



Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken

General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea

Date December 2025

Publication details

Version number	1.1
Town/city	The Hague
Drawn up by	Country of Origin Information Unit (COI Unit)

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**Co-funded by
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This translation has been co-funded by the European Union.

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Introduction

This Country of Origin Information (COI) Report was drawn up on the basis of the points for attention mentioned in the Terms of Reference (ToR) compiled by the Ministry of Asylum and Migration, which were adopted on 3 June 2025.

This COI Report describes the situation in Eritrea insofar as it affects the assessment of asylum applications and is of significance for decision-making regarding the return of asylum seekers who have been rejected. The reporting period runs from December 2023 to October 2025. The COI Report is a factual, neutral and objective representation of the findings that were made during the period under consideration. It is not a policy document, nor does it reflect the government's vision or policy in relation to any given country or region, or reach any conclusions on immigration policy.

The COI Report has been compiled on the basis of public and confidential sources, using carefully selected, analysed and verified information. In the compilation of this report, use was made of information from various sources, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), specialist literature, media reporting and relevant government agencies. The content in this COI Report is based on multiple sources, except where the facts are generally undisputed or when stated otherwise. The public sources that were consulted are listed in the appendix.

In addition, some of the information used was obtained through channels including the diplomatic representations of the Netherlands, along with information originating from confidential conversations and correspondence. Such information was used primarily to support and complement passages based on publicly available information. The sources are listed as 'confidential source' in the footnotes, and are accompanied by a date.

Chapter 1 addresses the political developments and security situation in Eritrea during the reporting period. Chapter 2 considers matters related to documents, nationality and freedom of movement. Chapter 3 describes compliance with and violations of human rights. Chapter 4 details the position of refugees and displaced persons, and Chapter 5 describes the position of Eritrean nationals returning to Eritrea (including those who have been forced to return).

1 Political and security situation

Below is a brief description of political developments in Eritrea during the reporting period, developments relating to the relevant international relations of the country and developments in the security situation.

1.1 Political situation

1.1.1 Domestic political developments

The domestic political situation in Eritrea has remained more or less unchanged for years. During the current reporting period, the domestic political situation barely changed in comparison with the situation described in the previous COI Reports, of May 2022¹ and December 2023.² Since taking office in 1993, president Isaias Afwerki (hereafter: Isaias) has been at the head of the legislative and executive branches. There is no separation of powers or any meaningful limitation of, or institutional control over, the president's power. His party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), is still the only permitted political party in the country.³

During the current reporting period, Eritrean nationals were still denied the right to exercise their civil and political rights (see Chapter 3). Compulsory national service and the associated human rights violations continued to have a pervasive impact on the daily lives of Eritreans (see also section 3.2).⁴ The government controlled all aspects of public life and consistently limited freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly. Eritrea still had no independent media or civil society (see section 3.3). The ongoing system of political persecution had forced dissident voices, including journalists, human rights activists and political opposition, to practise self-censorship or flee the country. As before, there was no organised domestic opposition against the regime of President Isaias during the current reporting period (see also section 3.3.1).⁵

As such, Eritrea continued to figure in the lower regions of the main international indices that measure democratic, political and civil liberties: *The Economist* put the country in 153th place out of a total of 167 countries in the *Democracy Index* of 2024;⁶ in 2023, the *Bertelsmann Stiftung* ranked Eritrea 132nd out of the 137 countries assessed in terms of political transformation in its *Transformation Index*, and 137th in terms of governance;⁷ *Freedom House* gave the country a score of 3

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea*, May 2022, 25 May 2022, [url](#).

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea*; December 2023, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

³ U.S. Department of State (USDOS), Eritrea 2023 human rights report, pp. 19-20, 22 April 2024, [url](#); United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC), *Situation of human rights in Eritrea; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker (A/HRC/56/24)*, pp. 8-9, 7 May 2024, [url](#); Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, *Situation of human rights in Eritrea; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker (A/HRC/59/24)*, p. 8, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

⁴ UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, pp. 3, 6-8, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

⁵ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 12, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UK Parliament, Joint Committee on Human Rights, *Transnational repression in the UK; Written evidence; Dr. Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker (Special Rapporteur on Eritrea at Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations) (TRUK0174)*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 12, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

⁶ The Economist, Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), *Democracy Index 2024; What's wrong with representative democracy?*, p. 20, February 2025, [url](#).

