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EASO Country of Origin Information Report

Eritrea Country Focus

May 2015



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Dan Connell, an external expert, who has been working on Eritrea as a journalist, lecturer, and researcher for more than 25 years.

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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2012) ⁽¹⁾. The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced. To the extent possible and unless otherwise stated, all information presented, except for undisputed or obvious facts, has been cross-checked.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

Refugee, risk and similar terminology are used as a generic terminology and not as legally defined in the EU Asylum Acquis and the Geneva Convention.

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The target audience are asylum caseworkers, COI researchers, policymakers, and decision-making authorities.

The drafting of this report was finalised in April 2015. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report.

⁽¹⁾ The EASO methodology is largely based on the Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI), 2008, and can be downloaded from the EASO website: <http://easo.europa.eu>.

Glossary and Abbreviations

Adi	Village (Tigrinya)
Arbi Harnet	Diaspora-based opposition movement
Awraja	Province, first tier administrative division (until 1996)
Baito	Elected parliament (at all administrative levels)
Demhit	Tigray People's Democratic Movement
DMLEK	Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrean Kunama
EDA	Eritrean Democratic Alliance
EDF	Eritrean Defense Forces
EIT	Eritrean Institute of Technology
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
ELM	Eritrean Liberation Movement
ENSF	Eritrean National Salvation Front
EPDP	Eritrea People's Democratic Party
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRP	Eritrean People's Revolutionary Party
ESF	Eritrean Solidarity Front
EYSC	Eritrean Youth Solidarity for Change
EYSNS/Simret	Eritrean Youth Solidarity for National Salvation
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
Jebha	Eritrean Liberation Front (Arabic)
Giffa	Round-up, razzia
Hagerawi Agelglot	National Service
Hagerawi Baito	National parliament
Hafash	Masses (population)
Higdef	People's Front for Democracy and Justice (Tigrinya)
Hizbawi Ginbar	Eritrean People's Liberation Front (Tigrinya)
Hizbawi Serawit	People's Army
Kebabi	Municipality, lowest tier administrative division (after 1996)
Kebele	Amharic term for local administration
Kirshi	Nakfa (currency)
Megaba'aya	General meeting of population
Menqesaqesi Wereqet	Travel permit

Mmhidar	Administration (all levels)
NBHE	National Board of Higher Education
NCEW	National Confederation of Eritrean Workers
NDFLES	National Democratic Front for the Liberation of the Eritrean Saho
NUEW	National Union of Eritrean Women
NUEYS	National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students
Nus-Awraja	Sub-province, 2 nd tier administrative division (until 1996)
Nus-Zoba	Sub-region, 2 nd tier administrative division (after 1996)
PGE	Provisional Government of Eritrea
PFDJ	People's Front for Democracy and Justice (successor of EPLF)
RSADO	Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization
Shaebia	Eritrean People's Liberation Front (Tigrinya)
Tegadelti	Veteran independence fighters (singular: Tegadelay)
TGE	Transitional Government of Eritrea
TPDM	Tigray People's Democratic Movement (Eritrea-based Ethiopian organisation)
Woreda	3 rd tier administrative division (until 1996)
WYDC	Warsay Yikealo Development Campaign
Zoba	Region, 1 st tier administrative division (after 1996)

Introduction and source assessment

The Country Focus on Eritrea aims to provide information on a selection of topics relevant for international protection status determination (PSD; refugee status and subsidiary protection). This report was drafted by the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), Division Analysis and Services, Switzerland in German language and has been translated into English.

Access to relevant country of origin information (COI) about Eritrea, especially linked to human rights issues, is generally difficult. This is mainly due to the fact that human rights monitors have no access to the country⁽²⁾, research options for scholars are very restricted and there is no free press⁽³⁾. Furthermore, the authorities generally do not release information on topics such as the national service. Hence, reports on sensitive issues have to rely largely on sources outside Eritrea. The few available reports based on research in Eritrea mainly draw on government statements and anecdotal knowledge of international representatives, and not on first-hand information. This difficulty was demonstrated in recent polemics regarding a Danish fact-finding report⁽⁴⁾.

Due to limited direct access to relevant information in Eritrea and the fact that some well-established sources (such as US Department of State, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International) do not always quote the origin of their information, there is some risk of roundtripping⁽⁵⁾ and false confirmation of information.

Therefore this report uses a wide variety of sources as possible. Information from a wide range of scholars, human-rights monitors, aid agencies, non-governmental organisations and governmental agencies has been used in order to provide as balanced a picture as possible under the circumstances described above.

Some core topics of this report are particularly affected by the problematic access to reliable sources. These include national service, prison conditions, torture and treatment of deserters and draft evaders; the respective chapters are explicitly marked. On these topics, the reporting human rights organisations rely mostly on information from persons who are familiar with the human rights situation in Eritrea but who live abroad. These include refugees, journalists, political activists and former high-ranking officials in exile, diplomats and international aid workers formerly based in Eritrea, academics, government officials as well as representatives of international organisations⁽⁶⁾.

On other topics unrelated to the human-rights situation in Eritrea, information is less disputed and thus more reliable. On these topics, information given by the Eritrean authorities has been used as well as other publications, which generally are not contradictory (with a few exceptions e.g. regarding the issuance of exit visas). On some topics, there are relatively few current publications available. The older sources used in the report are still reliable.

⁽²⁾ Cf. UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Oral Update by Mr Mike Smith, Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea at the 28th session of the Human Rights Council*, 16 March 2015; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 6.

⁽³⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, pp. 5-6; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 18; cf. [Chapter 1.6](#).

⁽⁴⁾ Human Rights Watch, *Denmark: Eritrea Immigration Report Deeply Flawed*, 17 December 2014; UNHCR, *Fact Finding Mission report of the Danish Immigration Service, 'Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return. Country of Origin Information for Use in the Asylum Determination process', UNHCR's perspective*, December 2014; Caperi, *Eritrea: Professor Gaim Kibreab replies to the Danish Report*, 28 November 2014; Arnone, A. and 21 other signatories, *Statement on EU Asylum and Aid Policy to Eritrea*, 31 March 2015.

⁽⁵⁾ Round tripping occurs when secondary sources cite each other, instead of referring to the original/primary source. European Union, *Common EU guidelines for processing COI*, April 2008, p. 7.

⁽⁶⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, p. 11; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 8; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 6; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 18-19; US Department of State, *2013 Human Rights Report: Appendix A — Notes on Preparation of Report*, 27 February 2014.

Methodology

Defining the content

The terms of reference for the report were developed by the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), based on the needs for COI on specific issues relevant for PSD in Switzerland. Additional input was provided by the EASO-COI Specialist network on Eritrea in February, 2015.

This Country Focus, after introductory chapters on general country information and the political system, describes the following topics: national service, prisons, religion, identity documents, and (illegal) exit.

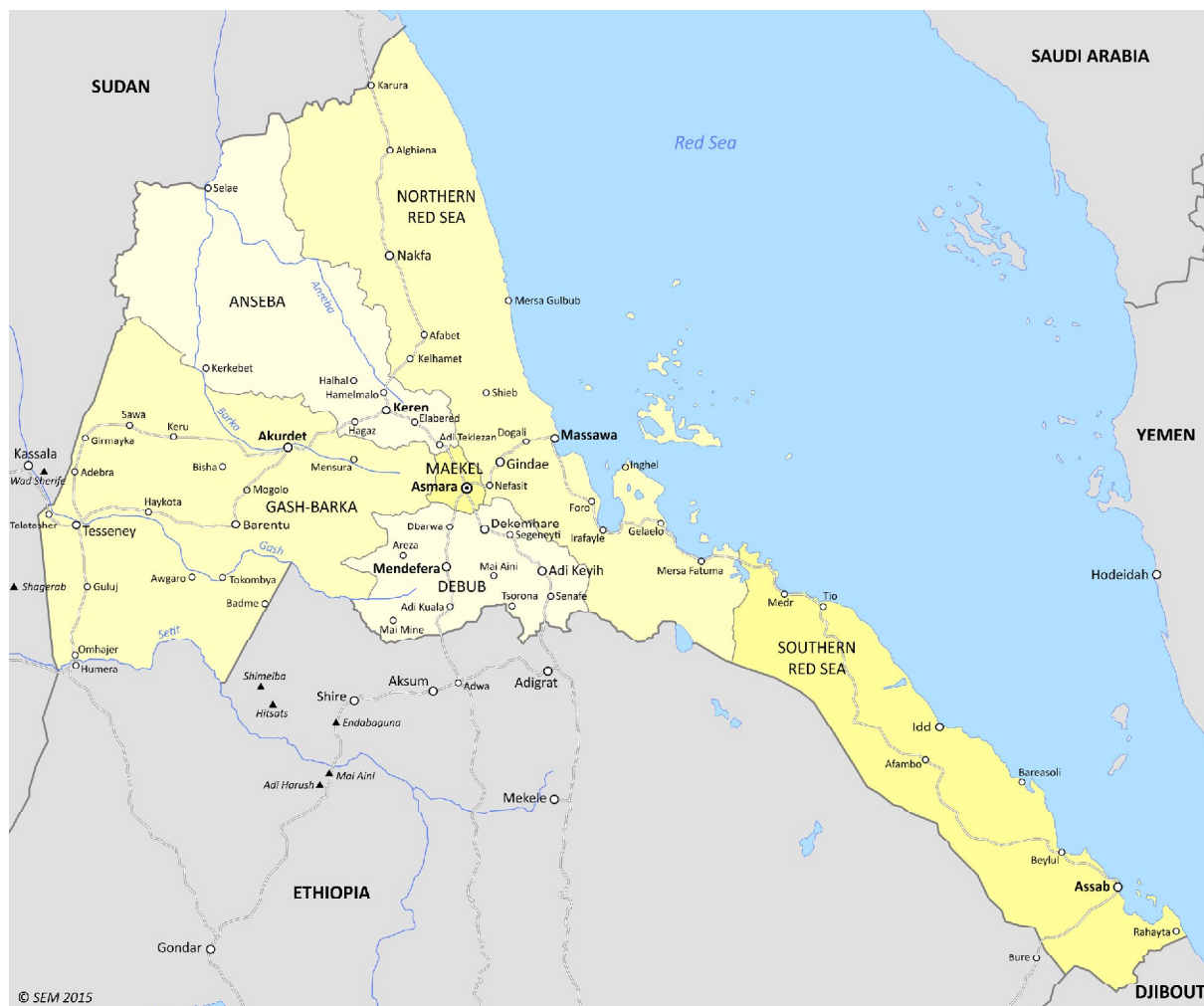
Collecting information

The report is based on publicly available reports of COI units, UN agencies, human rights organisations, scholars, official and NGO papers, government and diaspora media; it has been completed with information obtained from interviews e.g. during information-gathering missions. For security reasons, not all contacts were named; the choice had to be made between not interviewing them at all and referring to them as 'anonymous sources'. Considering the value of the information provided, the latter approach was preferred.

Quality control

In order to ensure that the writer respected the EASO-COI Report Methodology, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries listed as reviewers in the Acknowledgements section. Furthermore, the external expert, Dan Connell, was contracted to review the report from an academic point of view. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report.

Map of Eritrea



Source: State Secretariat for Migration 2015 (Switzerland) ⁽⁷⁾. All borders and names used on this and other maps in this report do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the European Union. The border line between Eritrea and Ethiopia corresponds to the *Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission's* ruling of 2002 ⁽⁸⁾. Since the ruling has not been implemented, the *de facto* border line diverges from that line at several points ⁽⁹⁾.

⁽⁷⁾ Map created by State Secretariat for Migration (Switzerland), 2015, based on Eritrean Demining Authority et al., *Landmine Impact Survey — 2004* [map], 2004; UN Cartographic Section, *Eritrea* [map], n.d.; Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission, *International Boundary between the State of Eritrea and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* [map], 2002.

⁽⁸⁾ Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission, *International Boundary between the State of Eritrea and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* [map], 2002.

⁽⁹⁾ TesfaNews, *Africa's Cuba: Eritrea Endures 13 Years of Illegal Occupation and Sanctions*, 16 April 2015.

1. General country information

1.1 Geography

Eritrea is located in North-East Africa (Horn of Africa) on the Red Sea. It shares a border with Sudan in the west, Ethiopia in the south and Djibouti in the southeast. To the north-east, Eritrea lies on the Red Sea, opposite Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The country has a land mass of approximately 120,000 km² ⁽¹⁰⁾, and the coastline along the Red Sea is 1,151 km long ⁽¹¹⁾.

In geographical terms, Eritrea can be broadly divided into three main areas: the highlands, the coastal lowlands and the lowlands and hilly landscapes of the west, with transitional zones in between. The coastal lowlands extend along the entire coast and are characterised by a very hot desert climate with high humidity. These coastal lowlands include the Danakil Depression in the southeast of the country and the Dahlak Archipelago, made up of more than 350 islands in the Red Sea. Hilly green landscapes lie between the lowlands and the highlands. The average altitude of the latter is about 2,250 metres above sea level. The highlands benefit from a mild climate and fertile soil and are the country's most densely populated region. They are bordered in the west by further hills and lowlands which extend to the Sudanese border, with a mild climate and savanna vegetation ⁽¹²⁾.

Agriculture is practised in the highlands; the lowlands are mainly inhabited by nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples ⁽¹³⁾.

1.2 Demographics

1.2.1 Ethnic groups

No census has been carried out in Eritrea since 1938 ⁽¹⁴⁾. Population estimates range between 2.5 (as of 1995) ⁽¹⁵⁾ and 6.5 million (as of 2014) ⁽¹⁶⁾. The Eritrean Ministry of Information estimated the country's population at 3.56 million in 2002 ⁽¹⁷⁾.

The Eritrean population is composed of nine officially recognised different ethno-linguistic groups:

- The **Tigrinya** (full name: *Bihere-Tigrinya*, who also refer to themselves as *Deqi Kebessa*, highlanders) account for about half of Eritrea's population. 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.
- The **Tigre**, the second-largest group (about 30 % of the population), 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.
- The **Afar** (approximately 5 % of the population, also known as the *Danakil*) are a 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.

⁽¹⁰⁾ 124,300 km² according to the Eritrean Ministry of Information, 117,600 km² according to the CIA, 125,320 km² according to Tesfagiorgis and 121,144 km² according to Europa Regional Surveys of the World. These discrepancies are presumably due to the unresolved border disputes with Ethiopia and Djibouti.

⁽¹¹⁾ Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Eritrea at a Glance*, 1 October 2009; CIA, *The World Factbook, Eritrea, People and Society*, 22 June 2014; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 1; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015, 44th edition*, 2014, p. 455.

⁽¹²⁾ Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara*, 2013, p. 463; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 1-10.

⁽¹³⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 1-10.

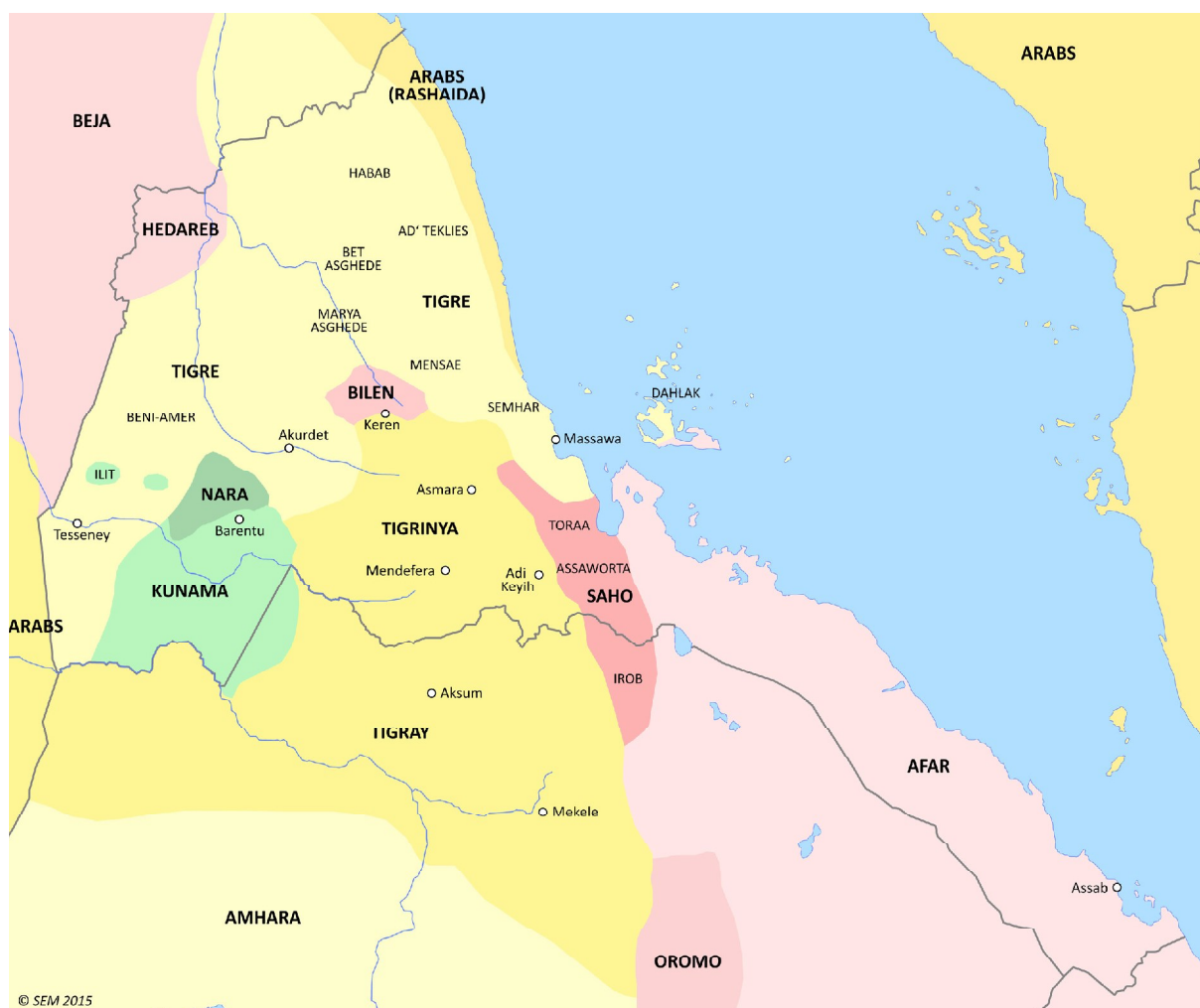
⁽¹⁴⁾ National Statistics Office (Eritrea) and Macro International Inc., *Demographic and Health Survey 1995*, March 1997, p. 2; Awate, *Politics of Census*, 11 April 2014.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Awate, *Politics of Census*, 11 April 2014.

⁽¹⁶⁾ CIA, *The World Factbook, Eritrea, People and Society*, 22 June 2014; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015, 44th edition*, 2014, p. 455.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Eritrea at a Glance*, 1 October 2009.

- The **Saho** (approximately 5 % of the population) are 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.
- The **Bilen** (approximately 2 % of the population, previously known as *Bogos*), who refer to themselves as *Blin* live in villages to the north of Keren and are mostly sedentary farmers. Around half of the Bilen are Christian and half are Muslim.
- The **Rashaïda** (approximately 0.5 % of the population) 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 **Hedareb** (approximately 2.5 % of the population, also known as *T'bdawe*) 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.



Distribution of ethnic groups and languages in Eritrea and bordering regions, disregarding linguistic relations within cities (yellow = Semitic languages, red = Cushitic languages, green = Nilo-Saharan languages) ⁽¹⁸⁾

⁽¹⁸⁾ The borders shown are not exact due to the nomadic lifestyle of many lowlanders and the incongruence of ethnic and linguistic borders. Map created by State Secretariat for Migration (Switzerland), 2015, based on Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 20, 171-178, 217-220; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, p. xxvi; Lewis, I.M., *Peoples of the Horn of Africa. Somali, Afar and Saho*, 1994; Ethnologue, *Eritrea, Languages*, n.d.; Ethnologue, *Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia* [map], 2015; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 112; Academic expert, e-mail, 31 March 2015. All borders and names used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the European Union.

- The **Nara** (approximately 1.5 % of the population, also referred to pejoratively as *Barya*) 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.
- The **Kunama** (approximately 2 % of the population) 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 ⁽¹⁹⁾.

The nine different ethnic groups in Eritrea officially enjoy the same status ⁽²⁰⁾ but in reality the Tigrinya dominate the state, the economy, the military and the spheres of politics and education ⁽²¹⁾. 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 ⁽²²⁾.

1.2.2 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) ⁽²³⁾. The language pairs Tigrinya and Tigre, Saho and Afar, and Nara and Kunama are to a certain extent mutually intelligible ⁽²⁴⁾. Tigrinya, Tigre and Bilen are written using the Ge'ez script (*Fidel*), 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 ⁽²⁵⁾.

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 ⁽²⁶⁾. Amharic was the only official language between 1959 and 1991 while Eritrea was part of Ethiopia ⁽²⁷⁾. It is still used in addition to Tigrinya as a first or second language by Eritreans who grew up in Ethiopia (the 'Amiche') 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 ⁽²⁸⁾.

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 ⁽²⁹⁾. Except for Bilen

⁽¹⁹⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 167-179, 212-217; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Eritrea at a Glance*, 1 October 2009; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Eritrea's 9 ethnic groups*, 21 March 2014; Ethnologue, *Eritrea, Languages*, n.d.; Simeone-Senelle, M., 'Les langues en Erythrée', 2000; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 111-113; Academic expert, e-mail, 31 March 2015; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 134-136.

⁽²⁰⁾ Simeone-Senelle, M., 'Les langues en Erythrée', 2000; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 108-109; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 130-132.

⁽²¹⁾ Africa Confidential, *Opposing Issayas*, 14 May 2010; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 113-117.

⁽²²⁾ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 98-99, 118-132; NOREF, *Eritrean opposition parties and civic organisations*, January 2015, p. 2; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 144-164.

⁽²³⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 209; Simeone-Senelle, M., 'Les langues en Erythrée', 2000.

⁽²⁴⁾ Academic expert, e-mail, 31 March 2015.

⁽²⁵⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 212-218; Yonas M.A., 'Origin and development of multilingual education in Eritrea', 30 April 2014, p. 137.

⁽²⁶⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 212, 217-220; Ethnologue, *Eritrea, Status*, n.d.; Simeone-Senelle, M., 'Les langues en Erythrée', 2000; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, pp. 212-216; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 114; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 139; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, pp. 211-216.

⁽²⁷⁾ Simeone-Senelle, M., 'Les langues en Erythrée', 2000; Yonas M.A., 'Origin and development of multilingual education in Eritrea', 30 April 2014, p. 145.

⁽²⁸⁾ Riggan, J., 'In Between Nations: Ethiopian-Born Eritreans, Liminality, and War', May 2011, pp. 141-143, 146; Kibreab, G., interview, 5-6 September 2009; Academic expert, e-mail, 30 April 2015.

⁽²⁹⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 171-178, 212, 217-220; Simeone-Senelle, M., 'Les langues en Erythrée', 2000.

and Nara, all of Eritrea's languages are also spoken in bordering countries (see [map](#)) ⁽³⁰⁾. 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 ⁽³¹⁾.

While Tigrinya is the dominant language in the cities of the highlands, including Asmara, Eritrea's other cities are multilingual:

- Massawa: main language Tigre, also Tigrinya and Saho
- Assab: main language Tigrinya, also Amharic and Afar
- Keren: main language Bilen, also Tigre and Tigrinya
- Akurdet: main language Tigre, some Tigrinya speakers
- Barentu: main language Kunama, also Tigrinya and Tigre
- Tesseney: mixture of Tigre, Kunama, Tigrinya and Arabic, some Nara speakers ⁽³²⁾

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 ⁽³³⁾.

1.2.3 Eritrean names

Eritrean names are made up of three parts: the individual's first name, his/her father's first name and his/her grandfather's first name. There are no surnames in the European sense and people are therefore called by their first names also in formal settings ⁽³⁴⁾. In cases of children born out of wedlock, the name of the biological father is taken. In some rare cases, when the mother does not want to disclose the name of the biological father, either the mother's own father's name is used or the name of her current husband (usually depending on with whom she lives) ⁽³⁵⁾.

Eritreans in Europe frequently use their father's name and grandfather's name as a surname ⁽³⁶⁾.

1.3 History

The Eritrean highlands were part of the Abyssinian Kingdom for many centuries, during which time Orthodox Christianity was introduced. The coastal lowlands have seen the influx of a variety of different influences, mainly from the Arabic-speaking countries and the Ottoman Empire, which resulted in the spread of Islam. Eritrea was an Italian colony between 1890 and 1941. Italy's original aim was to colonise all of Abyssinia, but after losing the Battle of Adwa against the Abyssinian army in 1896 it had to content itself with the northernmost extremities of Abyssinia and the Eritrean lowlands ⁽³⁷⁾.

