the Beni Amer mostly speak Tigre.
- **Nara (2%):** mostly speak tigre as their first language, but culturally they are akin to the Kunama, with which they share their Nilo-Saharan origin. The Nara are mostly Muslims living in South-Western Eritrea as subsistence farmers with small-scale pastoral activities.
- **Rashaida (1%)** are a nomadic Arabic tribe who are believed to have migrated in the 19th century. They are Muslims who live in the lowlands along the border between Eritrea and Sudan. Their main activities are pastoralism and transnational trade.



The nine different ethnic groups in Eritrea officially enjoy the same status but in reality the Tigrinya dominate the state, the economy, the

military and the spheres of politics and education. Ethnic tensions and officially sanctioned ethnic discrimination is rare. However, there are reports of discrimination against the Kunama who are accused of offering little resistance to the Ethiopian army in the Eritrean-Ethiopian wars. There have also been reports of discrimination against the Afar and the Saho in South-Eastern Eritrea and against the Jeberti (a Tigrinya-speaking Muslim group that lacks recognition as a distinct ethnicity) in the central highlands.

Languages: Eritrea's languages belong to three different linguistic families: Semitic (Tigrinya, Tigre and Arabic), Cushitic (Saho, Bilen, Afar and Hedareb) and Nilo-Saharan (Kunama and Nara). The language pairs Tigrinya and Tigre, Saho and Afar, and Nara and Kunama are to a certain extent mutually intelligible. Tigrinya, Tigre and Bilen are written using the Semitic Ge'ez script, which is also used for Amharic in Ethiopia, whereas Arabic is written using Arabic script. The remaining languages are written using the Latin alphabet, but they lack a written tradition and are mainly used for oral communication.

Eritrea has no official language and the languages of the nine different ethnic groups officially have equal status. In reality, however, Tigrinya is mainly used as a working language. Arabic, the lingua franca of the Muslim ethnic groups, is also used to a lesser extent by the authorities. English is also frequently used as a working language and within the education system. Amharic was the only official language between 1959 and 1991 while Eritrea was part of Ethiopia. It is still used in addition to Tigrinya as a first or second language by Eritreans who grew up in Ethiopia as well as in places where it was dominant during the Ethiopian rule, such as Assab. This is because it was the main port during the Ethiopian period and many Amharic speakers migrated to the city. Most Eritreans, and in particular those who belong to the smaller ethnic groups, are multilingual. The Saho speak Tigrinya,

Tigre, Afar or Arabic as a second language depending on where they were born. The Bilen speak either Tigrinya or Tigre as a second language, and many Kunama also speak Arabic or Tigre. The Hedareb and Nara speak Tigre either as a second or sometimes first language, and many of them can also speak some Arabic. Eritreans who speak Tigrinya, Tigre or Kunama and the Arabic-speaking Rashaida are frequently monolingual. Except for Bilen and Nara, all of Eritrea's languages are also spoken in bordering countries. Differences exist between the different dialects of Tigrinya, and native speakers can generally tell whether a Tigrinya speaker comes from Eritrea or Ethiopia, although this can be more difficult in the case of those born in the border regions. While Tigrinya is the dominant language in the cities of the highlands, including Asmara, Eritrea's other cities are multilingual. Since Tigrinya is the main language used by the army, knowledge of Tigrinya is very widespread in the vicinity of all the larger military bases throughout the country.

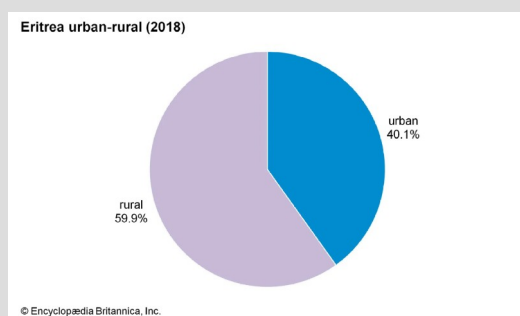
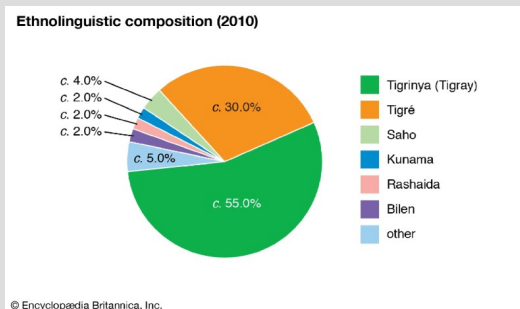
Religions: According to official information, Christians (in particular Orthodox Christians) and Muslims account for roughly equal portions of the population. Estimations of foreign organizations however believe that there is a higher proportion of Christians. The latter live mainly in the highlands, whereas Muslims live predominantly in the west and in the coastal lowlands.