⁷ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI Transformation Index; Country dashboard: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 9 May 2025.

out of 100 for political and civil liberties⁸; and in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) *World Press Freedom Index 2025*, Eritrea occupied last place – one place below North Korea.⁹

1.1.2 Foreign relations

1.1.2.1 Relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia

During the war in Tigray (2020-2022), the Eritrean armed forces (Eritrean Defence Forces, EDF) fought on the side of the Ethiopian government army.¹⁰ However, following the signing of the Pretoria Agreement (2 November 2022) which ended the civil war, relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia soured.¹¹ The reasons for this development included Eritrean discontent about the fact that the country was not involved in the negotiations leading to the peace agreement, and about the fact that the agreement was not robust enough in tackling the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which Eritrea regarded as an arch enemy.¹²

The EDF had occupied parts of Tigray since 2022.¹³ These included parts of North West Tigray, Central Tigray and East Tigray that bordered Eritrea (see also the map in 6.3.2).¹⁴ Relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia deteriorated further when the Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed began to display increasingly obvious ambitions to acquire access to a seaport. Ethiopia lost its only seaports (Massawa and Assab, on the Red Sea) to Eritrea at the time of the separation of the two countries in 1993. Against this background, in which an Ethiopian attack on Eritrean territory to obtain access to the Red Sea appeared possible, both countries strengthened their military presence in the border region from February 2025.¹⁵ According to various sources, the rising tensions also led the Eritrean authorities to intensify their mobilisation efforts in February 2025. According to Cedoca sources,

⁸ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2025: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 9 May 2025.

⁹ Reporters Without Borders (RSF), *World Press Freedom Index 2025*, [url](#), accessed on 10 June 2025.

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Tigray 2021*, pp. 5-11, August 2021, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, pp. 12-16, 25 May 2022, [url](#).

¹¹ See also: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 12, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

¹² Critical Threats, *Africa file, September 26, 2024: Fano offensive in Ethiopia's Amhara; (...)*, 26 September 2024, [url](#); Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), *Global conflict tracker: Conflict in Ethiopia; Updated March 20, 2025*, [url](#), accessed on 9 May 2025.

¹³ France24, *Two years after Ethiopia's Tigray war, Eritrean forces still occupy border regions*, 14 November 2024, [url](#); United Kingdom Home Office, *Country policy and information note: Tigrayans and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, Ethiopia, December 2024 (accessible)*; Updated 27 December 2024, [url](#), accessed on 9 May 2025; Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Rising tensions in Tigray risk regional conflict*, 24 March 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 6, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 21 March 2025.

¹⁴ UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 6, 12 May 2025, [url](#); The Sentry, *Power and plunder: The Eritrean Defense Forces intervention in Tigray*, p. 18, June 2025, [url](#); Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS)/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, pp. 15-17, 19 September 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 22 October 2024.

¹⁵ Critical Threats, *Africa file, September 26, 2024: Fano offensive in Ethiopia's Amhara; (...)*, 26 September 2024, [url](#); Clingendael, *A dangerous frenemy: Averting a showdown between Eritrea and Ethiopia*, 6 March 2025, [url](#); Chatham House, *Tensions in Tigray could spark war between Ethiopia and Eritrea - disaster must be avoided*, 19 March 2025, [url](#); CFR, *Global conflict tracker: Conflict in Ethiopia; Updated March 20, 2025*, [url](#), accessed on 9 May 2025; The Guardian, *Power struggle leads to coup in Tigray as war looms between Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 21 March 2025, [url](#); Al Jazeera, *Are Ethiopia and Eritrea hurtling towards war?*, 25 March 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group (ICG), *Ethiopia and Eritrea slide closer to war amid Tigray upheaval*, 27 March 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 5, 12 May 2025, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, *Report says Ethiopia, Eritrea deploying troops along shared border*, 6 July 2025, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Eritrea's president says Ethiopia preparing for war as tensions rise*, 21 July 2025, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Ethiopian general says Eritrean port 'worth any price'*, 1 September 2025, [url](#).