In 1935, Italy invaded and occupied all of Abyssinia, together with British Somaliland, and incorporated it in what it termed Italian East Africa. Following the outbreak of World War II, the British army invaded Abyssinia in 1941 and drove the Italians out of the country, setting up a British Military Administration in Eritrea. Once World War II ended, the four Great Powers and the United Nations sent several delegations to decide on the future status of Eritrea. Ethiopia called for the former Italian colony to be brought within its territory, whereas many Eritreans, in particular those in the Muslim lowlands, demanded independence, partly because Eritrea was economically more advanced than Ethiopia and had developed its own identity. The Great Powers were also undecided, but in 1950 the United Nations reached a compromise promoted by Ethiopia's ally, the United States; on 15 September 1952, Eritrea became part of a federation with Ethiopia, yet retained a large degree of autonomy with its own government, parliament, flag and constitution ⁽³⁸⁾.

⁽³⁰⁾ Ethnologue, *Eritrea, Languages*, n.d.; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 217-218

⁽³¹⁾ Landinfo. *Respons Eritrea/Etiopia: Tigrinja-språk langs grensen*, 30 June 2010; Beyene, T., *Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1988, p. 21; UCLA, *UCLA Language Materials. Tigrinya*, n.d.; About World Languages, *Tigrinya*, 29 January 2014.

⁽³²⁾ Academic expert, e-mail, 31 March 2015; on Assab: Riggan, J., 'In Between Nations: Ethiopian-Born Eritreans, Liminality, and War', May 2011, pp. 141-143, 146.

⁽³³⁾ Academic expert, e-mail, 31 March 2015.

⁽³⁴⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 236.

⁽³⁵⁾ Academic expert, e-mail, 30 April 2015.

⁽³⁶⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 236.

⁽³⁷⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 31-55; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, 21 September 2010, p. 2; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 134-135.

⁽³⁸⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 55-63; Prouty, C. and Rosenfeld, E., *Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 1994, pp. 9, 111; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, 21 September 2010, pp. 2-3.

Ethiopia, however, gradually limited Eritrea's autonomy and eventually abolished it entirely on 15 November 1962, officially by decision of the Eritrean Parliament. Eritrea was henceforth considered an Ethiopian province and armed Eritrean groups took up the fight for independence. The *Eritrean Liberation Movement* (ELM) was founded by Muslims and communists in 1958 but was rapidly supplanted by the *Eritrean Liberation Front* (ELF, *Jebha* in Arabic) which was set up in 1960, and ultimately disintegrated in 1970. The ELF's activities had been mainly confined to the Muslim lowlands but also mobilised ever more Christian highlanders, which heightened tensions within the ELF. In the early 1970s, three ELF splinter groups led by highlanders founded the Marxist-inspired *Eritrean People's Liberation Front* (EPLF, *Shaebia* or *Hizbawi Ginbar* in Tigrinya). Christians and Muslims fought side by side in the EPLF but the leadership was dominated by Christian highlanders. Eritrea's struggle for independence was hampered from 1972 onwards by a civil war between the ELF and the EPLF, which was halted by a truce in 1974 that held until 1980 when fighting between them erupted again. In 1981 the ELF was driven into Sudan where it broke up into numerous splinter groups⁽³⁹⁾.

In 1971, like-minded fighters of the EPLF founded a secret Marxist-Leninist party known as the *Eritrean People's Revolutionary Party* (EPRP). Their goal was to build a national movement on a more unified and radical social and political basis. This secretive core elite took all major decisions for the EPLF and defined its ideology. While the EPLF was officially led by Romedan Mohamed Nur since its first congress in 1977, Isaias Afewerki was the head of the more influential EPRP. In 1987, Isaias was appointed leader of the EPLF⁽⁴⁰⁾.

In spite of Ethiopia's military pre-eminence, the loosely allied EPLF and ELF succeeded in gaining control over almost the entire country by 1977, with the exception of the cities of Asmara and Assab. After the Abyssinian Emperor Haile Selassie was toppled in 1974, the socialist Derg regime was established in Addis Abeba under the leadership of Lieutenant-Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam. Military assistance provided by the Soviet Union allowed the Derg to launch a successful offensive from 1978 onwards, and the EPLF were forced to withdraw to the Sahel mountains around the city of Nakfa, while the ELF suffered major losses from which it never recovered. The EPLF started a counter-offensive in the mid-1980s and won key victories at battles in Afabet and Massawa by the end of the decade, finally taking control of the entire country after the capital of Asmara was captured on 24 May 1991⁽⁴¹⁾. About 65,000 Eritrean soldiers and up to 50,000 civilians were killed during the 30-year conflict⁽⁴²⁾.

In a referendum in 1993 supervised by the United Nations, 99.8 % of Eritreans voted in favour of independence and the country was recognised by the international community. The EPLF leader Isaias Afewerki became head of state, and in February 1994 the EPLF transformed itself into a political party named *People's Front for Democracy and Justice* (PFDJ)⁽⁴³⁾. The secret EPRP had been formally dissolved in 1989 but the 'inner circle' continued to take important decisions until the establishment of the PFDJ, when the existence of the EPRP was publicly acknowledged for the first time⁽⁴⁴⁾. Relations with Ethiopia began well and no restrictions were imposed on the movement of people or goods across the shared border⁽⁴⁵⁾.

The border between Eritrea and Ethiopia was never officially demarcated, however, and tensions rose in the western, central and eastern border regions of Badme, Tsorona-Zalambessa and Bure respectively. Fighting broke out in May 1998 around Badme and rapidly escalated into a border war⁽⁴⁶⁾. Between 70,000⁽⁴⁷⁾ and 100,000 people were killed in several rounds of combat, as many people as had perished in the independence war, and about 155,000 of the Eritreans living in Ethiopia and of the Ethiopians living in Eritrea were deported back to their home countries. A ceasefire was finally declared in June 2000. A peace agreement signed in December 2000 obliged both parties to the conflict to recognize the demarcation of the common border by a UN Commission. When the borderline⁽⁴⁸⁾

⁽³⁹⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 63-66; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, 21 September 2010, pp. 3-4; Connell, D., 'Escaping Eritrea. Why They Flee and What They Face', Fall 2012, p. 5; Treiber, M., *Der lange Schatten der EPLF*, May 2005, p. 14; Pool, D., *From Guerillas to Government*, 15 December 2001.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Connell, D., 'Inside the EPLF: The Origins of the 'People's Party' & its Role in the Liberation of Eritrea', September 2001, pp. 351-361; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 58-59; Connell, D., Killion, T., *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 230-232.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Connell, D., *Against All Odds. A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution*, 1993; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 66-67; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, 21 September 2010, p. 4; Pool, D., *From Guerillas to Government*, 15 December 2001; Africa Watch, *Evil Days. 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia*, September 2001.

⁽⁴²⁾ Pool, D., *From Guerillas to Government*, 15 December 2001, p. 157; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 67-68; Matthies, V., *Kriege am Horn von Afrika. Historischer Befund und friedenswissenschaftliche Analyse*, 2005, p. 108.

⁽⁴³⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 66-67.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Connell, D., e-mail, 30 April 2015; Connell, D., Killion, T., *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 232.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ HRW, *The Horn of Africa War: Mass Expulsions and the Nationality Issue (June 1998 — April 2002)*, January 2003, p. 14.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ HRW, *The Horn of Africa War: Mass Expulsions and the Nationality Issue (June 1998 — April 2002)*, January 2003, p. 17; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015, 44th edition*, 2014, p. 455; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, pp. 30-31.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Sudan Tribune *Ethiopia Affirms Readiness for Dialogue With Eritrea*, 30 April 2013.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission, *International Boundary between the State of Eritrea and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* [map], 2002.

was announced in April, 2002, however, it was recognised only by Eritrea and not by Ethiopia, which continues to control territory (such as Badme) granted to Eritrea. Eritrea therefore regards the border conflict as unresolved and believes that it is still under threat from its larger neighbour⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Criticism of President Isaias' increasingly autocratic style of government grew in the aftermath of the border war. Student protests were suppressed in July 2001. In September 2001, the government imprisoned scores of anti-regime activists, and the entire free press was shut down (cf. [Chapter 1.6](#))⁽⁵⁰⁾. The country has adopted a zero-tolerance policy towards anti-government activities ever since, with criticism of the regime not being heard again in public until January 2013, when renegade soldiers occupied the Ministry of Information and demanded the release of political prisoners. The army suppressed the mutiny swiftly and large numbers of arrests ensued⁽⁵¹⁾. In June 2014, the bishops of the Catholic Church of Eritrea published an open letter criticising the government (cf. [Chapter 2.4](#))⁽⁵²⁾.

In 2009 and 2011 the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Eritrea, due in part to Eritrea's alleged support of Al-Shabaab in the Somali Civil War and violations of its border with Djibouti⁽⁵³⁾.

Small-scale skirmishes are a regular occurrence along the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Ethiopian troops encroached on Eritrean territory on several occasions during the first half of 2012 in order to attack armed Ethiopian rebel groups⁽⁵⁴⁾. Eritrea has established a militia-style 'People's Army' to reinforce its army, in part in response to these border violations (cf. [Chapter 3.9](#))⁽⁵⁵⁾.

1.4 Administrative structure

Since 1997, Eritrea has been divided into six *zobas* (regions)⁽⁵⁶⁾:

- Maekel (Centre, capital Asmara)
- Debub (South, capital Mendefera)
- Gash-Barka (capital Akurdet)
- Anseba (capital Keren)
- Semienawi Keyih Bahri (Northern Red Sea, capital Massawa)
- Debubawi Keyih Bahri (Southern Red Sea, capital Assab)

The *zobas* are divided into *Nus-Zobas* (sub-regions). The lowest administrative units are *Kebabi* (formerly known as *Kebele* in Amharic), which cover an urban district, village or area⁽⁵⁷⁾. The *Kebabi* are officially divided into several *Adi* (villages), but these do not have administrative structures of their own⁽⁵⁸⁾. All levels of the administration (i.e.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ HRW, *The Horn of Africa War: Mass Expulsions and the Nationality Issue (June 1998 — April 2002)*, January 2003, pp. 5-8, 17-18; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, 21 September 2010, p. 5; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015, 44th edition*, 2014, pp. 456-457; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, p. 16; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conspiration in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 17; TesfaNews, *Africa's Cuba: Eritrea Endures 13 Years of Illegal Occupation and Sanctions*, 16 April 2015.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, 21 September 2010, p. 7; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 63-69; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conspiration in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 18-20; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, pp. 13-14; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, pp. 422-423.

⁽⁵¹⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, p. 4-6; Connell, D., 'Refugees, Ransoms and Revolt. An Update on Eritrea', Spring 2013, p. 39; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Annual Report 2014/15 — Eritrea*, 25 February 2015; Article 19, *Eritrea: A Nation Silenced*, June 2013, p. 9; Institute for Security Studies, *Where is Eritrea heading?* 5 February 2013.

⁽⁵²⁾ HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015; BBC, *Eritrea 'desolate' — Catholic bishops*, 9 June 2014.

⁽⁵³⁾ UN Security Council, *Security Council Imposes Sanctions on Eritrea over Its Role in Somalia, Refusal to Withdraw Troops Following Conflict with Djibouti*, SC/9833, 23 December 2009; UN Security Council, *Resolution 2023 (2011). Adopted by the Security Council at its 6674th meeting*, 5 December 2011; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, pp. 10, 17-18.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ UN Security Council, *Letter dated 11 July 2012 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2012/545)*, 13 July 2012, p. 14; Institute for Security Studies, *Where is Eritrea heading?* 5 February 2013; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, pp. 5-6; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, pp. 6-7; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015, 44th edition*, 2014, p. 457.

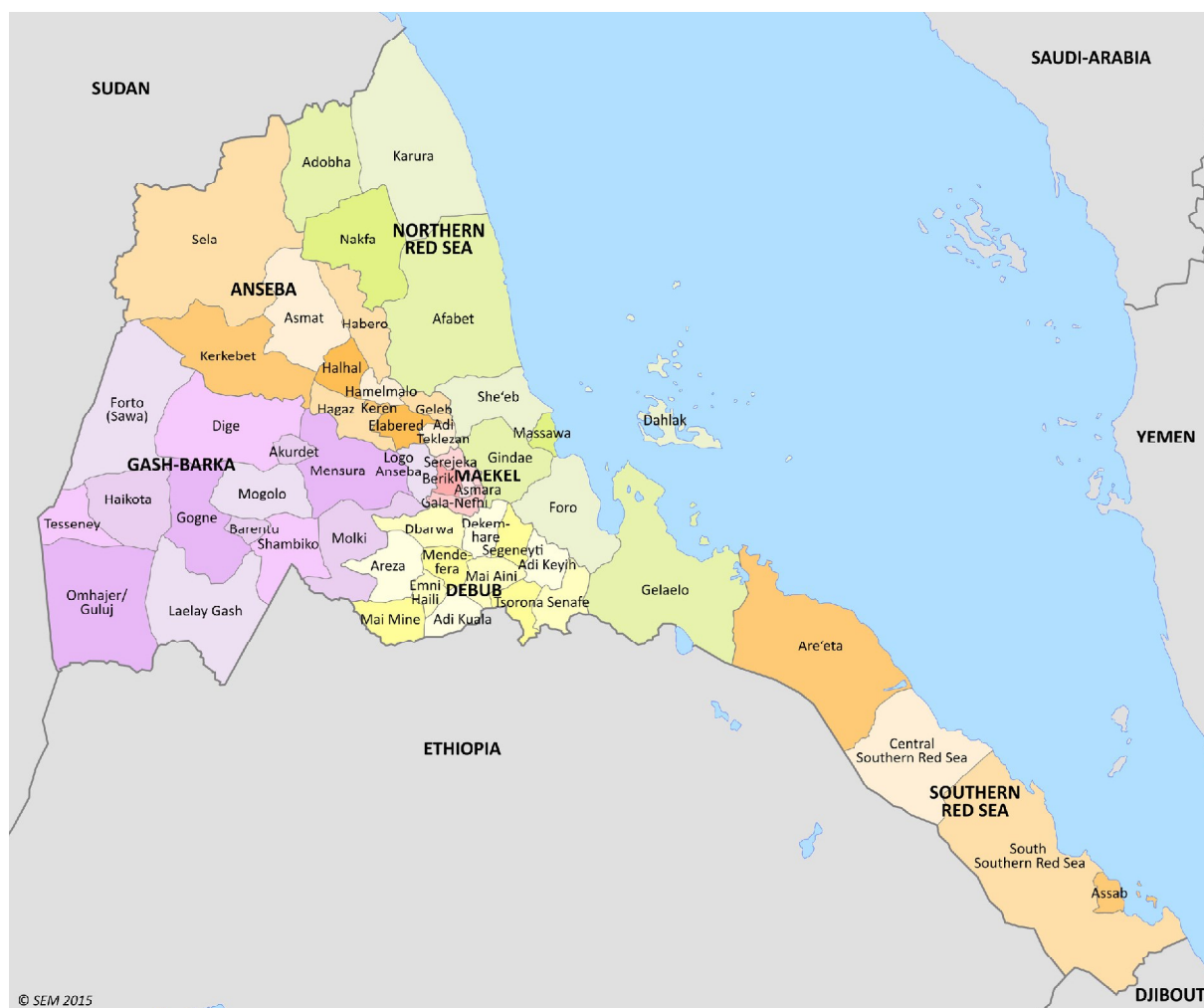
⁽⁵⁵⁾ Institute for Security Studies, *Where is Eritrea heading?* 5 February 2013.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 79, 344-345; Gebremichael, K.H., 'Public administration reform in Eritrea: Past trends and emerging challenges', September 2014, p. 50.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 56-58; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 79, 344-345; Gebremichael, K.H., 'Public administration reform in Eritrea: Past trends and emerging challenges', September 2014, p. 50.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Representatives of the Administration of *zoba* Maekel, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013.

Zobas, Nus-Zobas and Kebabi) feature an executive branch (the *zoba* governors are appointed by the government), courts and either an elected parliament (*baito*) or, in localities with a population of less than 5,000, a general people's assembly (*megaba'aya*)⁽⁵⁹⁾.



Eritrea's administrative division into *zobas* and *nus-zobas* ⁽⁶⁰⁾

The capital city of Asmara was originally divided into four *nus-zobas* (North-West, North-East, South-West and South-East). However, Asmara's 13 urban districts (Abashawl, Akria, Arbaete Asmara, Edaga Hamus, Gejeret, Gezabanda, Godaif, Maekel Ketema, Mai Temenei, Paradiso, Sembel, Tiravolo, Tsetserat) have in the meantime been granted the status of *nus-zobas*, with no further sub-divisions ⁽⁶¹⁾.

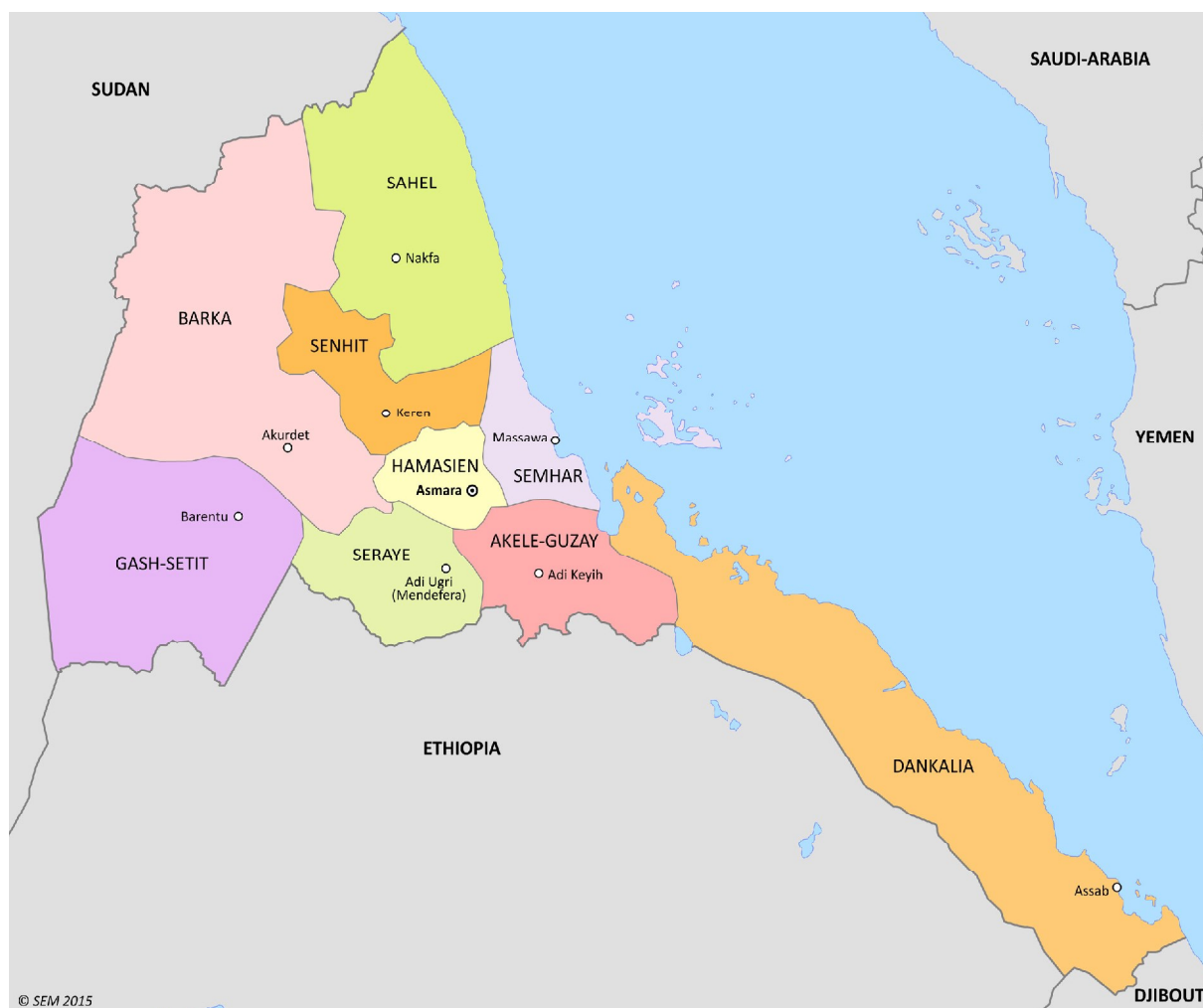
⁽⁵⁹⁾ Gebremichael, K.H., 'Public administration reform in Eritrea: Past trends and emerging challenges', September 2014, p. 51.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Map created by State Secretariat for Migration (Switzerland), 2015, based on Eritrean Demining Authority et al., *Landmine Impact Survey — 2004* [map], 2004; UN Cartographic Section; *Eritrea* [map], n.d. All borders and names used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the European Union. The border line between Eritrea and Ethiopia corresponds to the *Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission's* ruling of 2002 (cf. [map page 11](#)).

⁽⁶¹⁾ Representatives of the Administration of *zoba* Maekel, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013; Norwegian ID Center, e-mail, 24 March 2015.

Administrations at all levels are referred to as *mmhidar* in Tigrinya. The *kebab*i administrations hold most significance to the population on a day-to-day basis since they keep written population registers and function as the first point of contact with the authorities ⁽⁶²⁾. The *nus-zoba* administrations keep electronic population registers ⁽⁶³⁾.

Until 1996, Eritrea was divided into 10 *awrajas* (provinces) which were based on the *commissariati* of the Italian colonial government, referred to as provinces since independence: Hamasien, Akele-Guzay, Seraye, Senhit, Semhar, Dankalia, Sahel, Barka, Gash-Setit (part of Barka until 1974) and Asmara (part of Hamasien until 1974) ⁽⁶⁴⁾. The *awrajas* were sub-divided into 50 *nus-awrajas* (sub-provinces), 194 *woredas* (districts) and 2,580 *adi* (villages) ⁽⁶⁵⁾.



Eritrea's administrative divisions until 1996, with the *awrajas* and their capitals ⁽⁶⁶⁾

⁽⁶²⁾ Bozzini, D., *En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*, 23 May 2011, p. 222; Bozzini, D., *National Service and State Structures in Eritrea*, 28 June 2012, p. 9; Representatives of the Administration of *zoba* Maekel, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013.

⁽⁶³⁾ Representatives of the Administration of *zoba* Maekel, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Connell, D., Killion, T., *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea*, 2010, p. 36.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 53; Gebremichael, K.H., 'Public administration reform in Eritrea: Past trends and emerging challenges', September 2014, p. 50.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Map created by State Secretariat for Migration (Switzerland), 2015, based on CIA, *Eritrea (Political)* [map]; Prouty, C. and Rosenfeld, E., *Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 1994, p. xx; Eritrea.be, *Location and Geography of Eritrea*, n.d. All borders and names used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the European Union. The border line between Eritrea and Ethiopia corresponds to the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission's ruling of 2002 (cf. [map page 11](#)).

1.5 Education

1.5.1 Public schools

Eritrea's state school system is based on five years of education in elementary school (official denomination, also known as primary school, Tigrinya: *mebaeta dereja bet timhrti*), followed by three years in middle school (junior school, Tigrinya: *maekelay dereja bet timhrti*) and four years in secondary school (high school Tigrinya: *kaelay dereja bet timhrti*)⁽⁶⁷⁾. In theory, school attendance is compulsory for the first eight years⁽⁶⁸⁾. 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⁽⁶⁹⁾. 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 (cf. [Chapter 3.4](#)), 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⁽⁷⁰⁾. Schooling lasted only 11 years before the Sawa-based 12th school year was introduced in 2003⁽⁷¹⁾.

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⁽⁷²⁾. 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⁽⁷³⁾), 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⁽⁷⁴⁾. 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⁽⁷⁵⁾. 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⁽⁷⁶⁾. The enrolment rate for girls is somewhat lower than for boys⁽⁷⁷⁾ and higher in the highlands than in the peripheral regions such as Gash-Barka or Southern Red Sea *zobas*⁽⁷⁸⁾. A minority of children (approximately 35 % according to official figures) attend one of the non-compulsory kindergartens before they start school⁽⁷⁹⁾.

