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Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

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5 September 2014

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Eritrea: Prevalence of fraudulent identity documents, including national identity cards (2012-August 2014)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Information about the prevalence of fraudulent identity documents, including national identity cards, was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

A June 2014 report by the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) [1] entitled *Going West: Contemporary Mixed Migration Trends from the Horn of Africa to Libya and Europe* states that most Eritreans who leave Eritrea do so illegally because few people under the age of 50 are given permission to go abroad (RMMS June 2014, 21). The same source indicates that there is "a near impossibility for the majority of Eritreans to obtain a passport or exit visa" and notes that most Eritrean refugees in Libya, which is located along a common route for refugees leaving Eritrea en route to Europe and other countries, do not have official documents, such as passports and/or identity papers (*ibid.*, 21, 52).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an associate professor at the GIGA [German Institute of Global and Area Studies] Institute of African Affairs said that fraudulent identity cards and national service exemption documents are "common" in Eritrea (Associate Professor 14 Aug. 2014). She explained:

Reportedly, such documents are faked and sold by government and military officials on the black market. I believe that there is a high demand for documents which make it possible for people to travel inside the country without being arrested at one of the many checkpoints throughout the countries: papers stating that the individual is on leave from his/her military service, sickness certificates, exemptions from military/national service and the like. (*ibid.*).

Similarly, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, a researcher with Human Rights Watch, who specializes in the Horn of Africa region, also said that fraudulent ID cards are prevalent in Eritrea (Human Rights Watch 19 Aug. 2014). He said he believed that there is a market for fraudulent ID cards within Eritrea, in which "disgruntled or corrupt officials issue real documents by questionable means" (*ibid.*). He noted, though, that the person would likely need to have a strong connection with the official in such a case (*ibid.*).

According to the US Department of State's *Country Reciprocity Schedule*, Eritrean national ID cards, which are issued to adults 18 years of age and older, are "easily alterable, making proof of Eritrean citizenship difficult to determine" (US n.d.).

In a dissertation about national mobility and surveillance in Eritrea submitted to the Université de Neuchâtel, the author, David Bozzini [2], indicated that after 2004, various government departments began issuing different forms of national identity documents as a solution to the use of student cards as identity documents for people registered in military or civil service (Bozzini, 23 May 2011, 142-143). However, the same source notes that the array of document formats being used led to a high prevalence of fraudulent identity cards since the identification of fake documents became more challenging (*ibid.*).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, Aaron Berhane, publisher and editor-in-chief of the Toronto-based *Meftih* newspaper who was the former editor-in-chief and co-founder of the Eritrean newspaper *Setit*, said that

the most fraudulent document used by most Eritrean refugees is 'menkesakesi' (permit paper to travel around inside the country). Most of them use this permit paper to travel to areas near the border of Sudan or Ethiopia (Berhane 1 Sept. 2014).

He noted that he was not aware of other documents that could be faked (ibid.).

The Researcher with Human Rights Watch also believes that there is an "underground market" for fraudulent Eritrean ID cards in refugee communities abroad (Human Rights Watch 19 Aug. 2014). He said that such markets were likely to exist in Ethiopia, Sudan and Tel Aviv, and were also possibly available in Italy, Kenya, Egypt and South Africa (ibid.).

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a professor of African studies and political science at Pennsylvania State University, who has published books and articles about Eritrea and the Horn of Africa, said that fake and fraudulent Eritrean identity documents are prevalent outside Eritrea (Professor 18 Aug. 2014). He said that

[i]n Khartoum, there is a large black market for fake/fraudulent Eritrean identity documents, including passports, national ID cards, possibly driving license--whatever documents someone wants or needs. People are referred through a chain. The dealers generally deal directly with the clients and are guarded about who they are willing to sell documents to. (ibid.)

According to the Professor, these fraudulent identity documents are "expensive" to obtain (ibid.).

The media source M2 Presswire published an article on 28 April 2014 about a person facing charges in the US for operating a human smuggling network and bringing Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants from Dubai through South and Central America to the US (M2 Presswire 28 Apr. 2014). The article indicates that the undocumented migrants were allegedly given fraudulent identity and travel documents to travel through Latin America (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The RMMS is an independent research and policy development agency based in Nairobi that focuses on the subject of mixed migration in the Horn of Africa and Yemen sub-region. Established in 2011, the co-founders and Steering Committee members include the UNHCR, IOM (International Organization for Migration), the Danish Refugee Council, INTERSOS and the Yemen Mixed Migration Task Force.

[2] Dr. Bozzini is a political and legal anthropologist and is currently Visiting Research Fellow at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York. His main research topic is the Eritrean military service and state surveillance, and he has written several articles in peer-reviewed journals on the subject (David Bozzini 19 Feb. 2014).

References

Associate Professor, GIGA Institute of African Affairs, Hamburg. 14 August 2014. Correspondence to the Research Directorate.

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Bozzini, David. 19 February 2014. "About." <<http://www.davidbozzini.org/>> [Accessed 25 Aug. 2014]

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Human Rights Watch. 19 August 2014. Correspondence from a researcher to the Research Directorate.

M2 Presswire. 28 April 2014. "Alleged Human Smuggler Extradited to Face Charges in Washington, DC." (Factiva)

Professor of African Studies and Political Science, Pennsylvania State University. 18 August 2014. Telephone interview with the Research Directorate.

Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS). June 2014. *Going West: Contemporary Mixed Migration Trends from the Horn of Africa to Libya and Europe*.

<http://www.regionalmms.org/fileadmin/content/rmms_publications/Going_West_migration_trends_Libya_Europe_RMMS.pdf> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2014]

United State (US). N.d. Department of State. "Eritrea Reciprocity Schedule." *Country Reciprocity Schedule*. <<http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/fees/reciprocity-by-country/ER.html>> [Accessed 18 Aug. 2014]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Canada- Consulate of Canada in Eritrea, Embassy of Canada in Khartoum; Eritrean-Canadian Human Rights Group of Manitoba; Human Rights Concern Eritrea; International Organization for Migration; Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat; three lawyers based in Eritrea. Representatives of the following organizations were unable to provide information: National Document Centre, Canadian Border Services Agency.

Internet sites, including: Africa Confidential; Africa Research Bulletin; Amnesty International; Center for Public Integrity; ecoi.net; EDISONTD; Eritrea – Embassy of Eritrea in London, Embassy of Eritrea in Washington DC, Ministry of Information; Factiva; Forced Migration Review; Internal Displacement Monitoring Center; International Journal of Refugee Law; Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor; Journal of Refugee Studies; Transparency International; UN – Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld, UNHCR.

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