Historically, religion has been a prominent symbol of ethnic identity in the Horn of Africa. Christianity was established in the 4th century CE on the coast and appeared soon afterward in the plateau, where it was embraced by the Ethiopian highlanders. Prior to Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia in 1993, about half the population of Eritrea belonged to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, including nearly all the Tigrinya. After the country gained its independence, it appealed to the patriarch of the Coptic church for autocephaly, which was granted.

About one-half of Eritrea's population is Christian, with members of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church accounting for some two-fifths. The rest of the Christian population is primarily Roman Catholic with a small number of Protestants, stemming from the time of Italian colonial rule (1889–1941), when Roman Catholic and Protestant European missionaries introduced their own versions of Christianity into Eritrea. They had considerable success among the small Kunama group, and they also attracted a few townspeople with the offer of modern education.

Following the rise of Islam in Arabia in the 7th century, Muslim power flowed over the Red Sea coast, forcing the Ethiopians to retreat deep into their mountain fastness. Islam displaced other creeds in the lowlands of the Horn, and it remains the faith of about one-half of the Eritrean population, including nearly all the people inhabiting the eastern coast and the western plain of Eritrea, as well as the northernmost part of the plateau. Thus, while Islam claims nearly all the pastoralists, Christianity is dominant among the cultivators. Muslims are also significantly represented in all towns of Eritrea, where they are prominent in trade. In the perennial competition between cultivators and pastoralists over land, water, control of trade, and access to ports, religion has played an ideological role, and it remains a potent political force.

Eritrea is a secular state that officially allows freedom of religion. However, only the four denominations that are recognized and registered may be freely followed for the most part: the Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church and Sunni Islam. All religious communities have been required to register since 2002; several



non-recognized churches have applied for registration since then but received no response from the authorities. Since 2002, the practising of non-registered religions is unlawful and according to human right reports, people who do so are persecuted. This mainly affects various Christian churches (Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, though, it also includes the Anglican Church and other Protestant denominations, some of which had churches in Asmara before 2002) and the Wahhabi Muslims, who reject PFDJ ideology because the latter views martyrdom for the state as of greater merit than spiritual values. The authorities also claim that these denominations could lead to divisions within society and that they are foreign to Eritrea's traditions. A joint prayer session at home, a wedding or a funeral may lead to arrests of members of these religious communities, although the authorities do not always follow a uniform approach. Refusals to participate in national service or the People's Army on grounds of faith frequently result in imprisonment. Jehovah's Witnesses are fundamentally opposed to the use of weapons and they were therefore stripped of significant civic rights by presidential decree in October 1994. According to reports by Christian and human rights NGOs, there are between 1,200 and 3,000 people in prison due to their faith, although the basis and timeliness of these unverifiable reports is unknown. Most religious prisoners are kept in Maeter prison near the city of Nakfa. Prison sentences differ greatly in length, ranging from a few weeks to several years. According to the US Department of State, members of non-registered religions find it harder to obtain passports and exit visas. The government also intervenes in the internal affairs of registered religions, which are obliged to present a six-monthly report on their activities. The Sunni Mufti and the Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church were appointed by the government in 1996 and 2005 respectively. The Supreme Head of the Orthodox Church, Abune Antonios, was deposed in 2007 and has been under house arrest since 2006. The practising of religions (including registered religions) and the possession of religious texts during national service is normally not tolerated and frequently punished. Social discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation is, however, practically unheard of. The different religious communities within the country maintain good relations with each other.

History and current situation:

The Red Sea was the route by which Christianity and Islam reached the area, and it was an important trade route that such powers as Turkey, Egypt, and Italy hoped to dominate by seizing control of ports on the Eritrean coast.

As the site of the main ports of the Aksumite empire, it was linked to the beginnings of the Ethiopian kingdom, but it retained much of its independence until it came under Ottoman rule in the 16th century. In the 17th–19th centuries, control of the territory was disputed among Ethiopia, the Ottomans, the kingdom of Tigray, Egypt, and Italy; it became an Italian colony in 1890. Eritrea was used as the main base for the Italian invasions of Ethiopia (1896, 1935–36) and in 1936 became part of Italian East Africa. It was captured by the British in 1941, federated to Ethiopia in 1952, and made a province of Ethiopia in 1962.