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⁽⁸⁰⁾. Some schools hold morning and afternoon sessions⁽⁸¹⁾ and a six-day teaching week

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Ministry of Education (Eritrea), *Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators 2011/12*, December 2012, p. 3; Unesco and International Bureau of Education, *World Data on Education. VII Ed. 2010/11. Eritrea*, September 2010; Hare, H., *ICT in Education in Eritrea*, April 2007, p. 3; Education Data and Policy Center, *Eritrea*, March 2014; NOKUT, *Report on recognition of higher education in Eritrea and Ethiopia*, January 2013, p. 9; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 200; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Back to School*, 14 September 2012.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Hare, H., *ICT in Education in Eritrea*, April 2007, p. 4; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 200.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Education Data and Policy Center, *Eritrea, National Education Profile 2014 Update*, March 2014; Ministry of Education (Eritrea), *Eritrea: Basic Education Statistics 2011/12*, December 2012, p. 65.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, pp. 11, 14; Bozzini, D., 'Low-tech surveillance and the Despotic State in Eritrea', 2011, p. 96; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscriptioin in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 43; Bozzini, D., *En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*, 23 May 2011, p. 77-81, 92; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, p. 11; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Sawa: Center of Empowerment For Young Eritreans*, 23 April 2010; Müller, Tanja R., 'Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea', September 2012, p. 456; Connell, D., *Eritrea: Take me to prison — they have food*, 6 March 2015.

⁽⁷¹⁾ Human Rights Concern — Eritrea, *Report on Child Rights Violations in Eritrea*, 19 November 2013.

⁽⁷²⁾ Ministry of Education (Eritrea), *Eritrea: Basic Education Statistics 2011/12*, December 2012, p. 4.

⁽⁷³⁾ Ministry of Education (Eritrea), *Eritrea: Basic Education Statistics 2011/12*, December 2012, p. 13.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ Unesco and International Bureau of Education, *World Data on Education. VII Ed. 2010/11. Eritrea*, September 2010, p. 12; Education Data and Policy Center, *Eritrea, National Education Profile 2014 Update*, March 2014; Ministry of Education (Eritrea), *Eritrea: Basic Education Statistics 2011/12*, December 2012, p. 62-65.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ Ministry of Education (Eritrea), *Eritrea: Basic Education Statistics 2011/12*, December 2012, pp. 14, 35.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ Unesco and International Bureau of Education, *World Data on Education. VII Ed. 2010/11. Eritrea*, September 2010, p. 12.

⁽⁷⁷⁾ Ministry of Education (Eritrea), *Eritrea: Basic Education Statistics 2011/12*, December 2012, p. 8; Unesco and International Bureau of Education, *World Data on Education. VII Ed. 2010/11. Eritrea*, September 2010, p. 11; Education Data and Policy Center, *Eritrea, National Education Profile 2014 Update*, March 2014; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 12.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 10.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ Ministry of Education (Eritrea), *Eritrea: Basic Education Statistics 2011/12*, December 2012, pp. 14, 32.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ Education Data and Policy Center, *Eritrea, National Education Profile 2014 Update*, March 2014; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 73.

⁽⁸¹⁾ Hill, J., *Ciao Asmara. A Classic Account of Contemporary Africa*, 2004, p. 85.

has been introduced in the lowlands so that the school year can end before the hot season starts ⁽⁸²⁾. Attendance is free according to official information, but families are obliged to fund their children's school materials, uniforms and transport ⁽⁸³⁾. According to several reports, some schools charge tuition fees, particularly in the upper grades ⁽⁸⁴⁾. Uniform must be worn by school pupils of all ages. Marks are awarded as percentages ⁽⁸⁵⁾. The school year begins for all grades in September ⁽⁸⁶⁾.

Pupils are taught in their mother tongue (one of Eritrea's nine national languages) at elementary school level ⁽⁸⁷⁾. 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 ⁽⁸⁸⁾. 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 ⁽⁸⁹⁾. From the sixth school year onwards, all schools across the country teach in English ⁽⁹⁰⁾. Tigrinya, Arabic and English are taught as foreign languages ⁽⁹¹⁾. 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 ⁽⁹²⁾.

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 ⁽⁹³⁾.

1.5.2 Academies

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 ⁽⁹⁴⁾, 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 ⁽⁹⁵⁾. According to a source, however, it was also intended to prevent student uprisings in the capital (similar to the 2001 protests) ⁽⁹⁶⁾. 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

⁽⁸²⁾ Unesco and International Bureau of Education, *World Data on Education. VII Ed. 2010/11. Eritrea*, September 2010, p. 6.

⁽⁸³⁾ Hare, H., *ICT in Education in Eritrea*, April 2007, p. 3-4; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara*, 2013, p. 487; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 19; Women's Refugee Commission, *Young and Astray: An Assessment of Factors Driving the Movement of Unaccompanied Children and Adolescents from Eritrea into Ethiopia, Sudan and Beyond*, May 2013, p. 10.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ Women's Refugee Commission, *Young and Astray: An Assessment of Factors Driving the Movement of Unaccompanied Children and Adolescents from Eritrea into Ethiopia, Sudan and Beyond*, May 2013, p. 11; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara*, 2013, p. 487; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012 — Eritrea*, 19 April 2013, p. 19.

⁽⁸⁵⁾ Honorary Consulate of Switzerland in Eritrea, e-mail, 13 November 2014.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Back to School*, 14 September 2012.

⁽⁸⁷⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 217-220; Hare, H., *ICT in Education in Eritrea*, April 2007, p. 3; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 114-115; Unesco and International Bureau of Education, *World Data on Education. VII Ed. 2010/11. Eritrea*, September 2010, p. 9; Yonas M.A., 'Origin and development of multilingual education in Eritrea', 30 April 2014, p. 137.

⁽⁸⁸⁾ Ministry of Education (Eritrea), *Eritrea: Basic Education Statistics 2011/12*, December 2012, pp. 39, 41.

⁽⁸⁹⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 114-116; Unesco and International Bureau of Education, *World Data on Education. VII Ed. 2010/11. Eritrea*, September 2010, p. 6; Yonas M.A., 'Origin and development of multilingual education in Eritrea', 30 April 2014, p. 137.

⁽⁹⁰⁾ Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, pp. 213; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 115; Unesco and International Bureau of Education, *World Data on Education. VII Ed. 2010/11. Eritrea*, September 2010, p. 9.

⁽⁹¹⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 114-116; Unesco and International Bureau of Education, *World Data on Education. VII Ed. 2010/11. Eritrea*, September 2010, p. 9; Yonas M.A., 'Origin and development of multilingual education in Eritrea', 30 April 2014, p. 137.

⁽⁹²⁾ Yonas M.A., 'Origin and development of multilingual education in Eritrea', 30 April 2014, p. 145.

⁽⁹³⁾ Human Rights Concern — Eritrea, *Report on Child Rights Violations in Eritrea*, 19 November 2013; US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2014. Eritrea*, 20 June 2014, p. 168; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 201-202; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Back to School*, 14 September 2012; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 23; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 24.

⁽⁹⁴⁾ NOKUT, *Report on recognition of higher education in Eritrea and Ethiopia*, January 2013, p. 2; Müller, T.R., 'Bare life and the developmental state: implications of the militarization of high education in Eritrea', March 2008, p. 122-123; Awate, *Education not Incarceration: Build Schools not Prisons*, 4 June 2010; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Ending the Exodus?* 8 August 2014, p. 3; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, p. 105.

⁽⁹⁵⁾ NOKUT, *Report on recognition of higher education in Eritrea and Ethiopia*, January 2013, pp. 3, 5; Müller, T.R., 'Bare life and the developmental state: implications of the militarization of high education in Eritrea', March 2008, p. 122; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015, 44th edition*, 2014, p. 459.

⁽⁹⁶⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 203.

- 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 ⁽⁹⁷⁾

The colleges are subject to joint academic and military management ⁽⁹⁸⁾. According to some sources, students are under military command and divided into units ⁽⁹⁹⁾. However, according to another report, the military regime at EIT in Mai Nefhi has been relaxed and students are allowed to travel to Asmara freely, for example ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾. 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 ⁽¹⁰¹⁾. Students of the colleges are assigned to civilian national service (cf. [Chapter 3.6](#)) after graduating ⁽¹⁰²⁾, with some starting work as a 12th year teacher at Sawa ⁽¹⁰³⁾. Others are assigned to rural elementary schools ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾. Students who drop out are conscripted for military service ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾.

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 ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾.

1.6 Media

There are no free media in Eritrea. All media are controlled by the Ministry of Information ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾, which is responsible for the following media outlets:

- The following newspapers appear between once and three times per week: *Eritrea Profile* (English), *Hadas Ertra* (Tigrinya), *Al-Hadisa* (Arabic), *Tigrigta* (Tigrinya) and *Geled* (Tigrinya)
- The news agency *ERINA*
- The multilingual television station *EriTV*
- The radio station *Dimtsi Hafash* (Voice of the Masses), which broadcasts in 11 different languages, and the FM network *Radio Zara*
- *Shabait.com*, the Ministry of Information's website, which can be used to access the above media outlets online ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

Several private newspapers were published in Eritrea in the first decade after independence: *Meqaleh*, *Setit*, *Wintana*, *Admas*, *Mana*, *Qeste-Demenna*, *Zemen* and *Tsigenai* ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾. On 18 September 2001, however, all free media were shut down and many journalists were imprisoned by the authorities ⁽¹¹⁰⁾. The last foreign media correspondents left Eritrea in 2004 ⁽¹¹¹⁾ and in recent years there have been several cases of journalists working for government-owned

⁽⁹⁷⁾ NOKUT, *Report on recognition of higher education in Eritrea and Ethiopia*, January 2013, p. 2; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 200; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015*, 44th edition, 2014, p. 459.

⁽⁹⁸⁾ Müller, T.R., 'Bare life and the developmental state: implications of the militarization of high education in Eritrea', March 2008, p. 122; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Ending the Exodus?* 8 August 2014, p. 6; Local contact, interview, Ethiopia, 17 September 2014; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 181.

⁽⁹⁹⁾ Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 9; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 203; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, p. 105.

⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ Müller, Tanja R., 'Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea', September 2012, p. 455.

⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Connell, D., *Eritrea: Take me to prison — they have food*, 6 March 2015.

⁽¹⁰²⁾ Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, p. 11.

⁽¹⁰³⁾ Müller, Tanja R., 'Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea', September 2012, p. 456.

⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Connell, D., *Eritrea: Take me to prison — they have food*, 6 March 2015.

⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 9.

⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ NOKUT, *Report on recognition of higher education in Eritrea and Ethiopia*, January 2013, p. 3, 6, 10; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 9.

⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2014. Eritrea*, 25 August 2014; Reporters Without Borders, *Contribution on the situation of media freedom in Eritrea by Reporters Without Borders, an NGO with special consultative status*, 24 June 2013, p. 1.

⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ BBC, *Eritrea profile — Media*, 3 December 2014; Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2014. Eritrea*, 25 August 2014.

⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 314; Article 19, *Eritrea: A Nation Silenced*, June 2013, p. 10.

⁽¹¹⁰⁾ BBC, *Eritrea profile — Media*, 3 December 2014; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 314-315; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, pp. 42-44; Reporters Without Borders, *Contribution on the situation of media freedom in Eritrea by Reporters Without Borders, an NGO with special consultative status*, 24 June 2013, p. 2; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscripted in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 56.

⁽¹¹¹⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 101; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscripted in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 57. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, it was in 2007: CPJ, *Attacks on the Press 2012. Eritrea*, 14 February 2013.

media who were imprisoned⁽¹¹²⁾. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 23 journalists were in prison in Eritrea on 1 December 2014 — the third-highest number in the world⁽¹¹³⁾. In January 2015, however, six of the journalists who had been in prison since 2009 were released⁽¹¹⁴⁾. In March 2013, 33 radio journalists who had been detained in 2009 were released⁽¹¹⁵⁾. The Eritrean government justifies this lack of press freedom with emergency measures under the ‘no war, no peace’ situation following the border war with Ethiopia⁽¹¹⁶⁾.

Eritrea invariably occupies one of the lowest rankings worldwide in the annual press freedom indexes (placed last in 2015 by Reporters without Borders⁽¹¹⁷⁾ and fourth-to-last in 2014 by Freedom House⁽¹¹⁸⁾). However these indices concentrate on conditions within the country for the media and journalists, rather than the public’s access to foreign media⁽¹¹⁹⁾. Eritrea does somewhat better in this respect: there is legally accessible satellite reception in many areas for foreign television stations such as CNN, BBC or Al-Jazeera⁽¹²⁰⁾, although, the broadcasts are sometimes blocked⁽¹²¹⁾. The public has been able to use the Internet since 2000, for example in Asmara’s internet cafés, but access is extremely slow, monitored and — according to some sources — partially censored. Most of the population cannot access the internet at all⁽¹²²⁾. Mobile phone ownership is also very low compared to the rest of the region⁽¹²³⁾.

Several diaspora-run independent and opposition websites and radio stations are now in operation; the three online news portals Awate⁽¹²⁴⁾, Asmarino⁽¹²⁵⁾ and Assenna⁽¹²⁶⁾ and the Paris-based radio station Radio Erena are most active⁽¹²⁷⁾. An underground opposition newspaper published at irregular intervals, *Meqaleh Forto* (*Echoes of Forto*)⁽¹²⁸⁾, has also been in circulation in Asmara since 2013.

1.7 Healthcare system

The *Department of Health Services*, which reports to the Ministry of Health, is responsible for the healthcare system, which has the following structure:

- Primary healthcare system: 187 nurse-led healthcare units throughout the country.
- Secondary healthcare system: about 20 community hospitals and 55 health centres managed by doctors or experienced nurses.

⁽¹¹²⁾ HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 101-102; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 56-57.

⁽¹¹³⁾ CPJ, *2014 prison census: 221 journalists jailed worldwide*, 1 December 2014.

⁽¹¹⁴⁾ Reporters Without Borders, *Six Eritrean journalists released after nearly six years in prison*, 22 January 2015; CPJ, *CPJ welcomes release of six Eritrean journalists*, 23 January 2015.

⁽¹¹⁵⁾ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, pp. 8, 10.

⁽¹¹⁶⁾ Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 172-178; UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Oral Update by Mr Mike Smith, Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea at the 28th session of the Human Rights Council*, 16 March 2015.

⁽¹¹⁷⁾ Reporters Without Borders, *2015 World Press Freedom Index*, 2015.

⁽¹¹⁸⁾ Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2014*, p. 22.

⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Reporters Without Borders, *2015 World Press Freedom Index. How we compiled the index*, 2015, p. 2; Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2014*, pp. 26-27.

⁽¹²⁰⁾ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 10; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, p. 8; Müller, Tanja R., ‘Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea’, September 2012, pp. 459-460.

⁽¹²¹⁾ Reporters Without Borders, *Contribution on the situation of media freedom in Eritrea by Reporters Without Borders, an NGO with special consultative status*, 24 June 2013, p. 2; HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014; Article 19, *Eritrea: A Nation Silenced*, June 2013, p. 11; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 10.

⁽¹²²⁾ Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2014. Eritrea*, 25 August 2014; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 11; HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return*, November 2014, p. 6; HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015; Article 19, *Eritrea: A Nation Silenced*, June 2013, p. 11; Bariagaber, A., ‘Globalization, Imitation Behavior, and Refugees from Eritrea’, Winter 2013, p. 12; Bernal, V., ‘Civil Society and Cyberspace: Reflections on Dehai, Asmarino, and Awate’, Winter 2013, p. 26.

⁽¹²³⁾ Bariagaber, A., ‘Globalization, Imitation Behavior, and Refugees from Eritrea’, Winter 2013, p. 12.

⁽¹²⁴⁾ Awate, <http://awate.com/>, accessed 11 March 2015.

⁽¹²⁵⁾ Asmarino Independent, <http://asmarino.com/>, accessed 11 March 2015.

⁽¹²⁶⁾ Assenna, <http://assenna.com/>, accessed 11 March 2015.

⁽¹²⁷⁾ Connell, D., ‘From resistance to governance: Eritrea’s trouble with transition’, September 2011, p. 428-429; Bernal, V., ‘Civil Society and Cyberspace: Reflections on Dehai, Asmarino, and Awate’, Winter 2013, pp. 21-36.

⁽¹²⁸⁾ African Arguments, *Underground Independent newspaper launched in Eritrea*, 18 September 2013; Asmarino, *Arbi Harnet News: Second edition of Meqaleh Forto*, 15 November 2013; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 6.

- Referral hospitals in all *zoba* capitals and five referral hospitals in Asmara: Orotta, Halibet, Hazhen, St. Mary (psychiatric) and Berhane Ayni (optometry) ⁽¹²⁹⁾.

There have been significant improvements in access to medical care since Eritrea gained independence and major progress has been made on a number of indicators: child and maternal mortality has dropped substantially, and vaccination programmes have brought diseases such as polio, measles, diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough under control ⁽¹³⁰⁾. However, there is still a severe lack of doctors, medical personnel, equipment and medication, particularly in outlying areas ⁽¹³¹⁾.

The healthcare system is largely state-funded ⁽¹³²⁾ but patients are obliged to cover part of the costs ⁽¹³³⁾. The very poor can request a poverty certificate from the local *kebab* administration, which entitles them to free treatment. Medication is only available free of charge in hospitals and must be paid for if collected from a pharmacy. Those with a poverty certificate are provided with a free supply of medication before being discharged from hospital ⁽¹³⁴⁾.

Free treatment is available for chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and malaria. National programmes have also been implemented in this area ⁽¹³⁵⁾. The malaria-related mortality rate has dropped by 82 % since 1999 and HIV prevalence stood at 0.8 % in 2011 (2003: 2.5 %), one of the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa ⁽¹³⁶⁾. Antiretroviral therapy is offered free of charge in 19 locations ⁽¹³⁷⁾. The incidence of non-transmissible diseases and tuberculosis, however, is rising ⁽¹³⁸⁾.

Complex cardiac surgery procedures are generally impossible. Chemotherapy, radiotherapy and transplants are not available in Eritrea. Dialysis facilities are available but capacities are severely limited. Access to psychiatric treatment is also very restricted due to a lack of trained specialists ⁽¹³⁹⁾. Some of the patients who cannot be treated in Eritrea are transferred to Sudan under a medical cooperation programme ⁽¹⁴⁰⁾.

The *Eritrean National List of Medicines* includes 180 medicines regarded as essential for treating diseases in Eritrea; according to the Eritrean Ministry of Health it was compiled by Eritrean doctors for the first time in 1988 and updated in 1993, 1996, 2001, 2005 and 2010 ⁽¹⁴¹⁾. Only the medicines featuring on this list are imported but not all of them are available at any time; this depends on stocks and funding ⁽¹⁴²⁾. It is often difficult to obtain medication for cardiac and geriatric diseases or cancer but the most common medicines are easily available and often supplied free of charge. Many medicines are smuggled into the country ⁽¹⁴³⁾.

1.8 Transport

Eritrea's main roads (from Asmara to Keren and Barentu, to Massawa and Foro, to Adi Kuala and to Senafe) are in good condition. Private transport is scarce since fuel prices are comparatively high. Public transport — mostly buses that connect the larger localities — is much cheaper. The rail line between Asmara and Massawa was repaired after the

⁽¹²⁹⁾ Expert on Eritrean Health Care System, interview, 7 November 2013; Ministry of Health (Eritrea), *Expanded Programmer on Immunization. Comprehensive Multi-Year Plan (2012-2016)*, n.d., p. 8; WHO, *WHO Country Cooperation Strategy 2009-2013. Eritrea*, 2009, p. 6.

⁽¹³⁰⁾ WHO, *Country Cooperation Strategy at a glance. Eritrea*, April 2014; WHO, *WHO Country Cooperation Strategy 2009-2013. Eritrea*, 2009, p. 3-4; World Bank, *Eritrea Overview*, 1 September 2012.

⁽¹³¹⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 322; WHO, *WHO Country Cooperation Strategy 2009-2013. Eritrea*, 2009, p. 5.

⁽¹³²⁾ Expert on Eritrean Health Care System, interview, 7 November 2013.

⁽¹³³⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Helse — hiv/aids, tuberkulose og diabetes*, 7 June 2013, p. 10.

⁽¹³⁴⁾ Expert on Eritrean Health Care System, interview, 7 November 2013.

⁽¹³⁵⁾ WHO, *WHO Country Cooperation Strategy 2009-2013. Eritrea*, 2009; WHO, *Country Cooperation Strategy at a glance. Eritrea*, April 2014; Expert on Eritrean Health Care System, interview, 7 November 2013; UNAIDS, *Global AIDS Response Reporting. Narrative Report-Eritrea (Jan 2013-Dec 2013)*, 2014, p. 2.

⁽¹³⁶⁾ World Health Organization (WHO), *WHO Country Cooperation Strategy 2009-2013. Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 4, 20; UNAIDS, *Global AIDS Response Reporting. Narrative Report-Eritrea (Jan 2013-Dec 2013)*, 2014, p. 1.

⁽¹³⁷⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Helse — hiv/aids, tuberkulose og diabetes*, 7 June 2013, p. 15; Ministry of Health (Eritrea), *UNGASS Country Progress Report*, 2010, pp. 56-59.

⁽¹³⁸⁾ World Health Organization (WHO), *WHO Country Cooperation Strategy 2009-2013. Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 5, 20.

⁽¹³⁹⁾ Expert on Eritrean Health Care System, interview, 7 November 2013; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Helse — hiv/aids, tuberkulose og diabetes*, 7 June 2013, p. 22-23.

⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ Expert on Eritrean Health Care System, interview, 7 November 2013; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Helse — hiv/aids, tuberkulose og diabetes*, 7 June 2013, p. 11.

⁽¹⁴¹⁾ Ministry of Health (Eritrea), *Eritrean National List of Medicines. Fifth Edition*, June 2010.

⁽¹⁴²⁾ Expert on Eritrean Health Care System, interview, 7 November 2013.

⁽¹⁴³⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Helse — hiv/aids, tuberkulose og diabetes*, 7 June 2013, p. 11.

country gained independence but it is now used only sporadically for tourism and holds no significance for everyday transport ⁽¹⁴⁴⁾. There are currently no domestic flights. Scheduled planes fly from Eritrea's only international airport in Asmara to Khartoum, Istanbul, Sana'a (route suspended at time of writing), Cairo and Qatar ⁽¹⁴⁵⁾.

For travelling within Eritrea, persons of conscriptable age (cf. [Chapter 3.7](#)) generally require a travel permit (*menqesaqesi wereqet*) or demobilisation papers to prove that they are undertaking or have completed their national service ⁽¹⁴⁶⁾. The permits have different formats depending on the issuing authority. They contain the owner's ID number and the approved travel route and dates but no photograph ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾. Foreigners also require a travel permit for all trips beyond a 25 km-perimeter around Asmara ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾.

Until about 2010, permits were regularly checked at the many road blocks erected since the border war ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾. These checks have become sporadic in recent years, however ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾. Generally, they are not very rigorous; usually the presence and validity of the permit are checked but the information is generally not compared with ID cards or other documents. Many people therefore travel with permits borrowed from friends and forged permits are also relatively easy to obtain ⁽¹⁵¹⁾.

1.9 Currency

The Ethiopian birr remained in use for a period of time after Eritrea gained independence but the country introduced its own currency, the nakfa, on 8 November, 1997. The official exchange rate was set at one nakfa to one birr and the new currency was pegged to the US dollar on a 15:1 basis ⁽¹⁵²⁾. Officially this exchange rate still applies but on the black market, one US dollar now costs between 30 and 54 nakfa ⁽¹⁵³⁾.

The nakfa is referred to colloquially as *kirshi* ⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ and is divided into 100 cents. Coins are issued in the values of 1, 5, 10, 25, 50 and 100 cents and bank notes in the values of 1, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 nakfa. The bank notes are printed in English. Only the word 'nakfa' is also printed in Arabic and in Tigrinya on the front ⁽¹⁵⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ Denison, E., *Eritrea. The Bradt Travel Guide*, July 1997, pp. 66-67; Carillet, J.-B., Butler, S., and Starnes, D., *Lonely Planet Ethiopia & Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 364-366.

⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ Yemenia, *Destinations*, n.d.; Egyptair, *Timetable*, n.d.; Qatar Airways, *Route Map*, n.d.; Representative of Swiss Embassy in Khartoum, e-mail, 16 November 2014.

⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 315; Bozzini, D., *National Service and State Structures in Eritrea*, 28 June 2012, p. 6; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 12; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 62-63; Bozzini, D., 'Low-tech surveillance and the Despotic State in Eritrea', 2011, pp. 99.

⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ Bozzini, D., *National Service and State Structures in Eritrea*, 28 June 2012, p. 6; Bozzini, D., 'Low-tech surveillance and the Despotic State in Eritrea', 2011, pp. 99.

⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ Auswärtiges Amt, *Eritrea: Reise- und Sicherheitshinweise (Teilreisewarnung)*, valid since 15 October 2014; GOV.UK (United Kingdom): *Foreign travel advice Eritrea*, Updated 31 October 2014; US Passports & International Travel, *Eritrea Travel Warning*, updated 6 May 2015; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return*, November 2014, p. 6.

⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ Bozzini, D., 'Low-tech surveillance and the Despotic State in Eritrea', 2011, pp. 98-104; Bozzini, D., *National Service and State Structures in Eritrea*, 28 June 2012, p. 7; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 13.

⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return*, November 2014, pp. 8, 29.

⁽¹⁵¹⁾ Bozzini, D., 'Low-tech surveillance and the Despotic State in Eritrea', 2011, pp. 98-104; Bozzini, D., *National Service and State Structures in Eritrea*, 28 June 2012, p. 7; Bozzini, D., *En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*, 23 May 2011, pp. 122-124, 132-135, 147-148; IRB, *Eritrea: Prevalence of fraudulent identity documents, including national identity cards (2012-August 2014)*, 5 September 2014.

⁽¹⁵²⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 98; Rena, R., 'Historical Development of Money and Banking in Eritrea from the Axumite Kingdom to the Present', June 2007, p. 10; Denison, E., *Eritrea. The Bradt Travel Guide*, July 1997, pp. 63-64; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 16.

⁽¹⁵³⁾ US Department of State, *2014 Investment Climate Statement*, June 2014; Awate, *Shortage of Nakfa Bills Reported Outside Eritrea*, 1 October 2014; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 16; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 13.

⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ Treiber, M., *Der Traum vom guten Leben*, 2005, p. 99.

⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ Denison, E., *Eritrea. The Bradt Travel Guide*, July 1997, p. 64; Banknote World, *Eritrea*, n.d.; World Coin Catalog, *Eritrea*, 16 December 2006.

2. State structure and politics

2.1 State institutions

2.1.1 Constitution

Immediately after Eritrea gained independence, a constitutional commission was tasked by the transitional government with drafting a constitution. The document that the commission worked on from March 1994 provides for the division of powers, democracy and free elections ⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ and was ratified by the parliament on 23 May, 1997. Implementation was initially delayed by the president on the grounds that it required elections to be held first and then indefinitely suspended after the outbreak of the border war with Ethiopia in 1998, together with national elections, and it has not been resumed ⁽¹⁵⁷⁾.

2.1.2 Transitional government (executive)

After capturing Asmara on 24 May 1991, the *Eritrean People's Liberation Front* (EPLF) took control of Eritrea and formed a provisional government (*Provisional Government of Eritrea*, PGE). After a referendum in 1993, which was monitored by the United Nations, the country's independence was recognised by the international community. Proclamation 37/1993 outlined the principles of operation of the transitional government and limited its term to four years (*Transitional Government of Eritrea*, TGE). In spite of this time limit, however, the transitional government is still in power today and operates on the basis of Proclamation 37/1993 ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾.

Isaias Afewerki, who headed the clandestine *Eritrean People's Revolutionary Party* (EPRP) from its formation in 1971 and controlled the EPLF from behind the scenes in its early years, became its Secretary-General at the front's second congress in 1987. He led the provisional government (PGE) in 1991 and has been president of Eritrea since 1993. He is also head of the political party *People's Front for Democracy and Justice* (PFDJ, *Tigrinya Higdef*, cf. [Chapter 2.2](#)) ⁽¹⁵⁹⁾. The disregarded constitution stipulates that the president should be elected by the parliament but no presidential elections have taken place so far ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾.

The executive body of the transitional government is the ministerial cabinet, led by the president. The ministers are appointed by the president; the parliamentary approval required by law is not usually obtained. The cabinet is frequently reshuffled and most ministers are former EPLF fighters (*tegadelti*) ⁽¹⁶¹⁾.

No division of powers exists in Eritrea since the constitution has never been implemented. The parliament has not been convened for more than 10 years, the ministers hold few powers, and the president and the military intervene in the judicial system. According to several scholars and other sources, the official state institutions are in reality institutional facades and President Isaias rules the country informally by decree with the help of advisors from the PFDJ leadership and high-ranking military representatives ⁽¹⁶²⁾.

⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ Eritrea, *The Constitution of Eritrea*, 23 May 1997; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 32-37.

⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ Article 19, *Eritrea: A Nation Silenced*, June 2013, pp. 22-23; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 84-86; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, p. 12; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 31-32, 36-40.

⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 74-79; Article 19, *Eritrea: A Nation Silenced*, June 2013, p. 22; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 26; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 11; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 28-31.

⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ Connell, D., *Refugees, Ransoms and Revolt. An Update on Eritrea*, Spring 2013, p. 35; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 74-79; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, pp. 10-11; Connell, D., 'Inside the EPLF: The Origins of the 'People's Party' & its Role in the Liberation of Eritrea', September 2001, pp. 351-361; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, p. 3; Connell, D., Killion, T., *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 313-315.

⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 4.

⁽¹⁶¹⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 82; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, p. 12; Article 19, *Eritrea: A Nation Silenced*, June 2013, p. 8.

⁽¹⁶²⁾ Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, p. 422; Connell, D., 'Eritrean Refugees at Risk', 11 April 2014; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 15; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, pp. 8-11; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, pp. 10, 14.

2.1.3 Parliament (legislative)

The national assembly (*Hagerawi Baito*), established in 1993, has 150 members, 75 of whom represent the PFDJ and 75 of whom are supposed to be elected by the people. Direct elections to this body have never taken place, however, and the seats were occupied by delegates of the *zoba* parliaments following the *zoba* elections in 1997 in which all candidates were screened first by the PFDJ ⁽¹⁶³⁾. Despite the fact that parliamentary elections were announced for 1998 and 2001, none have taken place ⁽¹⁶⁴⁾. President Isaias has stated on several occasions that no elections will take place in the foreseeable future ⁽¹⁶⁵⁾. Parliament has not been functional since 1998 and has not been convened since 2001 or 2002 ⁽¹⁶⁶⁾. Most members of parliament have left the country ⁽¹⁶⁷⁾.

In the villages (*adi*), *woredas* and *awrajas*, the first elections to local parliaments (*baito*) took place in 1992 and 1993. After the *zobas* were established, *zoba* parliament elections were held in 1997. The elections were not free, since electoral campaigning was virtually non-existent and almost all candidates were PFDJ members ⁽¹⁶⁸⁾. According to state media reports, elections continue to take place at *kebab* level ⁽¹⁶⁹⁾. There is no information available on their fairness.

2.1.4 Judicial system (judiciary)

Following the *de facto* declaration of independence in 1991, a judicial system was established on the basis of adapted Ethiopian laws ⁽¹⁷⁰⁾. The Ethiopian Criminal Code of 1957 was renamed the *Transitional Penal Code of Eritrea* ⁽¹⁷¹⁾, for example. The most important laws were reformed in 1997, but these new laws have not yet entered into force. The president or the relevant ministries issue new legislative regulations by decree and these enter into force without parliamentary consent. These regulations take the form of proclamations and legal notices published in the *Gazeta Awagiat Ertra*. Further sources of law include administrative acts, directives and orders published by ministries, other administrative bodies and the military, as well as personal interventions by the president ⁽¹⁷²⁾. Written laws thus hold very little meaning in reality ⁽¹⁷³⁾. The justice system cannot be regarded as independent, firstly because it is overseen by the president (whose decrees take priority over official legislation) ⁽¹⁷⁴⁾, and secondly because of the role played by the Special Court (see below).

The judiciary is divided into military courts (two instances), civil courts (community courts, *zoba* courts and the High Court) and a Special Court. All officially report to the Ministry of Justice. The Supreme Court, which is supposed to operate at the national level is yet to be established; its role is currently filled by the High Court, the highest legal body ⁽¹⁷⁵⁾. Although customary law is not officially recognised as a source of law, it is applied at the lowest level of administration by the community courts established in 2001. Use of Sharia law by Muslims is officially permitted at all three levels of justice, including for family-law cases, and practised by special chambers within the civil courts ⁽¹⁷⁶⁾.

⁽¹⁶³⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 53; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 81-82; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015*, 44th edition, 2014, p. 476; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 14.

⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 55-56; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 23.

⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 5; CBS News, *The world's enduring dictators: Isaias Afewerki, Eritrea*, 3 June 2011.

⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 81; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, pp. 8, 12; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, p. 422.

⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2013: Eritrea*, 2013.

⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 52-55; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara*, 2013, p. 466; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 65-72.

⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ E.g. Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Nacfa sub-zone: Election of Administrators, Managing directors and Village Administrative Committee conducted*, 17 March 2015; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Mensura sub-zone: Election of Administrators, Managing directors and Village Administrative Committees conducted*, 27 March 2015; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Agordat sub-zone: Election of Administrators, Managing directors and Village Administrative committees conducted*, 16 April 2015; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Laelai-Gash sub-zone: Election of Administrators, Managing directors conducted*, 17 April 2015.

⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 26; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 25-26.

⁽¹⁷¹⁾ Article 19, *Eritrea: A Nation Silenced*, June 2013, p. 31.

⁽¹⁷²⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 27-29; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 27-28, 32-33.

⁽¹⁷³⁾ Riggan, J., 'Debating National Duty in Eritrean Classrooms', Winter 2013, p. 89.

⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, p. 14; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 28.

⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 82; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 47-53.

⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, pp. 7, 10; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 29-31, 41; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 83-84; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 33-36.

The Special Court is operated by the President's Office with the help of the secret service, the army and the police. It was set up in 1996 as a temporary measure to fight corruption but is now used by the leaders of the country to circumvent the formal justice system in political, administrative and criminal cases. Judges — mostly high-ranking members of the military — are appointed directly by the president. A large number of criminal cases now pass through the Special Court ⁽¹⁷⁷⁾. Extrajudicial prison sentences are also meted out by secret committees on a regular basis. However, due to the secretive and arbitrary nature of these procedures, it is hard to obtain information about them ⁽¹⁷⁸⁾.

According to one source, the community courts frequently refuse to institute proceedings and encourage litigants to settle out of court whenever possible. In such cases mediators and elders are asked to arbitrate on the basis of customary law. Their agreements are subsequently checked by the court's lawyers. Mediators play an important role in village life and are regarded as moral authorities. Some mediators are former independence fighters (*tegadelti*) and have only limited knowledge of customary law since they spent so much time in battle ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾.

2.2 Political parties

The Eritrean leadership under President Isaias views democracy more in terms of involvement of the entire population (in reconstruction measures) than of accountability, i.e. as a political system based on parties and elections ⁽¹⁸⁰⁾. It has emphasised on many occasions (most recently in 2014) that a multipartite system would be inconceivable in Eritrea given the risk of inter-ethnic conflicts ⁽¹⁸¹⁾. The population is instead referred to as the 'masses' (*hafash*), who have coinciding interests represented by the PFDJ ⁽¹⁸²⁾. The PFDJ was established in February 1994 as the successor to the EPLF ⁽¹⁸³⁾. It is the only legal political party; there are no legally approved opposition groups or other organisations independent of the PFDJ ⁽¹⁸⁴⁾. The PFDJ operates at all levels of the administration, allowing the party to control administrative structures throughout the entire country ⁽¹⁸⁵⁾.

There is also virtually no organised underground opposition ⁽¹⁸⁶⁾. Since 2011, the diaspora-based group *Arbi Harnet* has occasionally run small political campaigns in Asmara ⁽¹⁸⁷⁾. There are also sporadic reports of military actions by ethnic rebel groups based in Ethiopia (*Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization* (RSADO), *Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrean Kunama* (DMLEK) and *National Democratic Front for the Liberation of the Eritrean Saho*

⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 42-44; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, p. 14; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, p. 422; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 82; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014. Eritrea*, 2014; Müller, T.R., 'Bare life and the developmental state: implications of the militarization of high education in Eritrea', March 2008, p. 116; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 47-51.

⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 43-44; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 9, 12, 14; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, pp. 16-17; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 9; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 52-53.

⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ Bozzini, D., *National Service and State Structures in Eritrea*, 28 June 2012, p. 10.

⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, p. 420.

⁽¹⁸¹⁾ HRW, *World Report 2014 — Eritrea*, 21 January 2014; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015, 44th edition*, 2014, p. 458; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 48; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 15.

⁽¹⁸²⁾ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, pp. 8, 12.

⁽¹⁸³⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, 21 September 2010, p. 6; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 79; Treiber, M., *Der lange Schatten der EPLF*, May 2005, p. 19; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 72; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, p. 55.

⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 58-59; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, pp. 8, 11-12; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, p. 422; Connell, D., 'Refugees, Ransoms and Revolt. An Update on Eritrea', Spring 2013, p. 35; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 12.

⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 59.

⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, p. 425; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonaltjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 6.

⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ NOREF, *Eritrean opposition parties and civic organisations*, January 2015, p. 4; Horn Affairs, *Eritrea: Conversation with the resistance mov't inside Asmara*, 26 October 2014; Awate, *Interview with Eritrea's 'Freedom Friday' Organizers*, 10 February 2012.

(NDFLES))⁽¹⁸⁸⁾, but these do not pose any threat to the government⁽¹⁸⁹⁾. These three organisations have founded an alliance with the *Democratic Front of Eritrean Nationalities* (190). In March 2015, there were reports of an attack by the *Eritrean National Salvation Front* (ENSF) on a government garage in Asmara⁽¹⁹¹⁾.

What used to be the most important group in opposition to the EPLF/PFDJ, the *Eritrean Liberation Front* (ELF, in Arabic: *Jebha*), was driven out of the country in 1981 during the war of independence. It is only active in exile and has now split into many splinter groups, some of which have formed party alliances⁽¹⁹²⁾.

Many parties with differing ideologies have been founded abroad but their names and compositions change frequently and their activities are mainly limited to conferences and sporadic demonstrations. The only thing they have in common is their opposition to the Eritrean government. Since 1999, 13 of these groups have allied to form the *Eritrean Democratic Alliance* (EDA). In 2009 and 2010, two other alliances were formed; the secular nationalist *Eritrea People's Democratic Party* (EPDP) and the Islamic *Eritrean Solidarity Front* (ESF)⁽¹⁹³⁾. Many attempts have been made at congresses in Ethiopia to reunite the splintered opposition⁽¹⁹⁴⁾. Eritrea's foreign representations attempt to monitor the activities of these groups, which results in tension between loyal adherents to the regime and opposition representatives in the diaspora. The consequences of this monitoring are not known and the subject of rumours in the diaspora⁽¹⁹⁵⁾.

2.3 Associations and civil society

Civil society in Eritrea is dominated by three mass organisations: the *National Union of Eritrean Women* (NUEW), the *National Confederation of Eritrean Workers* (NCEW) and the *National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students* (NUEYS). All three organisations came into being during the struggle for independence. They are controlled by the PFDJ, which challenges their 'civil' character⁽¹⁹⁶⁾. The term 'masses' (Tigrinya: *hafash*) is used to refer to the social class that did not belong to the EPLF/PFDJ or take part in the struggle for independence, in contrast to the former freedom fighters, the *tegadelti*⁽¹⁹⁷⁾.

Most of the other national civil society organisations and NGOs set up after Eritrea gained independence have since been forced to abandon their operations⁽¹⁹⁸⁾.

Ever more restrictions were imposed on the activities of international NGOs in Eritrea after the border war with Ethiopia, including via a law adopted in 2005 that cut off their source of funding. The government justified this by stating that NGOs were hampering the self-reliance of the population and leading to greater dependency. Many NGOs left the country as a result and the last six NGOs that remained finally had to leave in 2011⁽¹⁹⁹⁾. The UN agencies still present in the country are only allowed to take action on issues relating to water, sanitation and health⁽²⁰⁰⁾ and their movement is restricted⁽²⁰¹⁾.

⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ Awate, *Military Clashes Inside Eritrea*, 25 December 2014; Sudan Tribune, *Eritrea: Exiled Eritrean Rebel Groups Plan Joint Military Attack Against Regime*, 7 September 2013; New Vision, *Eritrea rebels say they killed 12 government troops*, 22 October 2011; Sudan Tribune, *Eritrean opposition says stormed military hospital*, 23 March 2009; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 6; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, pp. 426-427; NOREF, *Eritrean opposition parties and civic organisations*, January 2015, p. 2; Africa Confidential, *Opposing Issayas*, 14 May 2010; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, pp. 320; 345-346.

⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, 21 September 2010, p. 12.

⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, p. 426.

⁽¹⁹¹⁾ Sudan Tribune, *Eritrean rebels attack government facility in Asmara*, 16 March 2015.

⁽¹⁹²⁾ NOREF, *Eritrean opposition parties and civic organisations*, January 2015, p. 2; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, p. 425.

⁽¹⁹³⁾ Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, pp. 425-426; NOREF, *Eritrean opposition parties and civic organisations*, January 2015, p. 3; Connell, D., 'Refugees, Ransoms and Revolt. An Update on Eritrea', Spring 2013, p. 35; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015, 44th edition*, 2014, p. 456; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, p. 316-323.

⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ NOREF, *Eritrean opposition parties and civic organisations*, January 2015, p. 3; Africa Confidential, *Opposing Issayas*, 14 May 2010.

⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ Glatthard, F., 'Angst vor der Überwachung in der eritreischen Diaspora der Schweiz', 2012; Bozzini, D., *National Service and State Structures in Eritrea*, 28 June 2012, p. 12; Bozzini, D., *En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*, 23 May 2011, p. 88.

⁽¹⁹⁶⁾ Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, pp. 53-145; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, pp. 422, 428; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 186-189.

⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ Article 19, *Eritrea: A Nation Silenced*, June 2013, p. 21; Woldemikael, T.M., 'Introduction to Special Issue: Postliberation Eritrea', Winter 2013, p. xii.

⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, pp. 53-145.

⁽¹⁹⁹⁾ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015, 44th edition*, 2014, p. 459; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, pp. 424; Müller, Tanja R., 'Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea', September 2012, p. 459; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, pp. 135-139.

⁽²⁰⁰⁾ Müller, Tanja R., 'Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea', September 2012, p. 459

⁽²⁰¹⁾ | IS Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 17.

Many diaspora Eritreans are disappointed by their parties and have therefore founded civil society organisations, some of which focus on human rights ⁽²⁰²⁾. The most influential are *Eritrean Youth Solidarity for Change* (EYSC), which is most active in Europe and North America, and the Ethiopia-based *Eritrean Youth Solidarity for National Salvation* (EYSNS/Simret). The latter refers to itself as a political party (*Eritrean Solidarity Movement for National Salvation*) ⁽²⁰³⁾ since 2014.

2.4 Criticism of the government

Until the outbreak of the border war with Ethiopia, the newly independent Eritrea enjoyed a political climate that was more relaxed than today (e.g. there were still private newspapers) and the government had strong public backing. However, the government's actions during and after the border war and President Isaias' increasingly autocratic style of leadership led to growing criticism. In May 2001, a group of high-ranking ex-combatants referred to as the G-15 published an open letter to the government setting out various demands including a call for greater democracy ⁽²⁰⁴⁾. This led to a wave of imprisonments on 18 and 19 September 2001, during which the 11 members of the G-15 who were in Eritrea when the letter was published were detained, as well as, several journalists and other government critics ⁽²⁰⁵⁾. No criminal proceedings were ever initiated against them and the government has never disclosed their location. Nine of the 11 imprisoned G-15 members are dead according to unconfirmed reports ⁽²⁰⁶⁾.

In September 2001, all private media in Eritrea were shut down (cf. [Chapter 1.5](#)) ⁽²⁰⁷⁾. A zero-tolerance policy has been applied to public and private criticism of the government ever since ⁽²⁰⁸⁾. It is believed that the government monitors communication and that government informers are present throughout the country ⁽²⁰⁹⁾. Journalists and other government critics are regularly imprisoned and held indefinitely without criminal proceedings being initiated or their relatives being notified ⁽²¹⁰⁾. The number of political prisoners is estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000 ⁽²¹¹⁾. The Eritrean government justifies this lack of civil liberties under emergency measures due to the 'no war, no peace' situation following the border war with Ethiopia ⁽²¹²⁾.

On 21 January 2013, some 100 mutinous soldiers occupied the Ministry of Information and forced a TV presenter to read out a statement saying that the 1997 constitution would be put into effect and that all political prisoners would be released. The government suppressed the mutiny and the soldiers withdrew to their barracks ⁽²¹³⁾. Some

⁽²⁰²⁾ Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, p. 427; NOREF, *Eritrean opposition parties and civic organisations*, January 2015, pp. 3-4.

⁽²⁰³⁾ NOREF, *Eritrean opposition parties and civic organisations*, January 2015, p. 4.

⁽²⁰⁴⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, p. 13; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, pp. 422-423; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015, 44th edition*, 2014, p. 458; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 7, 75-79; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, pp. 31-38.

⁽²⁰⁵⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, 21 September 2010, p. 7; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 65-69; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 18-20; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, pp. 13-14; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, pp. 422-423; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 79-90; Kibreab, G., *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*, 2009, pp. 38-46.

⁽²⁰⁶⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 43; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 5; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Annual Report 2014/15 — Eritrea*, 25 February 2015.

⁽²⁰⁷⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, pp. 18-19; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 63-73.

⁽²⁰⁸⁾ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 11; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 9; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, p. 423; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 58; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 107-111.

⁽²⁰⁹⁾ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, pp. 9, 11.

⁽²¹⁰⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 12; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 26, 56-58; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 2; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 12; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, p. 423; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 91-93, 102.

⁽²¹¹⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 14; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014.

⁽²¹²⁾ Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 172-178; UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Oral Update by Mr Mike Smith, Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea at the 28th session of the Human Rights Council*, 16 March 2015.

⁽²¹³⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, pp. 4-6; Connell, D., 'Refugees, Ransoms and Revolt. An Update on Eritrea', Spring 2013, pp. 35-39; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Annual Report 2014/15 — Eritrea*, 25 February 2015; Article 19, *Eritrea: A Nation Silenced*, June 2013, p. 9; Institute for Security Studies, *Where is Eritrea heading?* 5 February 2013.

journalists and diaspora members regarded these events — now known as the *Forto incident* ⁽²¹⁴⁾ — as an attempted coup ⁽²¹⁵⁾. Between 50 and 200 people were arrested in its aftermath ⁽²¹⁶⁾, most of whom were reported to be Muslim members of the army ⁽²¹⁷⁾.

In May 2014, the bishops of the Catholic Church published an open letter warning that the country was being depopulated through emigration, and attributed this mainly to the unlimited duration of national service and the imprisonment of dissenters. They called on the government to introduce a more transparent and lawful political system, to release political prisoners and to allow open debate. There have been no reports of these bishops suffering any consequences ⁽²¹⁸⁾.

⁽²¹⁴⁾ The Ministry of Information is based in a former Italian military building called 'Forto'.

⁽²¹⁵⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, p. 5; Connell, D., 'Refugees, Ransoms and Revolt. An Update on Eritrea', Spring 2013, p. 39; Africa Confidential, *Issayas staggers a little*, 15 February 2013.

⁽²¹⁶⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 18; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, p. 5; Africa Confidential, *Issayas staggers a little*, 15 February 2013.

⁽²¹⁷⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, p. 1; USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2013 — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2013; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 8.

⁽²¹⁸⁾ HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015; BBC, *Eritrea 'desolate' — Catholic bishops*, 9 June 2014.

3. National service

Eritrea's national service (*Hagerawi Agelglot*) differs from the defence forces of other countries in that its overall aim is not only to defend the country, but also to rebuild it following the war of independence and to propagate the national ideology. National service is regarded as the 'school of the nation' in Eritrea ⁽²¹⁹⁾. According to the National Service Proclamation of 1995 ⁽²²⁰⁾ its aims are:

- *To establish a strong defence force ... [to] ensure a free and sovereign Eritrea.*
- *To preserve and entrust future generations with the courage, resoluteness and heroic episodes shown by our people in the past thirty years.*
- *To create a new generation characterised by love of work, discipline and a willingness to participate and serve in the reconstruction of the nation.*
- *To develop [...] the economy of the nation by investing in the development of our people as a potential wealth.*
- *To foster national unity among our people by eliminating sub-national feelings.*

Information on the national service by the Eritrean authorities is extremely scarce ⁽²²¹⁾. Therefore, this chapter is based mainly on information from academic research and human rights monitors. For a detailed source assessment, see the Chapter '[Introduction and source assessment](#)'.

3.1 Structure

National service is divided into two parts: active national service (military service) and civilian national service which officially involves development projects. In reality, however, civilian service conscripts work in administrative structures, schools, hospitals, agriculture and construction companies. (cf. [Chapter 3.6](#)) ⁽²²²⁾.

No official data is available regarding the number of people engaged in national service but various estimates place the figure at between 200,000 and 600,000 in recent years, approximately half of whom are assigned to active military service ⁽²²³⁾. Deserters have reported that many army units are seriously undermanned and that the whole force numbers only 100,000 ⁽²²⁴⁾.