this did not amount to a new general mobilisation but rather involved periodic training activities and refresher courses (see also section 3.2).¹⁶

Alongside the ongoing Eritrean presence on Ethiopian territory, internal Ethiopian affairs also played a role in the hardening of relations between the two countries.¹⁷ Following the Pretoria Agreement, a power struggle broke out within the TPLF between two factions: on the one hand, a faction led by the chairman of the regional interim government, Getachew Reda, who was supported by the Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed, and on the other a faction led by TPLF leader Debretsion Gebremichael. In March 2025, the latter faction took control of several local administrative offices. Since then, Mekelle, Ad Gudan and other cities have been under the effective control of the Debretsion Gebremichael faction. Getachew Reda was forced to flee the regional capital Mekelle, and moved to Addis Ababa. Thereupon, the TPLF faction led by Debretsion Gebremichael sought a rapprochement with Eritrea.¹⁸ The rapprochement between Eritrea and the Debretsion-led TPLF became known as *Ximdo* ('connection' or 'alliance' in Tigrinya).¹⁹

During the reporting period, there were also reports of Eritrean support for Amharic militias that were in conflict with both the Ethiopian government army and the TPLF in the north of Ethiopia. These militias were collectively referred to as *Fano* militias.²⁰ Both Eritrea and the Fano militias reportedly felt sidelined by the Pretoria peace agreement, which they had played no part in.²¹ Exactly what the Eritrean support for the militias consisted of cannot be determined from the sources consulted. Some sources cite the military training of Fano militias by the EDF.²² In February 2024, the Rift Valley Institute referred to possible Eritrean support for the

¹⁶ Human Rights Concern Eritrea (HRCE), *Eritrea orders nationwide military mobilization, raising fears of renewed conflict*, 18 February 2025, [url](#); Borkena, *Eritrea mobilizes military reserves, imposes travel restrictions amid rising tensions with Ethiopia*, 21 February 2025, [url](#); Clingendael, *A dangerous frenemy*, 6 March 2025, [url](#); Chatham House, *Tensions in Tigray could spark war between Ethiopia and Eritrea - disaster must be avoided*, 19 March 2025, [url](#); The Guardian, *Power struggle leads to coup in Tigray as war looms between Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 21 March 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 5, 12 May 2025, [url](#). CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, p. 33, 19 September 2025, [url](#).

¹⁷ Chatham House, *Tensions in Tigray could spark war between Ethiopia and Eritrea - disaster must be avoided*, 19 March 2025, [url](#); ICG, *Ethiopia and Eritrea slide closer to war amid Tigray upheaval*, 27 March 2025, [url](#); CFR, *Global conflict tracker: Conflict in Ethiopia; Updated March 20, 2025*, [url](#), accessed on 9 May 2025; Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), *Expert Comment: The possibility of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 26 March 2025, [url](#).

¹⁸ Voice of America (VOA), *At AU summit, Tigray demands full implementation of peace deal*, 17 February 2025, [url](#); CFR, *Global conflict tracker: Conflict in Ethiopia; Updated March 20, 2025*, [url](#), accessed on 9 May 2025; The Guardian, *Power struggle leads to coup in Tigray as war looms between Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 21 March 2025, [url](#); ACLED, *Expert Comment: The possibility of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 26 March 2025, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Ethiopia's Tigray opposition says 'TPLF on verge of launching war'*, 8 July 2025, [url](#); Africa Intelligence, *Tigray readies its military leadership for war*, 16 July 2025, [url](#); Al Jazeera, *Why Ethiopia's Tigray could be on the brink of another conflict*, 25 August 2025, [url](#).