After almost 30 years of war, Eritrea became independent in 1993. Since independence, it has been run by one party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), with Isaias Aferwerki as president of the country.

A new constitution was ratified in 1997 but was never implemented. A border war with Ethiopia that began in 1998 ended in 2000, but boundary disputes persisted into the 21st century.

ERITREAN MIGRATION

Map: Migration routes of Eritrean refugees (Source: Lena Reim, 2017)

In Eritrea both political rights and civil liberties are very low. There is no free press (the last privately owned media outlets were suspended and their journalists jailed in 2001, exit visas to leave the country are impossible to obtain legally, and with 17 behind bars, Eritrea remains the worst jailer of journalists in sub-Saharan Africa. Internet is practically non-existent: only 1 percent of the population goes online, and all Internet connections provided by EriTel, the sole state-run telecommunications company, must use the government-controlled gateway.

Most young Eritreans crossing the Mediterranean are fleeing national service, established in 1995 and recently extended to 18 months. According to Amnesty International, «conscription continues to be indefinite for a high proportion of conscripts. There is no provision for conscientious objection to provide an alternative civilian service for those who object to military service on religious, ethical or other conscientious grounds». Nearly 27.000 Eritreans between the age of 18 and 34 have sought asylum in Europe in 2015.

Eritrea is one of the biggest refugee producing countries in the

IMMIGRATION (2019): 16,101 migrants in the country (including 2,252 refugees in 2018).

MAIN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN: Somalia (2,481), Democratic Republic of Congo (1,704) and Uganda (1,539).

MIGRATION (2019): 751,481 Eritrean migrants worldwide (including 507,267 refugees in 2018).

MAIN RECEIVING COUNTRIES: Ethiopia (222,248), Sudan (197,001), Sweden (53.250).

UNHCR Sudan - Eritrean Refugees in Sudan Dashboard as of 30 June 2022:

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94296>

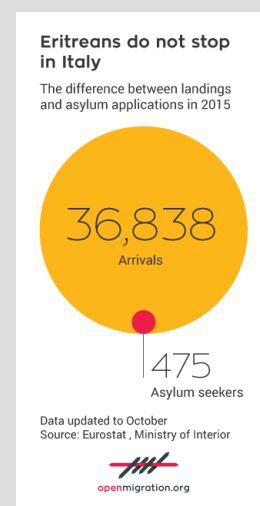
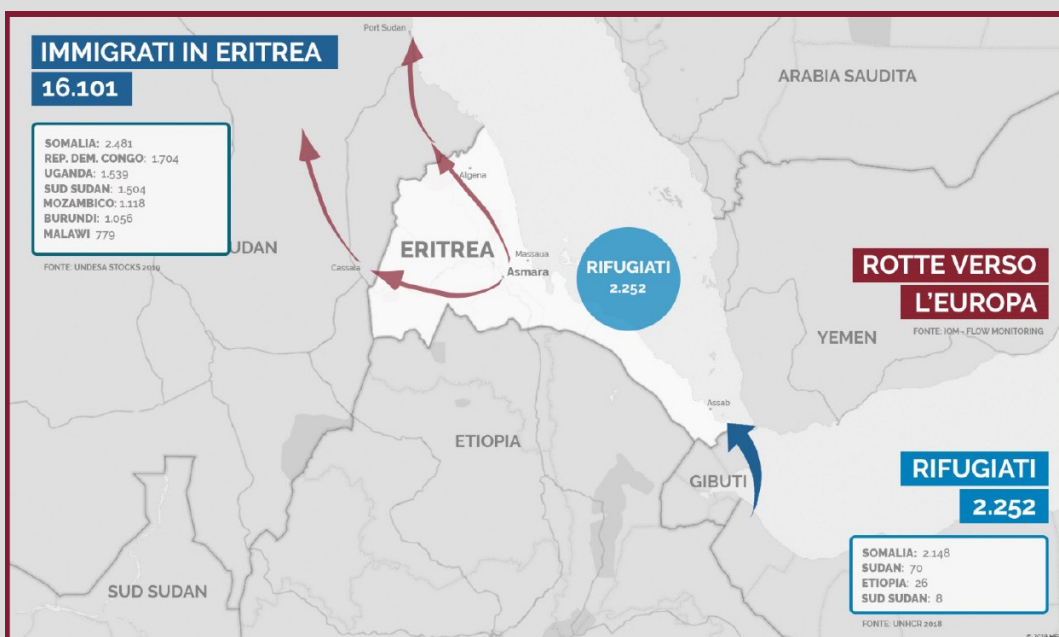
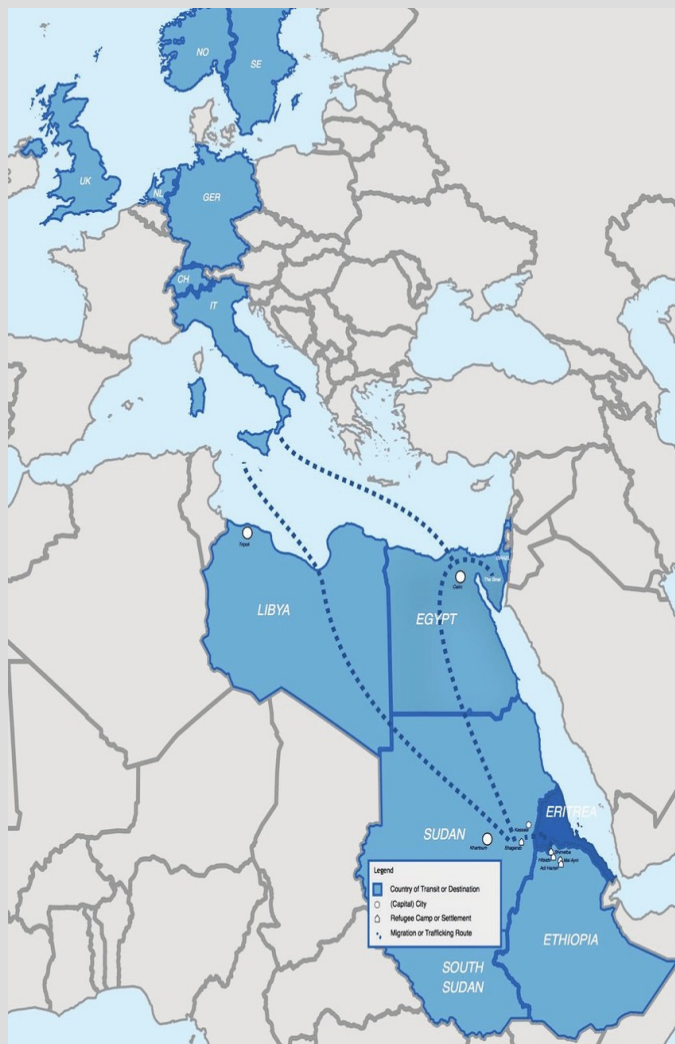
Amnesty International Research, Eritrea: Just deserters: Why **indefinite National Service** in Eritrea has created a generation of refugees [December 2015 edition]

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr64/2930/2015/en/>

world. During **2015**, the largest groups among those risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean were Syrians and Afghans, fleeing from armed conflict and abuses by non-state actors. But **the third biggest group crossing the Mediterranean were Eritreans**, fleeing from a tiny country in the Horn of Africa with no ongoing armed conflict. The reasons why Eritreans, especially young adults flee, are less publicized and less well understood.

In 2015, Eritrea had the record for sea arrivals of migrants and refugees in Italy. UNHCR estimates there were about 40.000, roughly the same number as 2014. Fleeing compulsory military service and one of the worst dictatorships in the world, Eritreans cross the Mediterranean and arrive in Italy. Surprisingly, though, none of them wants to stay. Between 4000 and 5000 Eritreans flee their homes every month to reach seek refuge in Europe. Nearly one out of a hundred Eritreans applies for asylum upon arrival in Italy. While Italy is only a country of transit for the new Eritrean migrants, their actual destinations, looking at the number of applications lodged – are Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and especially Switzerland, where international protection has been sought by 9.520 Eritrean citizens as of October 31st. In 2014, most Eritreans sought asylum in Germany (13.255 requests, accounting for 36 percent of all the applications lodged in the EU).

The history of Eritrean migrations to Italy is not a recent one. The first wave dates back to the early sixties, when the ties with our country were still rooted in the nation's colonial past. Subsequent wars with Ethiopia – the one that culminated in the independence of Eritrea in 1991 and a further armed conflict in 1998 (with a death toll of 100.000) – have created a stream of refugees in addition to economic migrants. A pre-Afewerki and a post-Afewerki exodus, the former characterized by political clashes, the latter a post-ideological one, with young Eritreans trying to break free from the shackles of compulsory, indefinite conscription.