The Eritrean military officially reports to the Minister of Defense. This post is temporarily vacant, since the former Minister of Defense, Major General Sebhat Efrem, was moved to the Ministry of Energy and Mines. In March 2014, Major General Filipos Woldeyohannes was appointed chief of staff of the Eritrean Defense Forces and is rumoured to become Minister of Defense ⁽²²⁵⁾. However, instructions are often transmitted directly from President Isaias Afewerki to the commanding officers ⁽²²⁶⁾. The military (*Eritrean Defense Forces*, EDF) consists of the army, the navy and the air force ⁽²²⁷⁾, with the army being the best resourced of the three ⁽²²⁸⁾. The Asmara-based air force had only seven operational planes in 2012 ⁽²²⁹⁾.

⁽²¹⁹⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, pp. 318, 371; Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 3; Kibreab, G., 'The national service/Warsai-Yikealo Development Campaign in post-independence Eritrea', 7 November 2013, pp. 633-635; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 7; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 7; Kibreab, G., 'Forced Labour in Eritrea', March 2009, pp. 44-46.

⁽²²⁰⁾ Eritrea, *Proclamation on National Service No 82/1995*, 23 October 1995, Art. 5.

⁽²²¹⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 5.

⁽²²²⁾ Bozzini, D., *National Service and State Structures in Eritrea*, 28 June 2012, p. 4; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 8; Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, pp. 4, 8.

⁽²²³⁾ Healy, S., *Eritrea's economic survival*, 20 April 2007, source: Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 8; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015*, 44th edition, 2014, p. 460; Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 10; Riggan, J., 'Debating National Duty in Eritrean Classrooms', Winter 2013, p. 91; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 166-169.

⁽²²⁴⁾ Awate, *Crisis In The Eritrean Army*, 3 April 2014; Africa Confidential, *Issayas staggers a little*, 15 February 2013.

⁽²²⁵⁾ Awate, *Eritrea 2014: Isaias Afewerki & His Musical Chair*, 19 July 2014; TesfaNews, *Eritrea Appoints New Chief of Staff*, 19 March 2014; Caperi, *Eritrean FM Meets Outgoing Qatari Ambassador*, 22 August 2014.

⁽²²⁶⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, 21 September 2010, p. 10.

⁽²²⁷⁾ NationMaster, *Eritrea Military Stats*, n.d.

⁽²²⁸⁾ Warner, J., 'Eritrea's military unprofessionalism and US security assistance in the Horn of Africa', 27 February 2014, p. 700.

⁽²²⁹⁾ UN Security Council, *Letter dated 11 July 2012 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2012/545)*, 13 July 2012, pp. 16-18.

The Eritrean army is organised into the following units:

Kifleserawit (division):	5,000 soldiers (more during wartime), led by brigadier generals
Brigade:	900 to 1,000 soldiers, led by colonels
Battalion:	300 to 400 soldiers, led by lieutenants or majors
Haili:	100 soldiers, led by lieutenants
Ganta (platoon):	30 soldiers
Mesre (troop):	10 to 12 soldiers
Gujile (unit):	5 to 6 soldiers ⁽²³⁰⁾

Eritrea is divided into five *Military Operational Zones* (Zone 1: Gash-Setit, Zone 2: South, Zone 3: West, Zone 4: East, Zone 5: Centre). The commanders of these zones have significant influence with the regional administration and are among the most powerful people in Eritrea ⁽²³¹⁾. President Isaias, however, from time to time reassigns them to different zones or roles ⁽²³²⁾.

The weakening of the Eritrean army due to numerous desertions has led to the establishment of an armed civil militia-style structure known as the People's Army (cf. [Chapter 3.9](#)) ⁽²³³⁾. According to unconfirmed reports, the Eritrean government also supports the armed Ethiopian rebel organisation *Tigray People's Democratic Movement* (TPDM, Tigrinya: *Demhit*), which is based in Eritrea and is deployed there for certain security tasks ⁽²³⁴⁾.

3.2 Exemptions

Proclamation 11/1991, which laid down the first legal basis for national service, originally provided for numerous exemptions ⁽²³⁵⁾. It was replaced in 1995 by Proclamation 82, which states that all Eritreans between the ages of 18 and 40 are conscriptable and shall belong to the reserve army until they reach the age of 50. Only those who fought in the war of independence are exempt from national service ⁽²³⁶⁾. Those who are unfit for military service are granted an exemption from the military programme but must complete 18 months of civilian service instead ⁽²³⁷⁾. Disabled, visually impaired and mentally ill persons may also be granted exemptions from civilian service ⁽²³⁸⁾. All of these exemptions (with the exception of that applying to former freedom fighters) apply only on a temporary basis and can be withdrawn at any time ⁽²³⁹⁾.

In the past, religious leaders of the four official religious communities (cf. [Chapter 5](#)) were partially exempt from military service ⁽²⁴⁰⁾ but this stopped being the case in 2010 at the latest ⁽²⁴¹⁾.

⁽²³⁰⁾ Landinfo, *Eritrea: Nationaldienst*, 28 July 2011, p. 9.

⁽²³¹⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, p. 15; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 9; Africa Confidential, *Issayas staggers a little*, 15 February 2013; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 73.

⁽²³²⁾ Africa Confidential, *Issayas staggers a little*, 15 February 2013.

⁽²³³⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonaltjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 21.

⁽²³⁴⁾ Awate, A *Mercenary Army: Isaias Afwerki's Last Stand*, 30 October 2013; Plaut, M., *Breaking: Eritrea — 'Thousands' detained in Asmara*, 28 October 2013; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Ending the Exodus?* 8 August 2014, p. 9.

⁽²³⁵⁾ Eritrea, *National Service Proclamation No 11/1991*, 1991, Art. 5, 7, 9, source: Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 371 and Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 2

⁽²³⁶⁾ Eritrea, *Proclamation on National Service No 82/1995*, 23 October 1995, Arts. 6, 12, 23.

⁽²³⁷⁾ Eritrea, *Proclamation on National Service No 82/1995*, 23 October 1995, Art. 13.

⁽²³⁸⁾ Eritrea, *Proclamation on National Service No 82/1995*, 23 October 1995, Art. 15.

⁽²³⁹⁾ Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 5.

⁽²⁴⁰⁾ Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, p. 35.

⁽²⁴¹⁾ USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2014, — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2014, p. 56; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 7.

In practice, women who are married or engaged and those who have children or are pregnant, as well as Muslim women from rural areas, are normally also granted an exemption from the military part of national service⁽²⁴²⁾. They are, however, occasionally conscripted during a *giffa* (round-up), for example, or assigned to civilian service (cf. [Chapter 3.3.2](#))⁽²⁴³⁾. Conscripts may marry during national service (with the exception of the six-month military training period) and apply for demobilisation, although this is not always granted⁽²⁴⁴⁾. Women who give birth during national service are generally demobilised, however. Women who have not been issued with demobilisation papers frequently work either at home or in shops, although there is an element of risk that they will be recruited during a *giffa*. Women over the age of 27 can ‘regularise’ their status, i.e. be officially demobilised⁽²⁴⁵⁾.

Women frequently marry or get pregnant in order to avoid national service⁽²⁴⁶⁾, not least because they are afraid of being sexually assaulted (cf. [Chapter 3.5.1](#))⁽²⁴⁷⁾.

In accordance with the Eritrean Nationality Proclamation, any person born to a father or a mother of Eritrean origin, whether in Eritrea or abroad, is an Eritrean national by birth⁽²⁴⁸⁾. Eritreans who have lived abroad since their birth are not exempt from conscription and must complete their national service if they return to Eritrea⁽²⁴⁹⁾.

3.3 Recruitment

3.3.1 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⁽²⁵⁰⁾, now officially known as the *Warsay-Yikealo School*⁽²⁵¹⁾, 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⁽²⁵²⁾. 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⁽²⁵³⁾.

The following recruitment rounds have taken place to date: 1st round July 1994, 2nd round January 1995, 3rd round June 1995, 4th round January 1996, 5th round July 1996⁽²⁵⁴⁾, 6th round winter 1997, 7th round summer 1997, 8th round winter 1998, 9th round summer 1998, 10th round winter 1999, 11th round summer 1999, 12th round winter 2000, 13th round summer 2000, 14th round winter 2001, 15th round summer 2001, 16th round winter 2002, 17th

⁽²⁴²⁾ Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 11; Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, p. 36, 41; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 25; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonaltjeneste*, 23 March 2015, pp. 15-16; IRB, *Eritrea: Military service, including age of recruitment, length of service, grounds for exemption, penalties for desertion from and evasion of military service, and availability of alternative service*, 4 September 2012; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 49.

⁽²⁴³⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonaltjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 16; Human Rights Concern — Eritrea, *Report on Child Rights Violations in Eritrea*, 19 November 2013; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 51.

⁽²⁴⁴⁾ Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, pp. 43-44.

⁽²⁴⁵⁾ Bozzini, D., *National Service and State Structures in Eritrea*, 28 June 2012, p. 8-9.

⁽²⁴⁶⁾ Women's Refugee Commission, *Young and Astray: An Assessment of Factors Driving the Movement of Unaccompanied Children and Adolescents from Eritrea into Ethiopia, Sudan and Beyond*, May 2013, p. 12; SIHA, *Letters from Eritrea. Refugee women tell their story*, 2013, p. 10.

⁽²⁴⁷⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, pp. 11-12.

⁽²⁴⁸⁾ Eritrea, *Eritrean Nationality Proclamation No 21/1992*, 6 April 1992, Art. 2.

⁽²⁴⁹⁾ UNHCR, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea*, 20 April 2011, p. 10.

⁽²⁵⁰⁾ Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 5; BBC, *Eritrea rapped for 'military' schooling*, 11 January 2004; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonaltjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 10; Müller, T.R., 'Bare life and the developmental state: implications of the militarization of high education in Eritrea', March 2008, p. 122; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 11.

⁽²⁵¹⁾ Mekonnen, D.R., *Translation of the Report of the Commander of the Sawa Military Training Camp to the Office of the Eritrean President*, 13 November 2010; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 181.

⁽²⁵²⁾ Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 9.

⁽²⁵³⁾ Bozzini, D., 'Low-tech surveillance and the Despotic State in Eritrea', 2011, p. 94; Bozzini, D., *En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*, 23 May 2011, p. 75; IRB, *Eritrea: Military service, including age of recruitment, length of service, grounds for exemption, penalties for desertion from and evasion of military service, and availability of alternative service*, 4 September 2012; NOKUT, *Report on recognition of higher education in Eritrea and Ethiopia*, January 2013, p. 9.

⁽²⁵⁴⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 318.

round summer 2003, 18th round summer 2004, 19th round summer 2005, 20th round summer 2006, 21st round summer 2007, 22th round summer 2008, 23rd round summer 2009, 24th round summer 2010 ⁽²⁵⁵⁾, 25th round August 2011 ⁽²⁵⁶⁾, 26th round July 2012 ⁽²⁵⁷⁾, 27th round July 2013 ⁽²⁵⁸⁾, 28th round August 2014 ⁽²⁵⁹⁾.

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 ⁽²⁶⁰⁾.

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 % ⁽²⁶²⁾.

3.3.2 Other methods of recruitment

There are many Eritrean teenagers who do not attend secondary school (cf. [Chapter 1.5.1](#)) 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 ⁽²⁶³⁾. 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 ⁽²⁶⁴⁾. 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 ⁽²⁶⁵⁾.

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. The army closes whole localities or urban districts for the purpose of these raids and demands proof of completed military service from anyone within the relevant area ⁽²⁶⁶⁾. According to some reports, *giffas* are now taking place less frequently than before ⁽²⁶⁷⁾ but in October 2013 and January 2015 there were large-scale *giffas* ⁽²⁶⁸⁾ in Asmara.

⁽²⁵⁵⁾ Landinfo, *Eritrea: Nationaldienst*, 28 July 2011, p. 9.

⁽²⁵⁶⁾ Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Student Members Of The 25th Round National Service Leave For Sawa*, August 2011.

⁽²⁵⁷⁾ Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Members of 26th round National Service leave for Sawa Training Center*, 23 July 2012.

⁽²⁵⁸⁾ Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Students leave for Sawa to continue 12th grade education in Warsai-Yikealo School*, 17 July 2013.

⁽²⁵⁹⁾ Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Members of the 28th round National Service begin regular academic activities*, 11 August 2014.

⁽²⁶⁰⁾ Academic expert, interview, 18 July 2012; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 47; Women's Refugee Commission, *Young and Astray: An Assessment of Factors Driving the Movement of Unaccompanied Children and Adolescents from Eritrea into Ethiopia, Sudan and Beyond*, May 2013, p. 12.

⁽²⁶¹⁾ Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 116; Local contact, interview, Ethiopia, 17 September 2014; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 10.

⁽²⁶²⁾ Mekonnen, D.R., *Translation of the Report of the Commander of the Sawa Military Training Camp to the Office of the Eritrean President*, 13 November 2010.

⁽²⁶³⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, pp. 10, 12; Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 4; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 9; Women's Refugee Commission, *Young and Astray: An Assessment of Factors Driving the Movement of Unaccompanied Children and Adolescents from Eritrea into Ethiopia, Sudan and Beyond*, May 2013, p. 12; Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, p. 40.

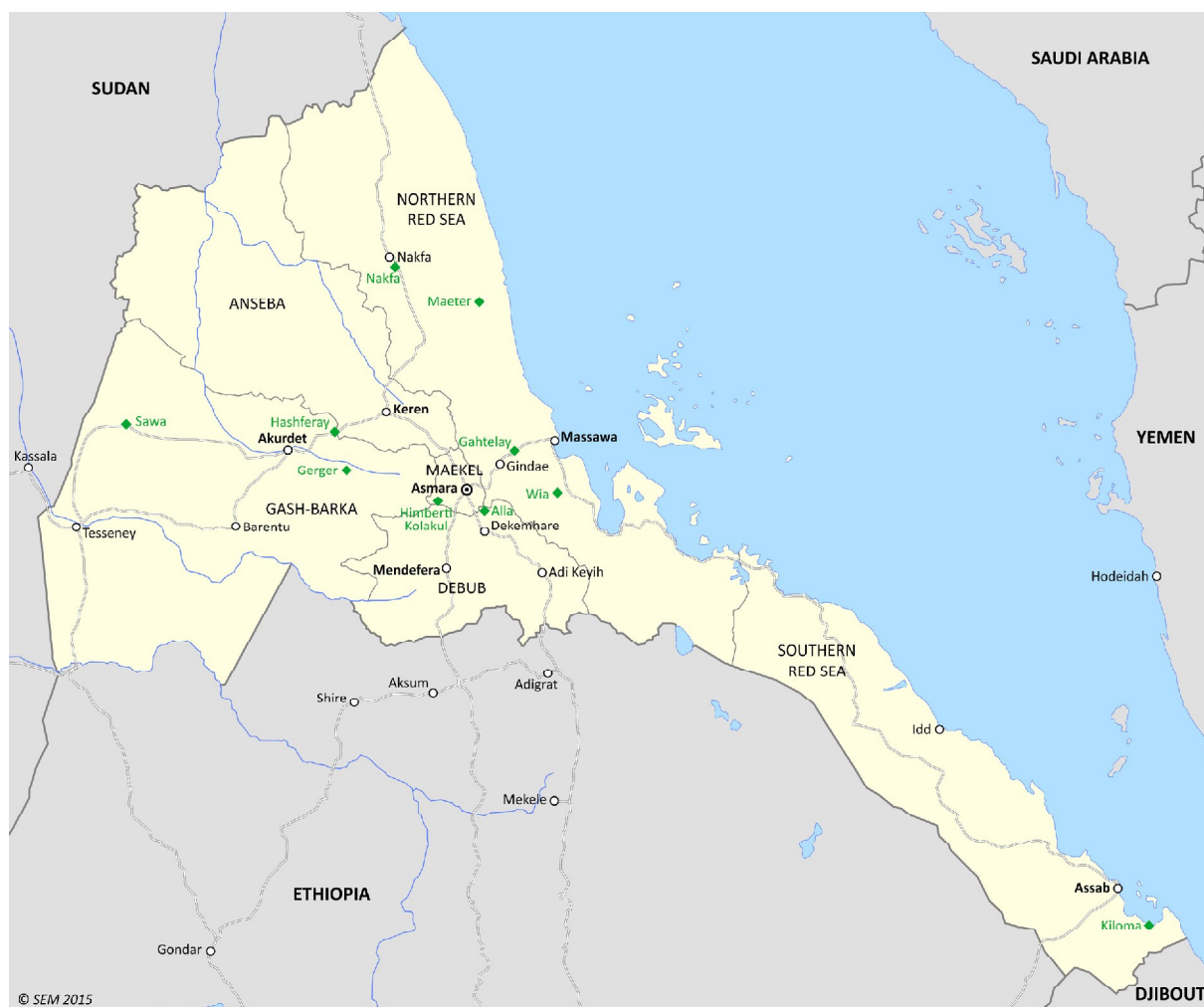
⁽²⁶⁴⁾ Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe, *Eritrea: Rekrutierung von Minderjährigen*, 21 January 2015, p. 4.

⁽²⁶⁵⁾ Connell, D., e-mail, 30 April 2015.

⁽²⁶⁶⁾ Bozzini, D., *En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*, 23 May 2011, pp. 124-126; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 48-49; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 319; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 8; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, pp. 422-423; Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, p. 34; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 9; Human Rights Concern — Eritrea, *Report on Child Rights Violations in Eritrea*, 19 November 2013; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 50.

⁽²⁶⁷⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 9; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, pp. 14, 28, 37; Müller, Tanja R., 'Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea', September 2012, p. 460.

⁽²⁶⁸⁾ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014; Plaut, M., *Eritrea: Solidarity blocks raids*, 17 January 2015; Plaut, M., *Breaking: Eritrea — 'Thousands' detained in Asmara*, 28 October 2013; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 51.



Some key military training camps in Eritrea ⁽²⁶⁹⁾

Several training camps have been set up across the country to provide military training to recruits mobilised directly by the local administration for military service or conscripted during *giffas*. These include Wia, Kiloma (Klima) and Maeter (see map above) ⁽²⁷⁰⁾.

Until the outbreak of the border war in 1998, local administrations were responsible for mobilising all national service recruits, who were notified by letter or in person of the time and place (e.g. stadium or school) where they needed to report in order to be transported to the Sawa training camp. Round-ups were carried out even at this stage, but they were easier to evade than the later *giffas* ⁽²⁷¹⁾.

3.3.3 Recruitment of minors

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

⁽²⁶⁹⁾ Map created by State Secretariat for Migration (Switzerland), 2015, based on Amnesty International, *Eritrea: Suspected Detention Centers* [map], n.d.; Local contact, interview, Ethiopia, 17 September 2014. All borders and names used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the European Union. The border line between Eritrea and Ethiopia corresponds to the *Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission's* ruling of 2002 (cf. [map page 11](#)).

⁽²⁷⁰⁾ Kibreab, G., interview, 5–6 September 2009; Women's Refugee Commission, *Young and Astray: An Assessment of Factors Driving the Movement of Unaccompanied Children and Adolescents from Eritrea into Ethiopia, Sudan and Beyond*, May 2013; Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, p. 41; Landinfo *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 13.

⁽²⁷¹⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 9.

be 17 years old or even younger⁽²⁷²⁾. According to a leaked Eritrean military report, one-third of those drafted during the 21st recruitment round in 2010 were under 18⁽²⁷³⁾. The Eritrean government claimed that the under-age pupils attending Warsay-Yikealo school did not belong to the army⁽²⁷⁴⁾.

The conscription of minors for national service during *giffas* is also a frequent occurrence and age is often judged merely by appearance. Parents who submit identity papers proving their child's real age are often ignored⁽²⁷⁵⁾. One report claims that *kebab* administrations conscript minors for national service partly to make up numbers but also for arbitrary reasons or as a reprisal against the child's family⁽²⁷⁶⁾.

3.4 12th school year at Sawa

The 12th school year at the Sawa-based Warsay-Yikealo school involves a combination of academic and military training and labour deployments⁽²⁷⁷⁾. 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⁽²⁷⁸⁾. Pupils are subjected to military discipline during this period and can be mobilised repeatedly for military training events⁽²⁷⁹⁾. 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⁽²⁸⁰⁾.

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* (or the *Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate Examination*)⁽²⁸¹⁾. All tested pupils receive a certificate, regardless of their marks⁽²⁸²⁾. 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⁽²⁸³⁾. 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⁽²⁸⁴⁾.

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

⁽²⁷²⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 25; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 20; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 9; Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe, *Eritrea: Rekrutierung von Minderjährigen*, 21 January 2015, p. 3; Child Soldiers International, *Louder Than Words*, 2012, p. 41; Human Rights Concern — Eritrea, *Report on Child Rights Violations in Eritrea*, 19 November 2013.

⁽²⁷³⁾ Mekonnen, D.R., *Translation of the Report of the Commander of the Sawa Military Training Camp to the Office of the Eritrean President*, 13 November 2010.

⁽²⁷⁴⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review*, 8 March 2010, pp. 4-5.

⁽²⁷⁵⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 9; Child Soldiers International, *Louder Than Words*, 2012, pp. 41-42; Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe, *Eritrea: Rekrutierung von Minderjährigen*, 21 January 2015, p. 4; Women's Refugee Commission, *Young and Astray: An Assessment of Factors Driving the Movement of Unaccompanied Children and Adolescents from Eritrea into Ethiopia, Sudan and Beyond*, May 2013, p. 12.

⁽²⁷⁶⁾ Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe, *Eritrea: Rekrutierung von Minderjährigen*, 21 January 2015, p. 5.

⁽²⁷⁷⁾ BBC, *Eritrea rapped for 'military' schooling*, 11 January 2004; Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 9; Local contact, interview, Ethiopia, 17 September 2014.

⁽²⁷⁸⁾ Mekonnen, D.R., *Translation of the Report of the Commander of the Sawa Military Training Camp to the Office of the Eritrean President*, 13 November 2010; Local contact, interview, Ethiopia, 17 September 2014; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 11.

⁽²⁷⁹⁾ Child Soldiers International, *Louder Than Words*, 2012, p. 41; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 50; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 181.

⁽²⁸⁰⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 9.

⁽²⁸¹⁾ Local contact, interview, Ethiopia, 17 September 2014; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Warsay-Yikealo Secondary School: Preparing Students for Academic Excellence*, 2 April 2010; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Eritrea: National School Leaving Examination Got Underway Today*, 17 March 2014; NOKUT, *Report on recognition of higher education in Eritrea and Ethiopia*, January 2013, p. 9.

⁽²⁸²⁾ NOKUT, *Report on recognition of higher education in Eritrea and Ethiopia*, January 2013, p. 9.

⁽²⁸³⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 12; Local contact, interview, Ethiopia, 17 September 2014; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, p. 11.

⁽²⁸⁴⁾ Human Rights Concern — Eritrea, *Report on Child Rights Violations in Eritrea*, 19 November 2013; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 12.

training at Sawa or elsewhere, and the remainder are transferred immediately to proper national service⁽²⁸⁵⁾. 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⁽²⁸⁶⁾.

The training camp is located near Forto Sawa in *zoba* Gash-Barka, around 30 kilometres from the Sudanese border (see [map on p. 36](#))⁽²⁸⁷⁾. 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⁽²⁸⁸⁾.

3.5 Military service

Military service conscripts are paid very little. Exact figures vary but most sources agree that soldiers earn a monthly salary of about 500 nakfa after completing their training and much less (less than 100 nakfa per month) during the training⁽²⁸⁹⁾. According to most sources, this is too little to live on or support a family⁽²⁹⁰⁾, and is referred to as 'pocket money' in Proclamation 82/1995⁽²⁹¹⁾. Former fighters (*tegadelti*) and higher-ranking officers have better salaries of up to 3,000 nakfa per month⁽²⁹²⁾. Soldiers engaged in military service sometimes carry out agricultural or industrial tasks or are deployed for the private benefit of their commanding officers⁽²⁹³⁾.

No standardised procedure appears to exist for requesting leave of absence. Leave is granted by each soldier's military superior, which presumably leads to widespread corruption and arbitrary decision-making. The military issues permits (cf. [Chapter 1.8](#)) stamped by the Ministry of Defence for journeys made during leave of absence⁽²⁹⁴⁾.

Human rights monitors describe the conditions in the Eritrean military as highly problematic⁽²⁹⁵⁾. According to these reports, recruits and soldiers are mostly subjected to the arbitrary decisions of their superiors and learn first and foremost to be fearful and obedient⁽²⁹⁶⁾. Dissent, attempted escape and disobedience are punished severely and even minor transgressions against military discipline may attract draconian punishments including beatings and

⁽²⁸⁵⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, pp. 11, 14; Bozzini, D., 'Low-tech surveillance and the Despotic State in Eritrea', 2011, p. 96; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 43; Bozzini, D., *En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*, 23 May 2011, pp. 77-81, 92; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, pp. 10-11; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Sawa: Center of Empowerment For Young Eritreans*, 23 April 2010; Müller, Tanja R., 'Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea', September 2012, p. 456; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Back to School*, 14 September 2012.