¹⁹ Ethiopia Insight, *Red Sea reckonings: Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the unraveling of Pretoria*, 16 July 2025, [url](#); Tesfa, Daniel and Mirjam van Reisen, *The Ximdo gamble: TPLF-Eritrea alliance and the fragile peace in Tigray and the Horn of Africa (GAIC-Papers #1)*, 21 July 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²⁰ For background information on the Fano militias, see: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, January 2024, [url](#).

²¹ Rift Valley Institute, *Briefing Paper: Understanding the Fano insurgency in Ethiopia's Amhara region*, February 2024, [url](#); Critical Threats, *Africa file, September 26, 2024: Fano offensive in Ethiopia's Amhara; (...)*, 26 September 2024, [url](#); UK Home Office, *Country policy and information note: Tigrayans and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, Ethiopia, December 2024 (accessible)*; Updated 27 December 2024, [url](#), accessed on 9 May 2025; Critical Threats, *Africa file special edition: Tigray threatens to spark the next Eritrean-Ethiopian war and plunge the Horn of Africa into crisis*, 13 March 2025, [url](#); The Guardian, *Power struggle leads to coup in Tigray as war looms between Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 21 March 2025, [url](#); European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), *Back from the brink: How European support could prevent another Ethiopia-Eritrea war*, 17 April 2025, [url](#).

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, p. 34, January 2024, [url](#); The Sentry, *Power and plunder: The Eritrean Defense Forces intervention in Tigray*, p. 22, June 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 28 January 2025.

militias in the form of funding, the supply of weapons and other military equipment, and training (in some cases inside Eritrea).²³

At the same time, Ethiopia was allegedly supporting Eritrean opposition based in Ethiopia.²⁴ For instance, in January 2025, a meeting of the opposition groups Brigade Nhamedu and the Eritrean Afar National Congress (EANC) was held in Addis Ababa.²⁵

Brigade Nhamedu is led from within the diaspora and consists of youths who fled Eritrea relatively recently. The self-proclaimed goal of the organisation is to bring down the regime of President Isaias.²⁶ In March 2025, Brigade Nhamedu opened an office in Addis Ababa, and announced preparations for the establishment of military bases and an armed struggle against the Eritrean regime.²⁷ Eritrea regards Brigade Nhamedu as a terrorist organisation. Germany has also designated it as a terrorist organisation, after it organised violent attacks on Eritrean festivals in Germany in 2022 and 2023 (see also section 3.8).²⁸

The EANC is committed to self-determination and self-governance for the Afar people in Eritrea.²⁹ This organisation also issued a statement in 2025 indicating that it was preparing for an armed struggle to bring down the Isaias regime.³⁰

Pro-Eritrean news media reported that the meeting between Brigade Nhamedu and the EANC of January 2025 was part of an Ethiopian strategy to cause unrest within Eritrea.³¹ There was no evidence that either of the groups had an organised presence within Eritrea (see also section 3.3.1).³²

During the reporting period, there was also ongoing attention from human rights organisations and news media for crimes committed by the EDF during the war in Tigray. For example, in June and July 2025, respectively, The Guardian and NOS Nieuws published accounts of widespread sexual violence during the war by EDF troops, including gang rapes and the insertion of objects (such as rusty screws and nail clippers) into the wombs of victims with the aim of making the women infertile.³³

²³ Rift Valley Institute, *Briefing Paper: Understanding the Fano insurgency in Ethiopia's Amhara region*, February 2024, [url](#).

²⁴ ICG, *Ethiopia and Eritrea slide closer to war amid Tigray upheaval*, 27 March 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²⁵ Martin Plaut, *Brigade N'Hamedu: From diaspora to Asmara*, 5 February 2025, [url](#); Clingendael, *A dangerous frenemy*, 6 March 2025, [url](#); ICG, *Ethiopia and Eritrea slide closer to war amid Tigray upheaval*, 27 March 2025, [url](#); Martin Plaut, *'Brigade nHamedu', its recently established office in Ethiopia and its objectives*, 17 April 2025, [url](#).