EDUCATION SYSTEM

(Sources: NOKUT, EASO)

More than three-fifths of Eritreans over age 14 are literate; the male literacy rate is significantly higher than the rate among females. Children are taught in their native languages, and in the higher grades they are also taught foreign languages, especially Arabic and English.

Eritrea's **state school system** is based on five years of education in elementary school (also known as primary school), followed by three years in middle school (junior school) and four years in secondary school. In theory, school attendance is compulsory for the first eight years. At the end of the eighth year, children sit a national examination before moving on to secondary school; the pass rate stands at about two-thirds. All male and female pupils complete their 12th and final year of school at the Warsay-Yikealo school at the Sawa national military training centre, which ends with the Eritrean School Leaving Certificate Examination. The pupils who score best are assigned to one of the country's academies (colleges), though they are not given a choice of which one, whereas those who do less well are given the opportunity to attend a technical vocational school. Schooling lasted only 11 years before the Sawa-based 12th school year was introduced in 2003. Of the 1,279 schools in the country in the 2011/12 school year, 1,170 were public schools. The remainder were run by religious communities (awkafe schools for Muslims or missionary schools for Christians) or community schools run by local governments or foreigners. Although, according to data of the Eritrean Ministry of Education, access to education has improved significantly since independence (in 1991/92 there were only 471 schools, with the figure rising to 891 by 2001/02, a significant proportion of school-aged children fail to attend school for the prescribed length of time, with many dropping out or being forced to repeat a year. According to official figures, the enrolment rate in the school year 2011/12 was 99 % for elementary school, 67 % for middle school and 32 % for secondary school. Even at elementary school, however, there were almost twice as many first-year pupils as fifth-year pupils. Reasons for the relatively high school dropout include the lacking capacities of the education system and the fact that many children are taken out of school to help with agricultural tasks. The enrolment rate for girls is somewhat lower than for boys and higher in the highlands than in the peripheral regions such as Gash-Barka or Southern Red Sea zobas. A minority of children (approximately 35 % according to official figures) attend one of the non-compulsory kindergartens before they start school. There is still a shortage of teachers and school buildings. According to Unesco statistics, in 2011 the pupil-teacher ratio in primary school was 41:1. Some schools hold morning and afternoon sessions and a six-day teaching week has been introduced in the lowlands so that the school year can end before the hot season starts. Attendance is free according to official information, but families are obliged to fund their children's school materials, uniforms and transport. According to several reports, some schools charge tuition fees, particularly in the upper grades. Uniform must be worn by school pupils of all ages. Marks are awarded as percentages. The school year begins for all grades in September. Pupils are taught in their mother tongue (one of Eritrea's nine national languages) at elementary school level. In reality, however, Tigrinya (taught to approximately 70 % of pupils) and Arabic (taught to approximately 9 % of pupils) are over-represented in elementary schools, while the languages of the smaller ethnic groups are under-represented; the language spoken by the Hedareb, for example, is only taught at three schools. This is partly due to the use of Arabic as a lingua franca by Muslims and the fact that members of the smaller ethnic groups are keen for their children to learn a major national language, a preference so far tolerated by the authorities. From the sixth school year onwards, all schools across the country teach in English. Tigrinya, Arabic and English are taught as foreign languages. Before Eritrea gained independence, lessons were taught in Amharic or — in the areas under the control of the ELF and EPLF — in Tigrinya, Tigre and Arabic. Since 1994, secondary school pupils have been sent to different parts of the country in July and August for summer work projects called *keremtawi maetot*. These campaigns include environmental, agricultural and infrastructure projects.

Eritrea literacy rate for 2018 was 76.57%, a 11.91% increase from 2008.

Male: (2018) 84% • Female: (2018) 69%

Eritrea literacy rate for 2008 was 64.66%, a 12.15% increase from 2002.

Eritrea literacy rate for 2002 was 52.51%.