⁽²⁸⁶⁾ Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 9; Local contact, interview, Ethiopia, 17 September 2014; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, p. 12; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 11.

⁽²⁸⁷⁾ Coordinates 15.695, 36.975, see Google Maps (<https://maps.google.ch/maps?q=15.695,+36.975&hl=de&ll=15.69407,36.973715&spn=0.03549,0.019011&sll=15.694979,36.965003&sspn=0.03549,0.019011&t=h&gl=ch&z=15>), accessed 20 March 2015

⁽²⁸⁸⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, pp. 9-10.

⁽²⁸⁹⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 318; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, p. 13; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 26; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 14; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 52; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 25; Bozzini, D., *En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*, 23 May 2011, pp. 124-126; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015*, 44th edition, 2014, p. 460.

⁽²⁹⁰⁾ Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 318; HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 53; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, p. 13.

⁽²⁹¹⁾ Eritrea, *Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995*, 23 October 1995, Art. 22.

⁽²⁹²⁾ HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 52; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, p. 13.

⁽²⁹³⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 14.

⁽²⁹⁴⁾ Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, p. 35.

⁽²⁹⁵⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, pp. 11-12; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 27; HRW, *World Report 2014 — Eritrea*, 21 January 2014; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 94; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 27-29; Kibreab, G., 'Forced Labour in Eritrea', March 2009, pp. 57-59.

⁽²⁹⁶⁾ FMDHR, *Eritrea: Youth and Militarization*, 1 July 2008, p. 2.

torture⁽²⁹⁷⁾. The absence of functioning military courts means that punishments are meted out by military superiors on an arbitrary basis⁽²⁹⁸⁾. Soldiers' living conditions are described as 'harsh'; neither their clothes nor their living quarters are adequate for the weather conditions and they lack food and medicine⁽²⁹⁹⁾.

3.5.1 Women in military service

Men and women are provided with separate accommodation during training but human rights reports claim that sexual assaults are a regular occurrence during military service, most frequently perpetrated by military superiors. Anyone who attempts to resist such attacks may be punished⁽³⁰⁰⁾. The US Department of State's Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2012 mentions that there were no reports of rape or sexual violence in national service⁽³⁰¹⁾, but the same report for 2013 states that it was a frequent occurrence⁽³⁰²⁾. According to the *Trafficking in Persons Report 2014*, the number of sexual assaults have decreased⁽³⁰³⁾.

3.6 Civilian national service

Conscripts engaged in civilian national service are deployed as follows:

- 'Ministries': this category covers work within national, regional or local administrative structures and in schools (Ministry of Education), hospitals (Ministry of Health), courts (Ministry of Justice) or hotels and restaurants (Ministry of Tourism), for example;
- Work on national development projects in one of the construction companies or agricultural companies under the control of the PFDJ or the army⁽³⁰⁴⁾;
- According to reports, national service recruits are also sometimes deployed for the private benefit of army commanders and assigned to tasks in private-sector companies such as gold mines⁽³⁰⁵⁾.

Civilian national service is predominantly reserved for those with special skills, post-school education or particular privileges⁽³⁰⁶⁾. Academy (college) graduates are assigned to tasks appropriate to their area of specialty⁽³⁰⁷⁾, and often initially sent to Sawa to work as 12th year teachers⁽³⁰⁸⁾. Anyone who drops out of academy is conscripted for military service⁽³⁰⁹⁾.

⁽²⁹⁷⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, pp. 11-12; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 27; HRW, *World Report 2014 — Eritrea*, 21 January 2014; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 94; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 27-29; Kibreab, G., 'Forced Labour in Eritrea', March 2009, pp. 57-59.

⁽²⁹⁸⁾ HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 27; Warner, J., 'Eritrea's military unprofessionalism and US security assistance in the Horn of Africa', 27 February 2014, pp. 704-705.

⁽²⁹⁹⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, p. 13.

⁽³⁰⁰⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 26; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 46-47; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, p. 11; HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015; US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2014. Eritrea*, 20 June 2014, p. 168; Human Rights Concern — Eritrea, *Report on Child Rights Violations in Eritrea*, 19 November 2013.

⁽³⁰¹⁾ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012 — Eritrea*, 19 April 2013, p. 18.

⁽³⁰²⁾ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 18.

⁽³⁰³⁾ US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2014. Eritrea*, 20 June 2014, p. 168.

⁽³⁰⁴⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 8; HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, pp. 25-26; Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 9; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, p. 15; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, p. 12; Kibreab, G., 'Forced Labour in Eritrea', March 2009, pp. 60-62.

⁽³⁰⁵⁾ US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2014. Eritrea*, 20 June 2014, p. 168; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 54-56; Kibreab, G., 'Forced Labour in Eritrea', March 2009, p. 62.

⁽³⁰⁶⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 13; Bozzini, D., 'Low-tech surveillance and the Despotic State in Eritrea', 2011, p. 96.

⁽³⁰⁷⁾ Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, p. 11.

⁽³⁰⁸⁾ Müller, Tanja R., 'Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea', September 2012, p. 456.

⁽³⁰⁹⁾ Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 9.

Salaries vary depending on the work involved, but are generally between 700 and 1,000 nakfa per month (up to 1,500 nakfa for doctors), which is not a living wage⁽³¹⁰⁾. The minimum monthly wage is 360 nakfa⁽³¹¹⁾. Critics often refer to civilian national service as forced labour⁽³¹²⁾; conscripts are subordinate to their civilian employers but must remain mobilisation-ready and can be re-conscripted to the military⁽³¹³⁾.

The Eritrean government has announced to representatives of the international community that starting with the 28th recruitment round in the autumn of 2014, conscripts would not be transferred to the civilian national service anymore. Those currently engaged in civilian service will be dismissed over the next few years, according to the government (cf. [Chapter 3.7](#))⁽³¹⁴⁾.

3.7 Duration

According to Proclamation 11/1991 and Proclamation 82/1995, universal conscription applies to everyone in Eritrea between the ages of 18 and 50⁽³¹⁵⁾. National service lasts 18 months, including six months of military training and 12 months of service⁽³¹⁶⁾. Recruits in the first four recruitment rounds were dismissed after 18 months but remobilised after the outbreak of the border war in 1998⁽³¹⁷⁾. Since 1998 the duration of conscription has been extended indefinitely until the age of 50⁽³¹⁸⁾, as provided by Article 21(1) of Proclamation 82/1995 for the event of mobilisation or war⁽³¹⁹⁾. This is justified on the grounds of the current ‘no war, no peace’ situation which is the cause of the continuing *de facto* (but non-declared) state of emergency since 1998⁽³²⁰⁾. Addis Abeba still refuses to recognise the shared border despite a UN arbitration ruling of 2002⁽³²¹⁾, therefore Eritrea still fears an Ethiopian attack although full-scale war ended in 2000⁽³²²⁾.

The *Warsai Yikealo Development Campaign* (WYDC)⁽³²³⁾ was set up as a national (civilian) development programme in 2002 to legitimise the indefinite duration of national service but its content has never been properly specified⁽³²⁴⁾. The WYDC comprises various agricultural development projects and national reconstruction efforts and pursues the same objectives as national service⁽³²⁵⁾.

In 2014 and 2015, representatives of the Eritrean authorities told foreign visitors that national service would be limited again to 18 months from the 28th recruitment round held in August 2014. National service would consist

⁽³¹⁰⁾ Connell, D., *Eritrea: Take me to prison — they have food*, 6 March 2015; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 14; Müller, Tanja R., ‘Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea’, September 2012, p. 457; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Helse — hiv/aids, tuberkulose og diabetes*, 7 June 2013, p. 8.

⁽³¹¹⁾ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 25.

⁽³¹²⁾ HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 51-56, 81-83; Kibreab, G., ‘Forced Labour in Eritrea’, March 2009, pp. 49-67; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, pp. 14-15; Connell, D., ‘Eritrean Refugees at Risk’, 11 April 2014.

⁽³¹³⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 14.

⁽³¹⁴⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 7.

⁽³¹⁵⁾ Eritrea, *National Service Proclamation No 11/1991*, 1991, source: Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 317 and Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 2; Eritrea, *Proclamation on National Service No 82/1995*, 23 October 1995, Art. 6.

⁽³¹⁶⁾ Eritrea, *Proclamation on National Service No 82/1995*, 23 October 1995, Art. 8.

⁽³¹⁷⁾ Kibreab, G., ‘Forced Labour in Eritrea’, March 2009, p. 44.

⁽³¹⁸⁾ Up to the age of 47 for women and 50 or 57 for men, according to some sources: HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 43-44; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 25.

⁽³¹⁹⁾ Eritrea, *Proclamation on National Service No 82/1995*, 23 October 1995, Art. 21(1).

⁽³²⁰⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Ending the Exodus?* 8 August 2014, p. 3; US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2014. Eritrea*, 20 June 2014, p. 168; Tronvoll, K. and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 172-175; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 23.

⁽³²¹⁾ Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 8; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Ending the Exodus?* 8 August 2014, p. 12.

⁽³²²⁾ Kibreab, G., ‘The national service/Warsai-Yikealo Development Campaign in post-independence Eritrea’, 7 November 2013, p. 636.

⁽³²³⁾ *Yikealo* (the brave, courageous) is a term used for the former EPLF fighters, and *warsay* means ‘heir’, i.e. the national service conscripts; the campaign is therefore intended to pass the legacy of the freedom fighters on to the next generation. National service conscripts however tend to refer to themselves as *ageglot* (service); Bozzini, D., ‘Low-tech surveillance and the Despotic State in Eritrea’, 2011, p. 97; Kibreab, G., ‘Forced Labour in Eritrea’, March 2009, p. 45.

⁽³²⁴⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 8; Bozzini, D., *En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*, 23 May 2011, pp. 71-72; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, 21 September 2010, pp. 9-10; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 43; Kibreab, G., ‘The national service/Warsai-Yikealo Development Campaign in post-independence Eritrea’, 7 November 2013, p. 636; Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 7-8; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Ending the Exodus?* 8 August 2014, p. 5; Bozzini, D., ‘The Fines and the Spies: Fears of State Surveillance in Eritrea and in the Diaspora’, forthcoming, p. 5; Bozzini, D., ‘Low-tech surveillance and the Despotic State in Eritrea’, 2011, p. 97; Müller, Tanja R., ‘Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea’, September 2012, p. 453; Tronvoll, K. and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 172-173.

⁽³²⁵⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, p. 8; Rena, R., ‘Warsai-Yikealo Program and its Impact in Post War Eritrea — A Development Perspective’, 2008, p. 102.

only of military training rather than civilian projects⁽³²⁶⁾. According to one report, the soldiers concerned have been informed⁽³²⁷⁾ but there has been no official announcement. It remains to be seen whether these announced concrete reforms will be implemented, as similar announcements have already been made in the past⁽³²⁸⁾.

3.7.1 Demobilisation and dismissal

A distinction should be made between demobilisations and dismissals; demobilisations follow wartime mobilisations, and dismissals take place on an individual basis after the discharge of national service obligations⁽³²⁹⁾.

After the end of the border war in 2000, the Eritrean authorities announced the demobilisation of 200,000 soldiers in three phases. However, only about 5,000 people were demobilised. Others received their demobilisation papers but were reassigned from military to civilian national service⁽³³⁰⁾. No large-scale demobilisations have occurred since then⁽³³¹⁾ and many national service conscripts have been serving indefinite terms for many years⁽³³²⁾. The Eritrean authorities claim that 70% of those who served in the army during the border war have been dismissed⁽³³³⁾.

Dismissals of national service conscripts take place to a limited extent but it is easier to be dismissed from civilian national service than from military national service. Good relations with superiors may also make the process easier⁽³³⁴⁾. A study carried out in 2008 and 2012 among Eritrean migrants in European and African countries revealed an average service time of 5.8 years⁽³³⁵⁾. Women surveyed for another study had served an average of five years⁽³³⁶⁾. Many employees of ministries do not know whether they are still engaged in national service or have been dismissed⁽³³⁷⁾.

3.8 Desertion

Individuals who leave national service (military and civilian) without permission are regarded as deserters⁽³³⁸⁾. Most deserters leave either the training centre at Sawa or other military bases without authorisation or fail to return from leave. They then either hide or attempt to leave the country illegally (cf. [Chapter 6.4.3](#)).

Due to the political and ideological nature of national service, most sources claim that desertion or draft evasion may be regarded by the authorities as an expression of political opposition or treason⁽³³⁹⁾. Due to the lack of empirical information on the punishment of deserters and draft evaders in the recent years (cf. [Chapter 3.8.2](#)), there is no recent information if this is still the case.

3.8.1 Punishment for desertion and draft evasion

According to Proclamation 82/1995, a deserter must pay a fine of 3,000 birr⁽³⁴⁰⁾ and/or serve a two-year prison sentence. The prison sentence rises to five years for those who leave the country after deserting. Deserters also lose

⁽³²⁶⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, pp. 7-8; Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen, *Rundschau: Homo-Segnungen, Eritrea-Flüchtlinge, D. Fiala, Sperma-Schmuggel* [video], 11 March 2015; Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, pp. 17-18; Plaut, M., *The Eritrean regime promises — no more than 18 months of military service*, 13 February 2015; Asmarino, *An Eritrean official 'promises' policy changes on the indefinite national service*, 24 November 2014.

⁽³²⁷⁾ Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, pp. 17-18.

⁽³²⁸⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, pp. 7-8; Arnane, A. and 21 other signatories, *Statement on EU Asylum and Aid Policy to Eritrea*, 31 March 2015.

⁽³²⁹⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 20.

⁽³³⁰⁾ Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 6-7; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 21.

⁽³³¹⁾ Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 6-7; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 318.

⁽³³²⁾ US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2014. Eritrea*, 20 June 2014, p. 168; HRW, *World Report 2014 — Eritrea*, 21 January 2014; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014.

⁽³³³⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 8.

⁽³³⁴⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, pp. 20-21.

⁽³³⁵⁾ Kibreab, G., 'The national service/Warsai-Yikealo Development Campaign in post-independence Eritrea', 7 November 2013, p. 635.

⁽³³⁶⁾ SIHA, *Letters from Eritrea. Refugee women tell their story*, 2013, p. 10.

⁽³³⁷⁾ Riggan, J., 'Debating National Duty in Eritrean Classrooms', Winter 2013, p. 89.

⁽³³⁸⁾ HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 44.

⁽³³⁹⁾ UNHCR, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea*, 20 April 2011, p. 14; Müller, T.R., 'Bare life and the developmental state: implications of the militarization of high education in Eritrea', March 2008, p. 115; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 27.

⁽³⁴⁰⁾ The Eritrean currency nakfa was only introduced in 1997 in a 1:1 rate with the Ethiopian birr. (cf. [Chapter 1.9](#)).

their right to be employed or own land ⁽³⁴¹⁾. Article 300 of the Criminal Code also stipulates that wartime desertions are punishable by prison sentences ranging in length from five years to life imprisonment, or even the death penalty in particularly severe cases. According to Article 297, wartime draft evasion is punishable by imprisonment of up to five years ⁽³⁴²⁾.

In practice, according to most sources, deserters and draft evaders are imprisoned if they are caught within the country before being able to leave, or at the airport after returning. They are frequently kept in *incommunicado* detention without charges, proceedings or fixed sentence, and sometimes even tortured. Periods of detention vary between several days and several years ⁽³⁴³⁾. According to one report, punishments are more severe in the case of deserters who have dropped out of military national service ⁽³⁴⁴⁾. However, for the punishment, it does not make a difference whether the desertion has taken place during the legally prescribed service period of 18 months or afterwards ⁽³⁴⁵⁾.

3.8.2 Punishment for returning deserters and draft evaders

The information on the treatment of returning deserters and draft evaders is based primarily on the experiences of failed asylum seekers repatriated to Eritrea between 2002 and 2008 ⁽³⁴⁶⁾. There have been no new empirical findings since then on the treatment of repatriated deserters and draft evaders. Therefore, the punishment currently imposed on deserters and draft evaders is difficult to establish. However, most sources state that punishment is imposed arbitrarily on an extra-judicial basis without regard for the laws ⁽³⁴⁷⁾.

Eritreans were repatriated from Egypt in 2009 and 2011 and there have been many instances of overland repatriations from Sudan in recent years. No information is available on the fate of those repatriated after their return, however ⁽³⁴⁸⁾. Some of the respondents contacted in Eritrea during Denmark's and Norway's fact-finding missions in late 2014 and early 2015 believed that deserters and draft evaders were held in prison for several weeks or months and were then reassigned to national service ⁽³⁴⁹⁾. However, several of the Eritrean experts consulted in 2013 and 2014 by Norway, the Netherlands and Denmark believed that repatriated deserters and draft evaders may still be subjected to interrogations, punishments and mistreatment ⁽³⁵⁰⁾. Since human rights monitors have no access to Eritrea and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is not allowed to visit prisons, it is impossible to verify such statements ⁽³⁵¹⁾.

⁽³⁴¹⁾ Eritrea, *Proclamation on National Service No 82/1995*, 23 October 1995, Art. 37.

⁽³⁴²⁾ Ethiopia, *Penal Code of Ethiopia 1957 (Eritrean Transitional Penal Code)*, 23 July 1957, Arts. 297, 300.

⁽³⁴³⁾ HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 27-29, 68, 70, 72, 74; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, pp. 30-31; Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, pp. 12-14; UNHCR, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea*, 20 April 2011, p. 11; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 10.

⁽³⁴⁴⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, pp. 18-19.

⁽³⁴⁵⁾ Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 14.

⁽³⁴⁶⁾ HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 68, 70, 72, 74; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 31; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 'You have no right to ask' — Government resists scrutiny on human rights*, 18 May 2004, p. 30.

⁽³⁴⁷⁾ UNHCR, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea*, 20 April 2011, p. 11; Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 12; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 17; Warner, J., 'Eritrea's military unprofessionalism and US security assistance in the Horn of Africa', 27 February 2014, pp. 704-705; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 51.

⁽³⁴⁸⁾ Landinfo, *Repons Eritrea: Reaksjoner mot hjemvendte asylsøkere*, 23 March 2015, p. 2-3; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 59; HRW, *Sudan: End Mass Summary Deportations of Eritreans*, 25 October 2011; Amnesty International, *Sudan must end forced returns of asylum seekers to Eritrea*, 15 August 2012; HRW, *Sudan: Stop Deporting Eritreans*, 8 May 2014; UN News Centre, *UN refugee agency warns Sudan over forced return of Eritrean asylum seekers*, 4 July 2014.

⁽³⁴⁹⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 18; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, pp. 15, 17-18.

⁽³⁵⁰⁾ Landinfo, *Repons Eritrea: Reaksjoner mot hjemvendte asylsøkere*, 23 March 2015, p. 3-4; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 59; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, p. 15.

⁽³⁵¹⁾ ICRC, *Annual Report 2013*, May 2014, p. 143; UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Oral Update by Mr Mike Smith, Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea at the 28th session of the Human Rights Council*, 16 March 2015.

The Eritrean leadership has stated on several occasions that those returning to the country will not be punished as long as they have not committed any offences⁽³⁵²⁾ but it has not yet been made clear whether desertion, draft evasion or illegal exits (cf. [Chapter 6.4.3](#)) are regarded as offences. No amendments have been made to the country's laws and no other documents have been issued to substantiate these announcements⁽³⁵³⁾.

According to recent observations, however, it has apparently been possible for exiled Eritreans to enter the country for holidays and to visit family without suffering any consequences. In order to do so, they need to rehabilitate themselves vis-a-vis the Eritrean state by paying the diaspora tax (also known as 'reconstruction tax' or '2 % tax') and signing a letter of repentance as well as abstain from any anti-government activities while abroad⁽³⁵⁴⁾. These measures provide no guarantee against punishment, however; signing the letter of repentance implies directly confessing to an offence and declaring a willingness to accept the relevant punishment⁽³⁵⁵⁾. It is important to note that most of those who have returned to Eritrea have visited the country rather than relocated for good⁽³⁵⁶⁾.

Also individuals of draft age, who have left Eritrea illegally, may be perceived as draft evaders upon return⁽³⁵⁷⁾. For more information on the punishment of illegal exit, see [Chapter 6.4.4](#).

3.8.3 Persecution of family members

In 2005, the Eritrean authorities began to impose a fine of 50,000 nakfa on the family members of deserters and draft evaders who had left the country illegally. Those who were unable to pay may have been imprisoned for a period and/or conscripted for national service in the place of the deserter. Business licences were also revoked and property seized⁽³⁵⁸⁾. These punishments are not imposed consistently, however, and depend on the region (most instances have been reported in the city of Asmara and *zoba* Debub), the current situation and possibly also whether the deserter dropped out of civilian or military national service⁽³⁵⁹⁾.

Reports about the persecution of family members have become much less common in recent years, probably in part because the Eritrean army no longer has sufficient capacities given the high numbers of deserters. There is no more systematic persecution of family members⁽³⁶⁰⁾. But, according to observers, it can still happen for a variety of reasons, particularly in rural areas⁽³⁶¹⁾, especially in the regions of *zoba* Debub which are close to the border⁽³⁶²⁾.

3.9 People's Army

The Eritrean government began to establish a civil militia known as the 'People's Army' (Tigrinya: *Hizbawi Serawit*) in March 2012, which exists in parallel to the national service troops. This move was prompted by the Ethiopian army's advances into Eritrean territory⁽³⁶³⁾. Eritreans between the ages of 18 and about 70 who are not currently engaged

⁽³⁵²⁾ Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country of Origin Information (COI) Report — Eritrea*, 17 August 2012, p. 142; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, pp. 25, 29, 32, 40; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 59; Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen, *Rundschau: Homo-Segnungen, Eritrea-Flüchtlinge, D. Fiala, Sperma-Schmuggel* [video], 11 March 2015.

⁽³⁵³⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 7; Arnone, A. and 21 other signatories, *Statement on EU Asylum and Aid Policy to Eritrea*, 31 March 2015.

⁽³⁵⁴⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 18; NZZ, *Die harte Hand von Eritreas Regime in der Schweiz*, 13 December 2014; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, pp. 17-18, 25, 29, 40; Poole, A., 'Ransoms, Remittances, and Refugees: The Gatekeeper State in Eritrea', Winter 2013, pp. 67-82.

⁽³⁵⁵⁾ NZZ, *Die harte Hand von Eritreas Regime in der Schweiz*, 13 December 2014.

⁽³⁵⁶⁾ Awate, *Eritrea: The Danish Delegation to Eritrea and Their Unreliable Sources*, 29 December 2014.

⁽³⁵⁷⁾ UNHCR, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea*, 20 April 2011, p. 16.

⁽³⁵⁸⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, p. 10; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: Over 500 parents of conscripts arrested*, 21 December 2006; UNHCR, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea*, 20 April 2011, pp. 17-18; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 129; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 45-46.

⁽³⁵⁹⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 28 May 2013, p. 12; Bozzini, D., 'Low-tech surveillance and the Despotic State in Eritrea', 2011, p. 109; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 45-46; Bozzini, D., 'The Fines and the Spies: Fears of State Surveillance in Eritrea and in the Diaspora', forthcoming, pp. 3, 7-8.

⁽³⁶⁰⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 20; Local contact, interview, Ethiopia, 17 September 2014; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, p. 16; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 6.

⁽³⁶¹⁾ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 6; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 24.

⁽³⁶²⁾ Local contact, interview, Ethiopia, 17 September 2014.

⁽³⁶³⁾ Landinfo: *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonalteneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 21; Vincent, L., *Erythrée: Pourquoi le pouvoir offre des kalachnikovs aux civils*, 24 October 2012; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 181.

in national service must complete weapons training and accept the weapons and uniforms issued to them by the government ⁽³⁶⁴⁾. Members of the People's Army must also carry out unpaid tasks as patrols, guards or workers on national development projects ⁽³⁶⁵⁾. Recruitment for the People's Army has so far taken place primarily in Asmara and Keren ⁽³⁶⁶⁾. It is not clear exactly how recruits are selected ⁽³⁶⁷⁾ but conscription takes place through the hanging of posters on house walls and street lamps ⁽³⁶⁸⁾.

Those who ignore the People's Army conscription notices are at risk of losing their food coupons and identity documents or face imprisonment ⁽³⁶⁹⁾. Many people were nevertheless still ignoring them in late 2014 and early 2015 ⁽³⁷⁰⁾. Reportedly, round-ups and detentions of such evaders occurred ⁽³⁷¹⁾.

⁽³⁶⁴⁾ US Department of State, *2012 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 20 May 2013, p. 2; HRW, *World Report 2014 — Eritrea*, 21 January 2014; Connell, D., 'Refugees, Ransoms and Revolt. An Update on Eritrea', Spring 2013; OSAC, *Eritrea 2014 Crime and Safety Report*, 12 March 2014, p. 4; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, pp. 13-14; Landinfo: *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, pp. 21-22; Vincent, L., *Erythrée: Pourquoi le pouvoir offre des kalachnikovs aux civils*, 24 October 2012; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 165, 181-182.