²⁶ ICG, *Ethiopia and Eritrea slide closer to war amid Tigray upheaval*, 27 March 2025, [url](#).

²⁷ Africa Intelligence, *Eritrean diaspora's Brigade Nhamedu set to open Addis Ababa branch*, 7 February 2025, [url](#); Martin Plaut, *Brigade N'Hamedu opens "military and diplomatic centres" in Ethiopia* - BBC, 20 April 2025, [url](#).

²⁸ Deutsche Welle (DW), *Eritrea's conflicts also being fought out in Germany*, 4 January 2025, [url](#); Der Generalbundesanwalt beim Bundesgericht, *Searches on Suspicion of Forming and Membership of a Domestic Terrorist Organisation ("Brigade N'Hamedu")*, 26 March 2025, [url](#); Eritrean Research Institute for Policy and Strategy, *Public condemnation letter regarding the unjust treatment of Eritrean refugees by German authorities*, 28 March 2025, [url](#); Martin Plaut, *Brigade N'Hamedu opens "military and diplomatic centres" in Ethiopia* - BBC, 20 April 2025, [url](#).

²⁹ Dankalia, *About: Eritrean Afar National Congress (EANC)*, [url](#), accessed on 13 August 2025.

³⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Eritrean opposition group in Ethiopia pledges fight to oust leader*, 31 July 2025, [url](#).

³¹ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Eritrean dissidents hold meeting in Ethiopia to 'plot regime change'*, 29 January 2025, [url](#).

³² Confidential source, 1 August 2025.

³³ The Guardian, *Rusted screws, metal spikes and plastic rubbish: the horrific sexual violence used against Tigray's women*, 30 June 2025, [url](#); NOS Nieuws, *In Tigray is zelfs de baarmoeder niet veilig*, 26 July 2025, [url](#).

The previous COI Report stated that human rights violations by the EDF had continued after the war.³⁴ During the current reporting period, ongoing violations were reported by Eritrean troops in the parts of Tigray occupied by the EDF.³⁵ In his annual reports for 2024 and 2025, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, stated that EDF troops in Tigray continued to perpetrate arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances of alleged or suspected opposition leaders and their family members; kidnappings; forced recruitment of young Tigrayans; looting;³⁶ extrajudicial executions; arbitrary detention; sexual and gender-based violence; the forced displacement of civilians; and torture and inhuman or degrading treatment.³⁷

According to the rapporteur, Tigrayan civilians in areas under the control of the EDF faced stringent restrictions on their freedom of movement, including curfews and threats of reprisals for attempts to travel to areas not under EDF occupation (see the map in subsection 6.3.2).³⁸ Many fled, some driven by fear of being forced to serve in the EDF.³⁹ Other sources confirmed the view that the EDF were committing crimes in Tigray, citing kidnappings, sexual violence, looting, arbitrary arrests and other restrictions of civilians' rights.⁴⁰ The US research institute *The Sentry* stated that nearly 74% of the incidents of sexual and gender-based violence in Tigray before May 2024 were committed by members of the EDF.⁴¹ Some sources reported that the EDF were forcing young Tigrayans to perform Eritrean national service.⁴² The UN also documented 33 cases of children being kidnapped by the EDF in 2024.⁴³ As far as could be ascertained, the presence of the EDF in the parts of Tigray it occupied did not lead to fighting with other conflict parties during the reporting period.

1.1.2.2 Relations between Eritrea and Somalia

In the previous COI Report, it was stated that relations between Eritrea and Somalia had been improving since 2018, in part due to military cooperation.⁴⁴ At the start of the current reporting period, the countries sought further rapprochement. This was reportedly a reaction to the agreement of January 2024 between Ethiopia and Somaliland potentially giving Ethiopia access to the Red Sea via Somaliland.⁴⁵ Both Eritrea and Somalia expressed their concerns about the agreement. Somalia because it regards Somaliland as a renegade region and feared that the agreement

³⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, pp. 14-16, 19 December 2023.