The system of education is fully controlled by the state, and programmes of **higher education** are overall planned and developed to serve the needs of the country. Eritrea has seen a change in its higher education system in the period 2004–2010. However, this reform is not a change in the system itself, but a change in the number of institutions offering higher education in the country. The system of diploma, bachelor (and master) programmes has remained more or less the same, except for the fact that the number of programs has increased. The University of Asmara was the only institution of higher education in the whole country in the period from 1958 to 2003. All issues related to higher education have been concentrated around the university. To be able to offer higher education to a larger number of students, the government decided to upgrade seven underlying colleges of the University of Asmara to independent institutions of higher education. Some of the new colleges have also been moved to other parts of the country. The University of Asmara was closed in 2004, with the last intake of students in 2003. The result of decentralisation is that Eritrea today has seven institutions offering higher education, and the number of students attending programs of higher education has risen from around 5000 students at the University of Asmara in 2004 to around 17 000 students attending programs at the new colleges of higher education in 2012.

The University of Asmara's main programmes were the diploma programmes and the bachelor degrees; the master degree programme was introduced for the first time in 2004, just before closing of the university. Today we see that most of the new colleges of higher education have already introduced many new master degree programmes or are planning to

introduce master degree programmes in the near future.

The University of Asmara — the first university in Eritrea — was founded in 1958. In 2003, it stopped accepting new students, and was closed and restructured in 2007, to be replaced from 2003 by satellite academies (colleges) spread across the country, which are still referred to as belonging to the University of Asmara. This move was officially explained by the need to decentralise university education and build capacity. According to a source, however, it was also intended to prevent student uprisings in the capital (similar to the 2001 protests). Since 2008, the colleges have fallen under the auspices of the National Board of Higher Education (NBHE). They include the following:

- Eritrean Institute for Technology (EIT), including three colleges (Engineering, Science and Education), in Mai Nefhi
- College of Arts and Social Science, in Adi Keyih
- Hamelmalo Agricultural College, in Hamelmalo
- College of Business and Economics, in Halhale
- College of Marine Science and Technology, in Massawa
- College of Health Sciences, in Asmara
- Orotta School of Medicine and Dental Hygiene, in Asmara

The colleges are subject to joint academic and military management. According to some sources, students are under military command and divided into units. However, according to another report, the military regime at EIT in Mai Nefhi has been

Recruitment via the 12th school year at Sawa

The official recruitment age in Eritrea is 18. Between 1994 and 2002, two recruitment rounds were carried out each year (one in winter and one in summer). The system was changed in 2003, and a 12th school year at the military training camp of Sawa, now officially known as the Warsay-Yikealo School, was introduced for all Eritrean pupils. Most of the pupils are assigned directly to national service after the final examinations which take place in Sawa. This means that there is now only one recruitment round for secondary school pupils each year, in late July/early August. Between 10,000 and 25,000 pupils are conscripted for the 12th school year in each recruitment round.

Eritrean pupils are called to register for the 12th school year by their local (kebab) administration during their 11th school year. Following registration, they are sent a letter telling them the time and location of their departure for Sawa.

Recruitment via the 12th school year is primarily carried out in the Eritrean highlands, where the education system is on a significantly stronger footing than in the lowlands (261). This means that the Tigrinya are over-represented at Sawa. Although they account for only about half of the population, 87 % of participants in the 21st recruitment round were Tigrinya. Only 5.8 % of recruits were Tigre, 2.8 % Saho and 2.6 % Bilen, while the remaining five ethnic groups accounted for only 1.8 %.