⁽³⁶⁵⁾ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014; HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015; OSAC, *Eritrea 2014 Crime and Safety Report*, 12 March 2014, p. 4; Landinfo: *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 22.

⁽³⁶⁶⁾ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 12.

⁽³⁶⁷⁾ Institute for Security Studies, *Where is Eritrea heading?*, 5 February 2013.

⁽³⁶⁸⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 22.

⁽³⁶⁹⁾ Awate, *Is This The Beginning Of The End For The Eritrean Regime*, 11 October 2012; Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe, *Eritrea: Rekrutierung von Minderjährigen*, 21 January 2015, p. 5; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, pp. 23-24.

⁽³⁷⁰⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonal tjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 22; Plaut, M., *Eritrea: the retribution begins, as defiance of military service grows*, 15 January 2015; Plaut, M., *Eritrea — the open defiance of ordinary people*, 5 January 2015; Horn Affairs, *Eritrea: Conversation with the resistance mov't inside Asmara*, 26 October 2014; Asmarino, *Eritrea: Regime calls off new calls for military training*, 3 January 2015.

⁽³⁷¹⁾ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, pp. 2, 6.

4. Prisons and detention

Prison sentences are imposed in Eritrea on general criminal grounds as well as political grounds (cf. [Chapter 2.4](#)) and religious grounds (cf. [Chapter 5](#)) and in connection with military crimes such as desertion and draft evasion (cf. [Chapters 3.4](#) and [3.8.1](#)) or attempts to leave the country illegally (cf. [Chapter 6.4.3](#)) ⁽³⁷²⁾. The number of prisoners in Eritrea is not known ⁽³⁷³⁾ but human rights organisations believe that there are between 5,000 and 10,000 political prisoners ⁽³⁷⁴⁾ and (or including) between 1,200 and 3,000 religious prisoners ⁽³⁷⁵⁾. In March 2013, about 300 prisoners were released ⁽³⁷⁶⁾. Eight political prisoners were released in April 2014 ⁽³⁷⁷⁾, and six journalists in January 2015 ⁽³⁷⁸⁾.

The location of many Eritrean prisons is shown on a satellite map released by Amnesty International in 2013 ⁽³⁷⁹⁾. Detailed lists of Eritrean prisons can be found in the following reports:

- Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, p. 78-80
- Awate, *Eritrea: The Network of Prisons*, 21 September 2009
- Human Rights Watch, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscriptioin in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 93-95.
- Amnesty International, *20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, pp. 33-36.
- Home Office (United Kingdom), *Eritrea Country of Origin Information Report*, 18 September 2013, pp. 70-73.

In addition to the documented prisons, many people across the country are held in police stations and in -informal or provisional prisons by the military or the secret service ⁽³⁸⁰⁾.

4.1 Detention conditions

Human rights reports describe the conditions of detention in Eritrean prisons as precarious. Given the lack of access to Eritrea, the quoted human rights reports are based on a range of sources abroad (cf. Chapter 'Introduction and source assessment'). International observers such as the ICRC have not been allowed to visit Eritrean prisons since 2009 ⁽³⁸¹⁾. Therefore the information cannot be verified on-site.

The following problems are mentioned in human rights reports ⁽³⁸²⁾:

- Some prisons are located underground or in shipping containers, which can become extremely hot due to the climate in Eritrea.
- Prison cells are often overcrowded to the point that prisoners can only lie down in turns, if at all.
- Hygiene conditions are poor. Some prisons have only a hole in the ground or a bucket instead of a toilet. The prisoners are often not let out to exercise and medical care is limited.
- Food rations are small and non-nutritious, and access to drinking water is scarce.

⁽³⁷²⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, pp. 16-17.

⁽³⁷³⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, pp. 15-16.

⁽³⁷⁴⁾ HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscriptioin in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 19; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 14; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014

⁽³⁷⁵⁾ Open Doors, *Persecution in Eritrea at its Highest Level Ever*, 30 May 2013; Christian Solidarity Worldwide, CSW — *Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review — 18th Session*, June 2013; International Christian Response, *Eritrea Again Persecutes Christians of Officially Recognized Faith*, 1 May 2014; US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, p. 3; USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2014, — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2014, p. 56; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 22; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014.

⁽³⁷⁶⁾ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 8.

⁽³⁷⁷⁾ Amnesty International *Annual Report 2014/15 — Eritrea*, 25 February 2015.

⁽³⁷⁸⁾ Reporters Without Borders, *Six Eritrean journalists released after nearly six years in prison*, 22 January 2015.

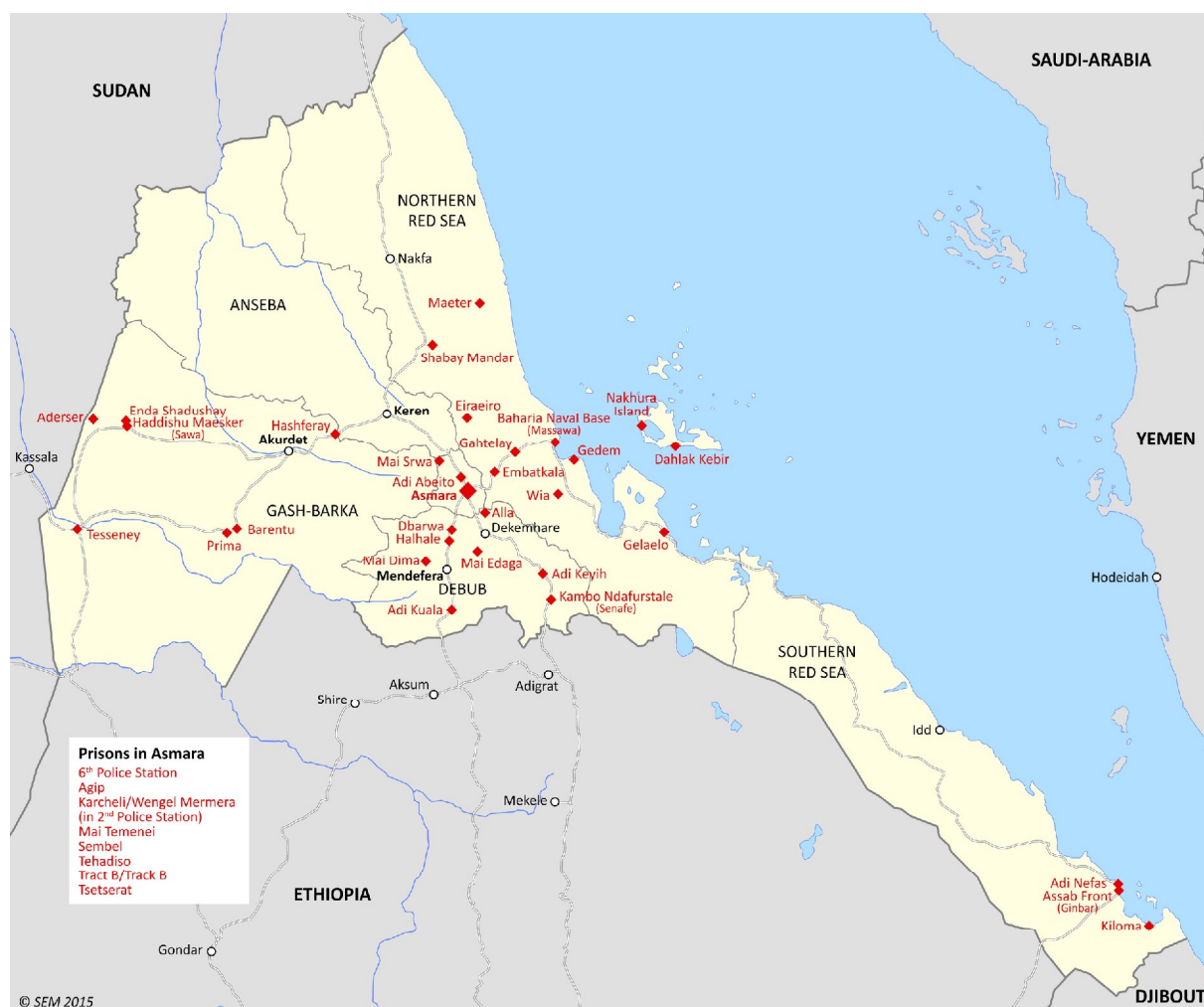
⁽³⁷⁹⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: Suspected Detention Centers* [map], n.d.

⁽³⁸⁰⁾ HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscriptioin in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 34; Connell, D., 'From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition', September 2011, p. 423; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 4.

⁽³⁸¹⁾ ICRC, *Annual Report 2013*, May 2014, p. 143; US Department of State *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 4

⁽³⁸²⁾ HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscriptioin in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 34-41; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, pp. 33-43; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, pp. 3-4; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 28 May 2013, p. 11; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, pp. 16-18; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 80-82; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 97-100.

- Some prisoners are mistreated or tortured (cf. [Chapter 4.2](#)) or used for forced labour.
- Relatives are frequently unable to visit.
- Women are usually kept in cells separate from men but there are still reports of sexual assaults and rape, for example by guards ⁽³⁸³⁾.
- Deaths have been reported a frequent occurrence due to the mentioned difficult circumstances ⁽³⁸⁴⁾.



Location of Eritrea's major prisons ⁽³⁸⁵⁾

⁽³⁸³⁾ SIHA, *Letters from Eritrea. Refugee women tell their story*, 2013, p. 11; Human Rights Concern — Eritrea, *Report on Child Rights Violations in Eritrea*, 19 November 2013; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, p. 6.

⁽³⁸⁴⁾ HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conspiration in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 35, 40-41; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, pp. 1-3.

⁽³⁸⁵⁾ Map created by State Secretariat for Migration (Switzerland), 2015, based on Amnesty International, *Eritrea: Suspected Detention Centers* [map], n.d.; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conspiration in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 93-95; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 78-80; Awate, *Eritrea: The Network of Prisons*, 21 September 2009; UN Security Council, *Letter dated 11 July 2012 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2012/545)*, 13 July 2012, p. 29. All borders and names used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the European Union. The border line between Eritrea and Ethiopia corresponds to the *Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission's* ruling of 2002 (cf. [map page 11](#)).

Many prisoners (in particular those imprisoned on political, religious or military grounds, including draft evaders or deserters ⁽³⁸⁶⁾) are kept in *incommunicado* detention; no criminal proceedings are initiated, no end date is set for their detention and their relatives are not informed ⁽³⁸⁷⁾. These prisoners are often mistreated or tortured ⁽³⁸⁸⁾. Prisoners are kept in *incommunicado* detention at Aderser and Tesseney prisons and in Track B at Asmara prison ⁽³⁸⁹⁾.

4.2 Torture

Reports on torture in Eritrea are based on the same mainly abroad-based sources as the reports on prison conditions (cf. Chapter ‘[Introduction and source assessment](#)’) ⁽³⁹⁰⁾, since visits to Eritrean prisons have not been possible for international observers such as ICRC since 2009 ⁽³⁹¹⁾.

Torture is used for various purposes in Eritrean prisons, for example to force confessions, obtain information or as a means of punishment ⁽³⁹²⁾. There are reports of prisoners being tortured for criticising the government, for lack of discipline during national service, for insubordination and in case of other prisoners’ escape. Members of religious minorities (including members of Pentecostal churches and Jehovah’s Witnesses) have also been tortured as punishment for practising their faith or in an attempt to force them to abandon their religion ⁽³⁹³⁾.

Methods of torture include being chained at the hands and feet for days or even weeks with ropes and handcuffs (*‘Helicopter’*, *‘Ferro’*, *‘Otto’* or *‘Jesus Christ’* methods) and being kept in a lorry tyre (*‘Goma’*). Prisoners have also been waterboarded or forced to walk barefoot over sharp objects or the scalding desert floor. Prisoners are also beaten ⁽³⁹⁴⁾.

Eritrea acceded to the Convention against Torture in September 2014 ⁽³⁹⁵⁾.

⁽³⁸⁶⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 28 May 2013, p. 10-11; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Annual Report 2014/15 — Eritrea*, 25 February 2015; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 111-126.

⁽³⁸⁷⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 9, 12, 14; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, pp. 16-17; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 9; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, pp. 5, 7.

⁽³⁸⁸⁾ Connell, D., ‘Escaping Eritrea. Why They Flee and What They Face’, Fall 2012, p. 5.

⁽³⁸⁹⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 29.

⁽³⁹⁰⁾ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, p. 11; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 8; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 6-7.

⁽³⁹¹⁾ ICRC, *Annual Report 2013*, May 2014, p. 143.

⁽³⁹²⁾ HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 29.

⁽³⁹³⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 36.

⁽³⁹⁴⁾ HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscript in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 29-34; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 83-85; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, pp. 82-85; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 28 May 2013, pp. 11-12; Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, pp. 100-103.

⁽³⁹⁵⁾ HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015.

5. Religion

According to official information, Christians (in particular Orthodox Christians) and Muslims account for roughly equal portions of the population ⁽³⁹⁶⁾. Estimations of foreign organisations 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 ⁽³⁹⁷⁾.

Eritrea is a secular state that officially allows freedom of religion. However, only the four denominations that are recognised 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 ⁽³⁹⁸⁾. 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 ⁽³⁹⁹⁾. Since 2002, the practising of non-registered religions is unlawful and according to human right reports (on which the information below is based, cf. Chapter ‘[Introduction and source assessment](#)’) people who do so are persecuted ⁽⁴⁰⁰⁾. 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 ⁽⁴⁰¹⁾. The authorities also claim that these denominations could lead to divisions within society and that they are foreign to Eritrea’s traditions ⁽⁴⁰²⁾.

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 ⁽⁴⁰³⁾. 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 ⁽⁴⁰⁴⁾. 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 ⁽⁴⁰⁵⁾. Most religious prisoners are kept in Maeter prison near the city of Nakfa ⁽⁴⁰⁶⁾. Prison sentences differ greatly in length, ranging from a few weeks to several years ⁽⁴⁰⁷⁾. According to the US Department of State, members of non-registered religions find it harder to obtain passports and exit visas ⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾.

⁽³⁹⁶⁾ US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, p. 1.

⁽³⁹⁷⁾ USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2013 — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2013; US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, pp. 1-2; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015, 44th edition*, 2014, p. 455; Connell, D., ‘Escaping Eritrea. Why They Flee and What They Face’, Fall 2012, p. 5.

⁽³⁹⁸⁾ US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, pp. 1-3; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014.

⁽³⁹⁹⁾ USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2014, — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2014, p. 55; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 21; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 59; Connell, D., ‘Escaping Eritrea. Why They Flee and What They Face’, Fall 2012, p. 5.

⁽⁴⁰⁰⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 21; USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2014, — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2014, p. 55; US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, p. 3; Tronvoll, K., *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea*, 2009, pp. 95-98.

⁽⁴⁰¹⁾ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014. Eritrea Country Report*, 2014, p. 7; USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2014, — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2014, p. 55; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014, US Department of State, *2012 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 20 May 2013.

⁽⁴⁰²⁾ USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2013, — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2013, p. 66.

⁽⁴⁰³⁾ US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, pp. 3-5; Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 13; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 21.

⁽⁴⁰⁴⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 22; Kibreab, G., *The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration*, 15-16 October 2014, p. 13.

⁽⁴⁰⁵⁾ Open Doors, *Persecution in Eritrea at its Highest Level Ever*, 30 May 2013; Christian Solidarity Worldwide, *CSW — Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review — 18th Session*, June 2013; International Christian Response, *Eritrea Again Persecutes Christians of Officially Recognized Faith*, 1 May 2014; US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, p. 3; USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2014, — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2014, p. 56; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 22; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2014: Eritrea*, 2014.

⁽⁴⁰⁶⁾ US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, p. 4.

⁽⁴⁰⁷⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 21; USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2013, — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2013, p. 64.

⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾ US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, p. 6.

The government also intervenes in the internal affairs of registered religions, which are obliged to present a six-monthly report on their activities ⁽⁴⁰⁹⁾. The Sunni Mufti and the Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church were appointed by the government in 1996 and 2005 respectively ⁽⁴¹⁰⁾. The Supreme Head of the Orthodox Church, Abune Antonios, was deposed in 2007 and has been under house arrest since 2006 ⁽⁴¹¹⁾.

The practising of religions (including registered religions) and the possession of religious texts during national service is normally not tolerated and frequently punished ⁽⁴¹²⁾. 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 ⁽⁴¹³⁾.

⁽⁴⁰⁹⁾ HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015; USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2014, — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2014, pp 55-56.

⁽⁴¹⁰⁾ USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2014, — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2014, p. 56; US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, p 5; HRW, *World Report 2015 — Eritrea*, 29 January 2015.

⁽⁴¹¹⁾ USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2014, — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2014, p. 56; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 23; US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, p. 5; Europa Regional Surveys of the World, *Africa South of the Sahara 2015, 44th edition*, 2014, p. 458.

⁽⁴¹²⁾ USCIRF, *USCIRF Annual Report 2013 — Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea*, 30 April 2013, p. 64; US Department of State, *2012 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 20 May 2013, p. 7; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, pp. 61-62; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth*, 13 May 2014, pp. 12-13; Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 21

⁽⁴¹³⁾ US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, p 6.

6. Identity documents and exit

Various authorities and religious institutions are responsible for issuing identity documents in Eritrea. The *Department for Immigration and Nationality* issues travel documents (identity cards, passports and exit visas). Official civil status documents are issued by the Municipality of Asmara in *zoba* Maekel and by the *nus-zoba* administrations in the other *zobas*. Churches and Sharia courts issue religious - civil status documents ⁽⁴¹⁴⁾. Population registers are kept in written form by the *kebab*i administrations and in electronic form by the *nus-zoba* administrations. Print-outs from these registers are required when applying for identity documents ⁽⁴¹⁵⁾.

6.1 Eritrean citizenship

Since Eritrean citizenship was the prerequisite for the participation in the 1993 independence referendum, the Eritrean Nationality Proclamation 21/1992 was one of the first laws decreed by the Provisional Government of Eritrea ⁽⁴¹⁶⁾. It holds that any person born to a father or mother of Eritrean origin is an Eritrean national by birth. The law considers persons who have resided in Eritrea in 1933 as having 'Eritrean origin' ⁽⁴¹⁷⁾. Persons who have settled in Eritrea after 1934 can be 'naturalised' if they fulfil some conditions like having lived in Eritrea for more than 10 years (more restrictions apply if after 1951) ⁽⁴¹⁸⁾.

At the same time as the registration for the 1993 independence referendum, citizenship was established. This task was carried out by the Provisional Government of Eritrea within Eritrea and its offices abroad, in many cities in Ethiopia and Sudan. Those registered have been issued an identity card (cf. [Chapter 6.2](#)) that entitled the holder to participate in the referendum ⁽⁴¹⁹⁾.

Proclamation 21/1991 does not recognise dual citizenship and provides for the deprivation of the Eritrean nationality if a person has obtained another citizenship abroad ⁽⁴²⁰⁾. In practice, dual citizens are considered Eritrean citizens by the authorities and treated as such ⁽⁴²¹⁾.

6.2 Identity card

The Eritrean identity card (colloquially known as *tassera* or *menenet*) was introduced in 1992 by the Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) for participation in the referendum on independence. Proclamation 21/1992 outlines the conditions of entitlement to Eritrean citizenship and a national identity card ⁽⁴²²⁾. The blue identity card has not changed in appearance since 1992, although various plastic coverings have been used. It is issued for an unlimited period or until the introduction of a new identity card has taken place ⁽⁴²³⁾. All Eritreans over the age of 18 must have an identity card ⁽⁴²⁴⁾. Since February 2014 no identity cards have been issued. However, in rare cases, embassies have issued identity cards for urgent purposes ⁽⁴²⁵⁾.

Identity cards are issued by the *Department for Immigration and Nationality*. Applicants must submit a supporting letter from their *kebab*i administration, a birth certificate and proof of Eritrean citizenship (the identity cards of their

⁽⁴¹⁴⁾ Norwegian ID Center, *ID-basen, Eritrea, Dokumenter*, last update 7 April 2015.

⁽⁴¹⁵⁾ Representatives of the Administration of *zoba* Maekel, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013.

⁽⁴¹⁶⁾ Tronvoll, K., and Mekonnen, D.R., *The African Garrison State. Human Rights & Political Development in Eritrea*, 2014, p. 25.

⁽⁴¹⁷⁾ Eritrea, *Eritrean Nationality Proclamation No 21/1992*, 6 April 1992, Art. 2.

⁽⁴¹⁸⁾ Eritrea, *Eritrean Nationality Proclamation No 21/1992*, 6 April 1992, Arts. 3 and 4.

⁽⁴¹⁹⁾ INS Resource Information Center, *Question & Answer Series. Eritrea & Ethiopia: Large-scale expulsions of population groups and other human rights violations in connection with the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict, 1998–2000*, 20 September 2000, p. 9; HRW, *The Horn of Africa War: Mass Expulsions and the Nationality Issue (June 1998 — April 2002)*, January 2003, p. 13; Tesfagiorgis, M., *Eritrea*, 2010, p. 77.

⁽⁴²⁰⁾ Eritrea, *Eritrean Nationality Proclamation No 21/1992*, 6 April 1992, Art. 8(1a).

⁽⁴²¹⁾ US Passports & International Travel, *Eritrea Travel Warning*, updated 6 May 2015; Auswärtiges Amt, *Eritrea: Reise- und Sicherheitshinweise (Teilreisewarnung)*, 15 October 2014; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 14.

⁽⁴²²⁾ Eritrea, *Eritrean Nationality Proclamation No 21/1992*, 6 April 1992.

⁽⁴²³⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Forvaltningsstruktur og dokumenter*, 29 April 2013, pp. 11-12; Norwegian ID Center, *ID-basen, Eritrea, Nasjonalt ID-kort*, last update 18 March 2015.

⁽⁴²⁴⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Forvaltningsstruktur og dokumenter*, 29 April 2013, pp. 11-12; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 74; Norwegian ID Center, *ID-basen, Eritrea, Nasjonalt ID-kort*, last update 18 March 2015.

⁽⁴²⁵⁾ Honorary Consulate of Switzerland in Eritrea, e-mail, 2 April 2015; Norwegian ID Center, *ID-basen, Eritrea, Nasjonalt ID-kort*, last update 18 March 2015.

parents or three witnesses) to one of the 12 branch offices ⁽⁴²⁶⁾. The branch office then forwards the application to the Asmara-based headquarters, where it is examined and a decision taken. If the application is approved, the relevant branch office is informed by mail and authorised to issue an identity card ⁽⁴²⁷⁾.

Applications for an identity card can also be submitted to Eritrean foreign representations. If the applicant cannot prove their Eritrean citizenship in writing, confirmation may be supplied by three witnesses. The foreign representation then verifies the information supplied using the sources available to it, after which it forwards the application to the Asmara-based *Department for Immigration and Nationality*, which checks it against register entries in Eritrea, issues an identity card and sends it back to the foreign representation ⁽⁴²⁸⁾. Applicants are also frequently asked by foreign representations to prove that they have paid the diaspora tax or to pay any arrears, and deserters and draft evaders are asked to sign a letter of repentance ⁽⁴²⁹⁾. It is also possible for family members in Eritrea to be authorised by the foreign representation to collect an identity card ⁽⁴³⁰⁾. When identity cards were introduced in 1992, Eritreans could also register for the referendum on independence (and consequently for an identity card) at the provisional government's representation offices in various large cities abroad (including Ethiopia and Sudan) ⁽⁴³¹⁾.

The *Department for Immigration and Nationality* is planning to introduce a new, credit-card-sized and machine-readable identity card. This identity card is intended to include the electronic population register reference number and thus replace the residence card (cf. [Chapter 6.5](#)). It is still unclear when the new identity card will be introduced ⁽⁴³²⁾.

6.3 Passport

Until 2010, the *Department for Immigration and Nationality* issued passports completed by hand, valid for five years. Since 1 May 2010, machine-readable (but not biometric) passports have been issued, initially valid for only two years, but since 2011 valid for five years. They cost 4,000 nakfa in Eritrea, or about 200 US dollars at foreign representations ⁽⁴³³⁾. Although the old passports could be issued directly by foreign representations, the new passports are only issued in Asmara ⁽⁴³⁴⁾.

Applicants must submit a supporting letter from the *kebab* administration, their identity card (or the parents' identity cards in the case of children) and a completed application form at the relevant branch office when applying for a passport. A supporting letter from their employer or proof that they have completed national service must also be submitted ⁽⁴³⁵⁾. Once the application has been checked, the passport is issued in Asmara and forwarded to the branch office ⁽⁴³⁶⁾. Passports are not issued to those engaged in national service ⁽⁴³⁷⁾.