³⁵ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 7, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UK Home Office, *Country policy and information note: Tigrayans and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, Ethiopia, December 2024 (accessible)*; Updated 27 December 2024, [url](#), accessed on 9 May 2025; HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Enhanced interactive dialogue on human rights in Eritrea*, 27 February 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 6, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

³⁶ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 7, 7 May 2024, [url](#).

³⁷ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 6, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

³⁸ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 6, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

³⁹ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 7, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 6, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

⁴⁰ HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); OHCHR, *Enhanced interactive dialogue on human rights in Eritrea*, 27 February 2025, [url](#); *The Sentry, Power and plunder; The Eritrean Defense Forces intervention in Tigray*, June 2025, [url](#).

⁴¹ *The Sentry, Power and plunder; The Eritrean Defense Forces intervention in Tigray*, p. 13, June 2025, [url](#).

⁴² Confidential source, 22 October 2024; Confidential source, 13 June 2025.

⁴³ UN Security Council, *Children and armed conflict; Report of the Secretary-General (A/79/878-S/2025/247)*, p. 29, 17 June 2025, [url](#).

⁴⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, pp. 11-12, 19 December 2023.

⁴⁵ Critical Threats, *Africa file, October 17 2024: Egypt-Eritrea-Somalia summit; (...)*, 17 October 2024, [url](#); Geopolitical Monitor, *The Egypt-Eritrea-Somalia alliance: A strategic counterbalance to Ethiopia*, 23 October 2024, [url](#).

would mean a first step towards international recognition.⁴⁶ Eritrea, for its part, saw the Red Sea as a vital element of its national security. Egypt, which has been at odds with Ethiopia for some time, was also said to regard Ethiopian access to the Red Sea as a threat to its security.⁴⁷ The leaders of Eritrea, Somalia and Egypt met in Asmara for a trilateral summit on 10 October 2024 in order to provide a counterweight to Ethiopian aspirations in the region.⁴⁸ In the media, the summit was also referred to as the 'axis against Ethiopia'.⁴⁹ The three countries agreed to set up a joint commission to promote military, diplomatic and economic cooperation, and so, in their own words, assure regional stability and security.⁵⁰

On 11 December 2024, to the surprise of Eritrea and Egypt, Somalia decided to strengthen ties with Ethiopia. The two countries were considering more extensive cooperation, involving, among other things, Ethiopia obtaining access to Somali waters and the construction of a new port. An adviser to the Eritrean Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that, should that agreement come into effect, Eritrea would reconsider its bilateral relations with Somalia.⁵¹ However, in July 2025, the negotiations between Ethiopia and Somalia foundered, after which Eritrea revived its ties with Somalia.⁵²

1.1.2.3 Relations between Eritrea and Egypt

Eritrea and Egypt maintain close diplomatic ties that go back to the early 1990s, when Egypt supported Eritrea in its war of independence.⁵³ The countries have similar interests in the region, which are primarily in opposition to Ethiopia. Chatham House considered it possible that Egypt might revive its ties with Ethiopia, at the expense of those with Eritrea, if Ethiopia and Egypt were to reach agreement on the controversial dam which Ethiopia is building on the Nile.⁵⁴ However, good ties with Egypt are also important for Eritrea, because Egypt is a major regional power in military and political terms.⁵⁵ In October 2024, Eritrea, Egypt and Somalia signed an agreement to promote cooperation in the security domain (see section 1.1.2.2).⁵⁶

⁴⁶ BBC News, *Ethiopia-Somaliland deal: Can the Horn of Africa rift be healed?*, 3 July 2024, [url](#); BBC News, *Eritrea, Egypt and Somalia cement 'axis against Ethiopia'*, 10 October 2024, [url](#); Geopolitical Monitor, *The Egypt-Eritrea-Somalia alliance*, 23 October 2024, [url](#).