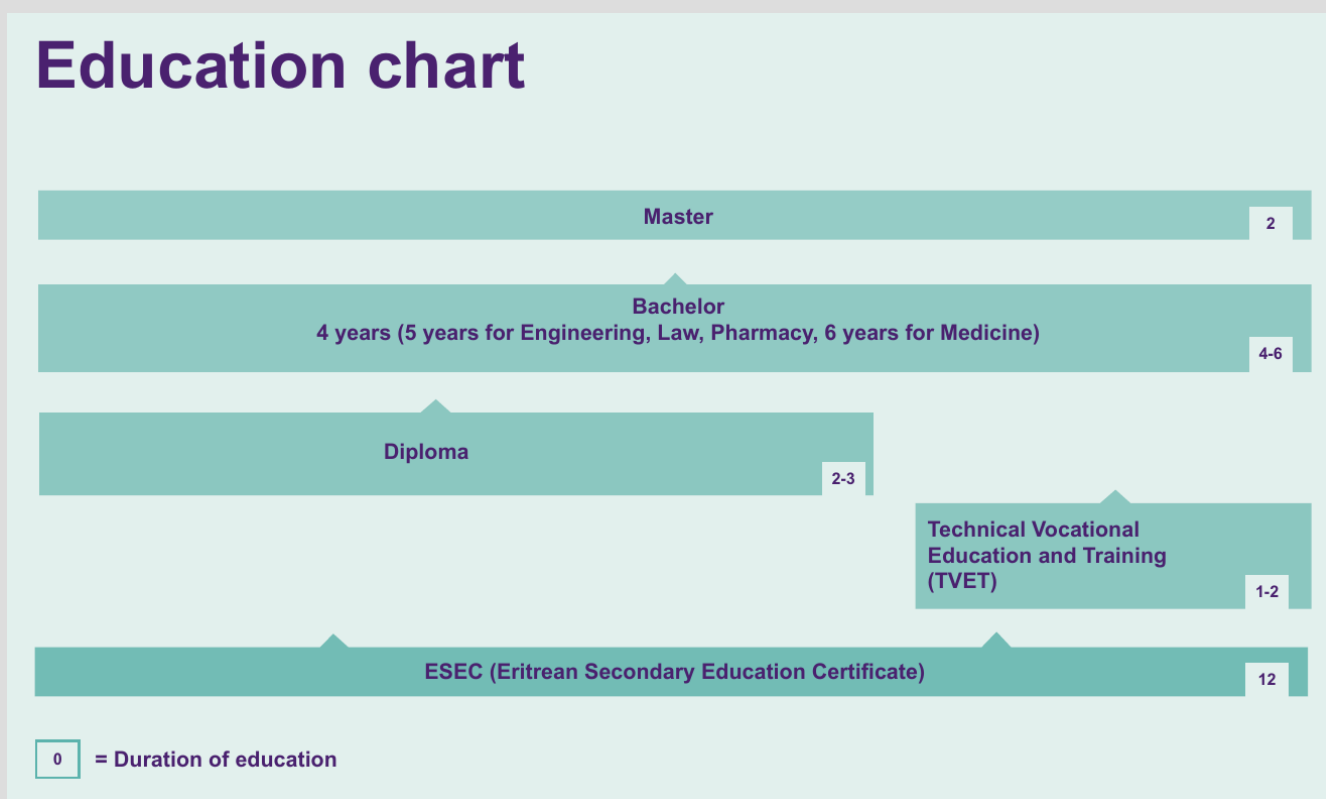
Standard recruitment procedures operate on the basis of the education system, which means that pupils are called up to Sawa as soon as they have finished their 11th year at school, regardless of their age. Conscripts may therefore be 17 years old or even younger. According to a leaked Eritrean military report, one-third of those drafted during the 21st recruitment round in 2010 were under 18. The Eritrean government claimed that the under-age pupils attending Warsay-Yikealo school did not belong to the army.

The 12th school year at the Sawa-based Warsay-Yikealo school involves a combination of academic and military training and labour deployments. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the academic session, which begins after the conscripts are recruited in July or August, lasts seven or eight months and focuses on the propagation of national values, i.e. the PFDJ's ideology. Pupils are subjected to military discipline during this period and can be mobilised repeatedly for military training events. According to several sources of a Norwegian fact-finding mission, however, it is likely that the Warsay-Yikealo school has become less military in nature in recent years, since it is now primarily an educational institution. The academic session ends in February or March with tests in five different subjects (two of which must be English and Mathematics) held over a period of several days, known as the Eritrean School Leaving Certificate Examination. All tested pupils receive a certificate, regardless of their marks. The precise length of the military training which then begins differs from year to year; the sources refer to periods of between six weeks and six months. A few sources state that part of the military training takes place before the academic session, which again suggests that the arrangements are not identical every year. The pupils who score best in the final examination can continue their education at one of the country's nine colleges after completing their 12th school year. Since 2007, those who fare less well have been able to start vocational training at Sawa or elsewhere, and the remainder are transferred immediately to proper national service. Most are sent to the army but some are assigned to civilian duties within administrative structures or to other tasks e.g. within agricultural or construction companies. The training camp is located near Forto Sawa in zoba Gash-Barka, around 30 kilometres from the Sudanese border. It consists of a training complex and a military exercise ground, as well as a number of shops and accommodation for parents visiting children during their stay at Sawa.