⁽⁴²⁶⁾ These are located in Asmara, Mendefera, Dekemhare, Adi Keyih, Barentu, Akurdet, Tesseney, Keren, Massawa, Nakfa, Afabet and Assab; Representatives of the Department for Immigration and Nationality, interview (during a technical mission conducted by the Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), Asmara, 6 November 2013.

⁽⁴²⁷⁾ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, pp. 24-25; Representatives of the Department for Immigration and Nationality, interview (during a technical mission conducted by the Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), Asmara, 6 November 2013.

⁽⁴²⁸⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Forvaltningsstruktur og dokumenter*, 29 April 2013, p. 11; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 26.

⁽⁴²⁹⁾ Landinfo, *Respons Eritrea: Immigration and Citizen Services request form — 'angrebrev'*, 18 March 2014, p. 1; UN Security Council, *Letter dated 11 July 2012 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2012/545)*, 13 July 2012, p. 23. Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 26; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 23.

⁽⁴³⁰⁾ Norwegian ID Center, *ID-basen, Eritrea, Nasjonalt ID-kort*, last update 18 March 2015.

⁽⁴³¹⁾ IIS Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, *Eritrea & Ethiopia: Large-Scale Expulsions of Population Groups and Other Human Rights Violations in connection With the Ethiopian-Eritrean Conflict, 1998-2000*, 1 January 2002, p. 9.

⁽⁴³²⁾ Representatives of the Department for Immigration and Nationality, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 6 November 2013; Norwegian ID Center, *ID-basen, Eritrea, Nasjonalt ID-kort*, last update 18 March 2015.

⁽⁴³³⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Forvaltningsstruktur og dokumenter*, 29 April 2013, p. 8; Representatives of the Department for Immigration and Nationality, interview (during a technical mission conducted by the Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 6 November 2013.

⁽⁴³⁴⁾ Norwegian ID Center, e-mail, 24 March 2015; Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, p. 36.

⁽⁴³⁵⁾ Representatives of the Department for Immigration and Nationality, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 6 November 2013; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Forvaltningsstruktur og dokumenter*, 29 April 2013, p. 8; Bozzini, D., *National Service and State Structures in Eritrea*, 28 June 2012, pp. 6-7; Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, p. 36.

⁽⁴³⁶⁾ Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Forvaltningsstruktur og dokumenter*, 29 April 2013, pp. 8-9; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 27.

⁽⁴³⁷⁾ Bozzini, D., *National Service and State Structures in Eritrea*, 28 June 2012, pp. 6-7.

An identity card, application form and proof that national service has been completed must also be submitted when applying for a passport at a foreign representation ⁽⁴³⁸⁾. Usually, the payment of the diaspora tax is required for the issuance of a passport abroad. Also deserters and draft evaders are issued passports if certain conditions are met, such as the signing of the letter of repentance ⁽⁴³⁹⁾; sometimes also when bribes are paid ⁽⁴⁴⁰⁾. Passports may also be collected by family members in Eritrea if they are authorised to do so by the Eritrean embassy ⁽⁴⁴¹⁾.

6.4 Exit

6.4.1 Exit visa

Leaving Eritrea may only be done with a valid exit visa issued by the Asmara-based *Department for Immigration and Nationality* or one of its branch offices, which can issue them without consent from the main branch in Asmara ⁽⁴⁴²⁾.

The exit visa regime is regulated by Regulation No 4/1992 ⁽⁴⁴³⁾. The fulfilment of national service (or the legal exemption from it) is a precondition for the issuance of exit visas ⁽⁴⁴⁴⁾. Applicants usually have to submit an identity card, a referral letter from the *kebab* administration, a proof of the reason for the trip, a completed application form and either a supporting letter from an employer or proof of completion of national service or a document proving medical exemption from national service ⁽⁴⁴⁵⁾. For exit visas on medical grounds, medical documentation confirming the need for treatment abroad and issued by a committee of doctors must be submitted as well ⁽⁴⁴⁶⁾.

In practice, the conditions for the issuance of exit visas are unclear, subject to unannounced changes and to the arbitrariness of the authorities. Most sources agree that exit visas are generally issued to the following categories of persons. However, some contradictions and uncertainties remain, particularly regarding the age boundaries.

- Men aged over 54
- Women aged over 47
- Children aged under 13 (some sources state an even lower age)
- People exempt from national service on medical grounds
- People travelling abroad for medical treatment, and in individual cases for studies or for a conference
- In some cases, businessmen and sportsmen
- Former freedom fighters (*tegadelti*) and their family members
- Authority representatives in leading positions and their family members ⁽⁴⁴⁷⁾

⁽⁴³⁸⁾ Norwegian ID Center, *ID-basen, Eritrea, K-pass etter 1. mai 2010*, last update 18 March 2015; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Forvaltningsstruktur og dokumenter*, 29 April 2013, p. 9; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, pp. 27-28.

⁽⁴³⁹⁾ Landinfo, *Respons Eritrea: Immigration and Citizen Services request form — 'angrebrev'*, 18 March 2014, p. 1; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 28; Bozzini, D., *National Service and State Structures in Eritrea*, 28 June 2012, p. 7; Van Reisen, M., Estefanos, M. and Rijken, C., *The Human Trafficking Cycle: Sinai and Beyond*, 4 December 2013, p. 55; UN Security Council, *Letter dated 24 July 2013 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2013/440)*, 25 July 2013, p. 23; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 14.

⁽⁴⁴⁰⁾ Freedom House, *Countries at the Crossroads 2011, Eritrea*, 10 November 2011; Connell, D., e-mail, 30 April 2015.

⁽⁴⁴¹⁾ Norwegian ID Center, *ID-basen, Eritrea, K-pass etter 1. mai 2010*, last update 18 March 2015.

⁽⁴⁴²⁾ Landinfo, *Respons Eritrea: Utstedelse av utreisestillatelse og ulovlig utreise*, 15 April 2015, p. 2; Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, p. 37.

⁽⁴⁴³⁾ Eritrea, *Regulation No 4/1992 on Travel Documents and Immigration*, 15 July 1992.

⁽⁴⁴⁴⁾ Eritrea, *Proclamation on National Service No 82/1995*, 23 October 1995, Art. 17.

⁽⁴⁴⁵⁾ Representatives of the Department for Immigration and Nationality, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 6 November 2013; Eritrea, *Regulation No 4/1992 on Travel Documents and Immigration*, 15 July 1992, Art. 17(2); Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 28; Landinfo, *Respons Eritrea: Utstedelse av utreisestillatelse og ulovlig utreise*, 15 April 2015, p. 2.

⁽⁴⁴⁶⁾ Representatives of the Department for Immigration and Nationality, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 6 November 2013; Landinfo, *Respons Eritrea: Utstedelse av utreisestillatelse og ulovlig utreise*, 13 May 2013, p. 2.

⁽⁴⁴⁷⁾ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 13; Landinfo, *Respons Eritrea: Utstedelse av utreisestillatelse og ulovlig utreise*, 15 April 2015, pp. 3-5; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, pp. 28-30; Home Office (United Kingdom), *Eritrea Country of Origin Information Report*, 18 September 2013, pp. 129-132.

The issuance of exit visas may be denied to government critics, relatives of persons who have left the country illegally or failed to pay diaspora tax while abroad, whole families or parents travelling together and members of non-recognised religious communities ⁽⁴⁴⁸⁾.

Exit visas cost 200 nakfa and are valid for one month and one trip out of the country. They can be extended three times for one month. The date on which the individual will leave Eritrea is fixed, but a return is possible at any time ⁽⁴⁴⁹⁾.

6.4.2 Legal exits

According to Proclamation 24/1992, a valid passport, an exit visa and an international health certificate are required in order to leave Eritrea legally. Border crossings are only possible at one of the allocated border control points ⁽⁴⁵⁰⁾, which include Asmara airport, Massawa sea port and several border crossings into Sudan (Talatasher, Adebra, Girmayka and, according to one source, Omhajer and Karura) ⁽⁴⁵¹⁾.

The restrictions on the issuing of exit visas mean that it is generally very difficult for normal Eritrean citizens to leave the country legally ⁽⁴⁵²⁾. According to one study, however, many migrants still leave Eritrea legally with an exit visa, since such visas are meanwhile somewhat easier to obtain once national service obligations have been met ⁽⁴⁵³⁾. Refugees also claim that corrupt officials at lower levels of the office sometimes provide exit visas in exchange for bribes ⁽⁴⁵⁴⁾.

6.4.3 Illegal exits

It is very difficult to obtain an exit visa and leave the country legally. Therefore, particularly deserters and draft evaders tend to leave the country illegally via Sudan or Ethiopia. There are several options:

- Leaving the country alone by foot from Sawa or other military bases close to the border
- Organised facilitation (human smuggling) from Asmara
- Travelling alone to a town near the border such as Tesseney or Guluj (by foot or on public transport), followed by facilitation or an independent border crossing ⁽⁴⁵⁵⁾

⁽⁴⁴⁸⁾ Landinfo, *Respons Eritrea: Utstedelse av utreisestillatelse og ulovlig utreise*, 15 April 2015, p. 5; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, pp. 28-30; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 — Eritrea*, 27 February 2014, p. 13; US Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom — Eritrea*, 28 July 2014, p. 6.

⁽⁴⁴⁹⁾ Representatives of the Department for Immigration and Nationality, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 6 November 2013; Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, p. 37; Eritrea, *Regulation No 4/1992 on Travel Documents and Immigration*, 15.07.1992, Art. 17.

⁽⁴⁵⁰⁾ Eritrea, *Proclamation No 24/1992 issued to regulate the issuing of travel documents, entry and exit visa from Eritrea, and to control residence permits of foreigners in Eritrea*, 1992, Art. 10, 11.

⁽⁴⁵¹⁾ Representatives of the Department for Immigration and Nationality, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 6 November 2013; IRB, *Eritrea and Sudan: Situation of the border region between the two countries, including military and police patrols, as well as legal crossing points; information on physical obstacles to prevent crossing, such as fences and mines; number of people legally and irregularly crossing the border (2013-May 2014)*, 20 December 2014.

⁽⁴⁵²⁾ Van Reisen, M., Estefanos, M. and Rijken, C., *The Human Trafficking Cycle: Sinai and Beyond*, 4 December 2013, p. 50; Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service*, 11 March 2015, p. 37; RMMS, *Going West: contemporary mixed migration from the Horn of Africa to Libya & Europe*, June 2014, p. 21; SIHA, *Letters from Eritrea. Refugee women tell their story*, 2013, p. 11; Riggan, J., 'Debating National Duty in Eritrean Classrooms', Winter 2013, p. 87.

⁽⁴⁵³⁾ Nüller, Tanja R., 'Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea', September 2012, pp. 456, 460.

⁽⁴⁵⁴⁾ Freedom House, *Countries at the Crossroads 2011, Eritrea*, 10 November 2011; Connell, D., e-mail, 30 April 2015.

⁽⁴⁵⁵⁾ Van Reisen, M., Estefanos, M. and Rijken, C., *The Human Trafficking Cycle: Sinai and Beyond*, 4 December 2013, p. 55; Humphris, R., 'Refugees and the Rashaida: human smuggling and trafficking from Eritrea to Sudan and Egypt', March 2013, p. 9; RMMS, *Going West: contemporary mixed migration from the Horn of Africa to Libya & Europe*, June 2014, pp. 21-22.

Members of the nomadic Rashaida ethnic group are particularly known for smuggling people across the border with Sudan ⁽⁴⁵⁶⁾. According to various reports, members of the Eritrean army are also involved in such operations ⁽⁴⁵⁷⁾ but the Eritrean authorities have become alert to this problem and have imprisoned a number of the perpetrators ⁽⁴⁵⁸⁾.

A shoot-to-kill-order at anyone attempting to leave the country illegally is in force along the borders ⁽⁴⁵⁹⁾. In view of the current high number of illegal border crossings (several thousand people per month ⁽⁴⁶⁰⁾), however, it can be assumed that this order is not followed systematically ⁽⁴⁶¹⁾. Shootings of individuals attempting to leave the country illegally are still a regular occurrence ⁽⁴⁶²⁾, but the lack of capacities and corruption within the Eritrean army suggest that it has become significantly easier in recent years to cross the border illegally ⁽⁴⁶³⁾.

People who exit the country illegally are also subject to the additional risks of kidnapping, sexual assault and forced labour ⁽⁴⁶⁴⁾.

6.4.4 Punishment for illegal exits

Violations of the exit rules laid down in Proclamation 24/1992 or attempts to cross the border illegally or to help others to do so are — according to the law — punishable by prison sentences of up to five years and/or fines of up to 10,000 birr ⁽⁴⁶⁵⁾.

In reality, however, punishment for illegal exits is generally imposed on an extrajudicial and arbitrary basis. Human rights organisations (see Chapter ‘Introduction and source assessment’) state that people who are caught attempting to leave the country illegally are detained without charge and without being told the grounds for, or duration of, their imprisonment. The reported detention periods vary, but are generally between one and two years according to Amnesty International ⁽⁴⁶⁶⁾, whereas Human Rights Watch states that they are between three and five years ⁽⁴⁶⁷⁾. Minors are sometimes also recruited for military service ⁽⁴⁶⁸⁾. The British embassy in Asmara reported in 2011 that returnees who had left the country illegally are recruited into military units, detained, fined or not punished at all ⁽⁴⁶⁹⁾.

In the reported cases of punishment, it is generally unclear if the punishment was meted out for the illegal exit of the person or due to other circumstances. There are no reports on the treatment of people who merely have left

⁽⁴⁵⁶⁾ Van Reisen, M., Estefanos, M. and Rijken, C., *The Human Trafficking Cycle: Sinai and Beyond*, 4 December 2013, pp. 25, 47; HRW, ‘I Wanted to Lie Down and Die’. *Trafficking and Torture in Sudan and Egypt*, February 2014, p. 24; Humphris, R., ‘Refugees and the Rashaida: human smuggling and trafficking from Eritrea to Sudan and Egypt’, March 2013, pp. 10-11; UN Security Council, *Letter dated 24 July 2013 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2013/440)*, 25 July 2013, pp. 20-21; SIHA, *Letters from Eritrea. Refugee women tell their story*, 2013, p. 12.

⁽⁴⁵⁷⁾ UN Security Council, *Letter dated 24 July 2013 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2013/440)*, 25 July 2013, pp. 20-21, 35-36; Müller, Tanja R., ‘Beyond the siege state — tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea’, September 2012, pp. 457-458; Humphris, R., ‘Refugees and the Rashaida: human smuggling and trafficking from Eritrea to Sudan and Egypt’, March 2013, p. 16; Van Reisen, M., Estefanos, M. and Rijken, C., *The Human Trafficking Cycle: Sinai and Beyond*, 4 December 2013, pp. 48-50; UN Security Council, *Letter dated 11 July 2012 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2012/545)*, 13 July 2012, p. 20.

⁽⁴⁵⁸⁾ International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Ending the Exodus?* 8 August 2014, pp. 10-11; Awate, *The Plight Of ‘Zuria 26’ Enrages Eritrean Youth*, 27 October 2014.

⁽⁴⁵⁹⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 28; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonaltnjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 17-18; HRW, *Service for Life. State Repression and Indefinite Conspiration in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, p. 65; IRB, *Eritrea and Sudan: Situation of the border region between the two countries, including military and police patrols, as well as legal crossing points; information on physical obstacles to prevent crossing, such as fences and mines; number of people legally and irregularly crossing the border (2013-May 2014)*, 20 December 2014.

⁽⁴⁶⁰⁾ UNOHCHR, *We know how many Eritrean children reach Europe on their own, but not how many die trying — UN Expert*, 28 October 2014; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Ending the Exodus?* 8 August 2014, p. 4; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 53.

⁽⁴⁶¹⁾ IRB, *Eritrea and Sudan: Situation of the border region between the two countries, including military and police patrols, as well as legal crossing points; information on physical obstacles to prevent crossing, such as fences and mines; number of people legally and irregularly crossing the border (2013-May 2014)*, 20 December 2014; Landinfo, *Temanotat Eritrea: Nasjonaltnjeneste*, 23 March 2015, p. 18.

⁽⁴⁶²⁾ Sudan Tribune, *Eritrean border guards shoot dead 10 civilians trying to flee*, 22 August 2014; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 28 May 2013, p. 9; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Ending the Exodus?* 8 August 2014, p. 7.

⁽⁴⁶³⁾ IRB, *Eritrea and Sudan: Situation of the border region between the two countries, including military and police patrols, as well as legal crossing points; information on physical obstacles to prevent crossing, such as fences and mines; number of people legally and irregularly crossing the border (2013-May 2014)*, 20 December 2014; International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: Ending the Exodus?* 8 August 2014, p. 8.

⁽⁴⁶⁴⁾ Van Reisen, M., Estefanos, M. and Rijken, C., *The Human Trafficking Cycle: Sinai and Beyond*, 4 December 2013; HRW, ‘I Wanted to Lie Down and Die’. *Trafficking and Torture in Sudan and Egypt*, February 2014; IRB, *Eritrea and Sudan: Situation of the border region between the two countries, including military and police patrols, as well as legal crossing points; information on physical obstacles to prevent crossing, such as fences and mines; number of people legally and irregularly crossing the border (2013-May 2014)*, 20 December 2014.

⁽⁴⁶⁵⁾ Eritrea, *Proclamation No 24/1992 issued to regulate the issuing of travel documents, entry and exit visa from Eritrea, and to control residence permits of foreigners in Eritrea*, 1992, Article 29(2).

⁽⁴⁶⁶⁾ Amnesty International, *Eritrea: 20 years of independence, but still no freedom*, 9 May 2013, p. 28.

⁽⁴⁶⁷⁾ HRW, ‘I Wanted to Lie Down and Die’. *Trafficking and Torture in Sudan and Egypt*, February 2014.

⁽⁴⁶⁸⁾ IJS Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2014. Eritrea*, 20 June 2014, p. 168.

⁽⁴⁶⁹⁾ Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) (United Kingdom), *MO (Illegal exit — risk on return) Eritrea*, CG [2011] UKUT 00190, 27 May 2011.

the country illegally without having deserted or evaded conscription⁽⁴⁷⁰⁾. The Eritrean authorities claim that people who have left the country illegally may return without fear of punishment after they have paid the diaspora tax and signed the repentance form⁽⁴⁷¹⁾ but they may be sent to a six-week training course to ‘enforce their patriotic feelings’⁽⁴⁷²⁾. Further information on the punishment of deserters and draft evaders who have left the country illegally can be found in [Chapter 3.8.1](#).

6.5 Residence card

Every *zoba* keeps an electronic population register (introduced first in *zoba* Maekel in 2003) updated by the *nus-zoba* administrations, from which print-outs can be obtained for various purposes (for individuals, families etc.). Many citizens hold residence cards that — unlike identity cards — include an electronic population register reference number and must therefore be presented on many occasions⁽⁴⁷³⁾. This reference number starts with a three-letter code; the first two letters refer to the *zoba* (AS = Maekel, ZD = Debub, GB = Gash-Barka, KE = Anseba, SK = Northern Red Sea, DK = Southern Red Sea), and the third indicates whether the number relates to an individual (C) or a family (F)⁽⁴⁷⁴⁾.

6.6 Official civil status documents

In *zoba* Maekel, all civil status documents are issued by the civil status office of the municipality of Asmara. In all other *zobas*, the *nus-zoba* administrations are responsible for issuing official civil status documents. Documents issued by the Asmara civil registry office include birth, marriage, divorce and death certificates, all of which include reference numbers for the civil registry office archive and the electronic population register⁽⁴⁷⁵⁾. Civil status documents are A4-sized computer print-outs which have no security features apart from stamps and signatures⁽⁴⁷⁶⁾.

A print-out from the electronic population register, an identity card (or copies thereof) and a filled-out application form must normally be presented before an official civil status document is issued, as well as various other documents depending on the nature of the document, e.g. a referral letter from the *kebab* administration or religious marriage certificates for an official marriage certificate, or birth documentation and vaccination certificates for birth certificates⁽⁴⁷⁷⁾. Different procedures are followed throughout the country when issuing official civil status documents, and these documents vary in their appearance. Residents of other *zobas* may therefore also request civil status documents from the Asmara civil status office (e.g. to use abroad)⁽⁴⁷⁸⁾.

Eritrean foreign representations do not issue civil status documents, but an individual in Eritrea may be authorised via the Eritrean foreign representation to collect the required document from the relevant authority in the recipient’s former place of residence⁽⁴⁷⁹⁾.

⁽⁴⁷⁰⁾ Landinfo, *Respons Eritrea: Utstedelse av utreisestillatelse og ulovlig utreise*, 15 April 2015, pp. 6-7.

⁽⁴⁷¹⁾ Home Office (United Kingdom), *Country of Origin Information (COI) Report — Eritrea*, 17 August 2012, p. 142; Udlændingestyrelsen (Danish Immigration Service), *Eritrea — Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, Appendix edition*, December 2014, pp. 25-26, 29, 32, 40; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands), *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Eritrea*, 5 May 2014, p. 59; Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen, *Rundschau: Homo-Segnungen, Eritrea-Flüchtlinge, D. Fiala, Sperma-Schmuggel* [video], 11 March 2015; Landinfo, *Respons Eritrea: Utstedelse av utreisestillatelse og ulovlig utreise*, 15 April 2015, pp. 6-7.

⁽⁴⁷²⁾ Landinfo, *Respons Eritrea: Utstedelse av utreisestillatelse og ulovlig utreise*, 15 April 2015, p. 6.

⁽⁴⁷³⁾ Representatives of the Administration of *zoba* Maekel, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013; Norwegian ID Center, *ID-basen, Eritrea, Bostedsbevis*, last update 7 April 2015; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Public Registration Office And The Public: Mutual Cooperation for Efficient Services*, 5 November 2010.

⁽⁴⁷⁴⁾ Honorary Consulate of Switzerland in Eritrea, e-mail, 2 April 2015.

⁽⁴⁷⁵⁾ Representatives of the Civil Status Office of the Municipality of Asmara, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013; Representatives of the Administration of *nus-zoba* Mendefera, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 12 November 2013; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Public Registration Office And The Public: Mutual Cooperation for Efficient Services*, 5 November 2010.

⁽⁴⁷⁶⁾ Norwegian ID Center, *ID-basen, Eritrea, Fødselsattest*, last update 18 March 2015; Norwegian ID Center, *ID-basen, Eritrea, Vigselsattest*, last update 18 March 2015.

⁽⁴⁷⁷⁾ Representatives of the Civil Status Office of the Municipality of Asmara, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013; Eritrea — Ministry of Information, *Public Registration Office And The Public: Mutual Cooperation for Efficient Services*, 5 November 2010.

⁽⁴⁷⁸⁾ Representatives of the Civil Status Office of the Municipality of Asmara, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013; Representatives of the Administration of *nus-zoba* Mendefera, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 12 November 2013; Norwegian ID Center, *ID-basen, Eritrea, Fødselsattest*, last update 18 March 2015.

⁽⁴⁷⁹⁾ Honorary Consulate of Switzerland in Eritrea, e-mail, 13 November 2014; Norwegian ID Center, e-mail, 24 March 2015.

6.7 Religious civil status documents

The Catholic and Orthodox churches keep their own handwritten registers, which they use as a basis for issuing baptismal and marriage certificates. The Orthodox Church generally uses the Ge'ez (Ethiopian) calendar for dating purposes but all other documents issued in Eritrea are dated using the Gregorian system ⁽⁴⁸⁰⁾.

Muslim civil status documents, including birth, marriage, divorce and death certificates, are issued by the Sharia courts — which are integrated into the civil courts at the various administrative levels and thus form part of the state justice system — rather than the mosques. Anyone who marries in a mosque must also register the marriage with a Sharia court ⁽⁴⁸¹⁾.

Religious documents are not recognised by the authorities as valid identity documents but must in some cases be provided in order to register a marriage in the civil registers ⁽⁴⁸²⁾. Religious marriages are recognised in Eritrea; an additional official (state) marriage certificate is not required but the marriage must be entered into the *kebab* administration's register ⁽⁴⁸³⁾.

⁽⁴⁸⁰⁾ Representatives of the Catholic Church, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013; Representatives of the Eritrean-Orthodox Tewahedo Church, letter (by the Honorary Consul of Switzerland in Eritrea), 18 February 2014.

⁽⁴⁸¹⁾ Representatives of the Sharia Court of *zoba* Maekel (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013.

⁽⁴⁸²⁾ Representatives of the Civil Status Office of the Municipality of Asmara, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013.

⁽⁴⁸³⁾ Representatives of the Civil Status Office of the Municipality of Asmara, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 7 November 2013; Representatives of the Administration of *nus-zoba* Mendefera, interview (during technical mission conducted by Federal Office for Migration FOM Switzerland), 12 November 2013.

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