There are many Eritrean teenagers who do not attend secondary school and accordingly fail to complete their 12th school year at Sawa. Other methods of recruitment are therefore used, particularly in rural areas. Anyone who drops out of school before their 11th school year can be conscripted for national service directly by the kebab administration once they reach the age of 18. Young people over the age of 18 who are still attending school are also sometimes conscripted by the administration, in particular if there are suspicions that they are delaying leaving school in order to avoid being recruited. This has a particularly strong impact on the children of poor families in lowland areas who rely on them to herd animals and assist with seasonal farming at locations remote from their homes. In addition, giffas have taken place on a country-wide basis since approximately 2001. During these raids, checks are carried out to ascertain whether young people have completed their military service and those who have not are imprisoned (mostly in the Adi Abeito prison near Asmara) and then sent for military training. (source: EASO)

relaxed and students are allowed to travel to Asmara freely, for example. With the loss of many former University of Asmara professors, the dispersed colleges and institutes are increasingly staffed by teachers brought from India on short-term contracts. Students of the colleges are assigned to civilian national service after graduating, with some starting work as a 12th year teacher at Sawa. Others are assigned to rural elementary schools. Students who drop out are conscripted for military service. Colleges offer two- or three-year diploma courses and four- or five-year bachelor degree courses. Postgraduate masters courses are being introduced. College students are not charged fees and the government also pays for their food and accommodation. Students only officially graduate from college after completing their mandatory national service. They may request a Transcript of Records in the meantime, however.

Approaches to evaluation of the qualifications from Eritrea can be different in different ENIC-NARIC countries depending on the mandate of the evaluation authorities. More information on assessment practices of documentation from Eritrea can be obtained from the E-learning modules to be developed within the framework of the EU-funded project “Refugees and Recognition – Toolkit for recognition of higher education for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation” by the ENIC-NARIC centres of France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom. The system of education is fully controlled by the state, and programmes of higher education are overall planned and developed to serve the needs of the country.



(source: NOKUT)

Structure of the education system of Eritrea

Primary and Secondary Education

- Primary School grades 1-5, official starting age is seven years old
- Middle School grades 6-8, middle school is compulsory
- Secondary School grades 9-11
- The School of Sawa is the only institution which offers 12th year for students from all over the country

University-preparatory qualifications

At the end of the 12th year the students sit for the Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate (ESEC) Examination. The Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate (ESEC) is issued by the Ministry of Education in Eritrea. In order to be qualified for admission to higher education, graduates must pass five subjects in the Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate Examination. English and Mathematics are compulsory subjects. In addition, they must take at least three other subjects. Each subject is marked on a grading scale from A to D. F is fail, and a student cannot have an “F” in order to graduate. The letter grades are converted to numerical grades in order to calculate the GPA (A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, F=0).

In order to be admitted to higher education applicants must have a General Point Average (GPA) of minimum 2.0. The GPA

is calculated from five subjects: Mathematics, English and three other subjects with the highest grades. The best students are placed by the Ministry of Education in the most prestigious study programmes, like medicine and engineering. Students with lower grades are placed in diploma programmes (HE) or certificate and diploma programmes (TVET).

Technical and vocational qualifications

- Post-Middle School (1-3 years)
- Post-Secondary TVET (1-3 years)

Higher Education

- Diploma programs (2-3 years)
- Most diploma programmes can be incorporated in a bachelor degree. It takes additional 2-2,5 years to complete an ordinary 4-year bachelor's degree
- 4-year bachelor degree programmes
- 5-year bachelor programmes in engineering, law and pharmacy
- 6-year bachelor of medicine at the Orotta School of Medicine and Dental Medicine

EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Higher Education Institutions

The University of Asmara was the only institution of higher education in Eritrea in the period from 1958 to 2003. As of 2017, there are seven new colleges of higher education:

1. Eritrea Institute of Technology, Mai Nefhi
2. Hamelmallo Agricultural College, Hamelmallo
3. College of Health Sciences, Asmara
4. Orotta School of Medicine and Dental Medicine, Asmara
5. College of Marine Sciences & Technology, Massawa
6. College of Business and Economics, Halhale College of Arts and Social Sciences, Adi Keih

Each college covers a specific subject area. For example, engineering is only offered at Eritrean Institute of Technology and medicine is only offered at Orotta School of Medicine and Dental Medicine. The colleges offer 2–3 year diploma programs, 4-5(6) year bachelor degree programmes, and some are offering or planning to offer different programmes on a master degree level.

The master degree is a 2-year program. As the master programme was only introduced in 2004, just before the closing of the University of Asmara, it is still a new degree in Eritrea. For this reason, just a few of the colleges have experience with master degrees and it takes time to develop these new degree programmes.