⁴⁷ Critical Threats, *Africa file, October 17 2024: Egypt-Eritrea-Somalia summit; (...)*, 17 October 2024, [url](#); Geopolitical Monitor, *The Egypt-Eritrea-Somalia alliance*, 23 October 2024, [url](#); Horn Observer, *Eritrea and Egypt set to punish Somalia's Hassan Sheikh for aligning with Ethiopia*, 2 March 2025, [url](#).

⁴⁸ Reuters, *Egypt, Eritrea and Somalia agree to boost security cooperation*, 10 October 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, *Somalia, Eritrea and Egypt pledge to bolster security ties*, 10 October 2024, [url](#); BBC News, *Eritrea, Egypt and Somalia cement 'axis against Ethiopia'*, 10 October 2024, [url](#); Critical Threats, *Africa file, October 17 2024: Egypt-Eritrea-Somalia summit; (...)*, 17 October 2024, [url](#).

⁴⁹ See, for example: BBC News, *Eritrea, Egypt and Somalia cement 'axis against Ethiopia'*, 10 October 2024, [url](#).

⁵⁰ Al Jazeera, *Somalia, Eritrea and Egypt pledge to bolster security ties*, 10 October 2024, [url](#); BNE Intellinews, *Eritrea, Egypt and Somalia strengthen ties amid regional strife, strained relations with Ethiopia*, 11 October 2024, [url](#).

⁵¹ Somali Guardian, *Eritrea says it will consider cutting ties with Somalia over recent deal with Ethiopia*, 25 December 2024, [url](#); VOA, *Eritrean, Somali leaders discuss stability amid regional tensions*, 26 December 2024, [url](#).

⁵² Africa Intelligence, *Ethiopia, Somalia; End of the line for the Ankara process*, 9 July 2025, [url](#); Borkena, *Ethiopia-Somalia deal falters, Somalia reportedly renews alliance with Egypt and Eritrea*, 11 July 2025, [url](#); The Habesha, *Evolving dynamics: Somalia, Egypt, and Eritrea's impact on Ethiopia*, 13 July 2025, [url](#).

⁵³ Geopolitical Monitor, *The Egypt-Eritrea-Somalia alliance*, 23 October 2024, [url](#).

⁵⁴ Chatham House, *Tensions in Tigray could spark war between Ethiopia and Eritrea - disaster must be avoided*, 19 March 2025, [url](#).

⁵⁵ Geopolitical Monitor, *The Egypt-Eritrea-Somalia alliance*, 23 October 2024, [url](#); Critical Threats, *Africa file special edition: Tigray threatens to spark the next Eritrean-Ethiopian war and plunge the Horn of Africa into crisis*, 13 March 2025, [url](#).

⁵⁶ Reuters, *Egypt, Eritrea and Somalia agree to boost security cooperation*, 10 October 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, *Somalia, Eritrea and Egypt pledge to bolster security ties*, 10 October 2024, [url](#); Critical Threats, *Africa file, October 17 2024: Egypt-Eritrea-Somalia summit; (...)*, 17 October 2024, [url](#).

In the first months of 2025, Eritrea and Egypt further strengthened their diplomatic ties, with a number of meetings between ministers and the two presidents. During those meetings, the participants discussed the intensification of ties, primarily with a view to security in the region and the situation in Sudan.⁵⁷

1.2 Security

The consequences of the armed conflict in Tigray (2020-2022) for the domestic security situation in Eritrea were described in the previous two COI Reports.⁵⁸ During the current reporting period, as far as could be ascertained, no military confrontations or other conflict-related incidents of violence took place in Eritrea. The non-governmental organisation (NGO) Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) similarly documented no political incidents of violence on Eritrean soil during the reporting period.⁵⁹ A source consulted on this subject explained that Eritrea is generally regarded as safe. The source added that this could not be viewed in isolation from the high degree of government control, and repression, of Eritrean citizens.⁶⁰

No formal demobilisation took place following the end of the conflict in Tigray in November 2022 (see section 3.2.1).⁶¹ The authorities continued to carry out round-ups (*giffas*) during the reporting period, with the goal of tracking down and apprehending conscientious objectors.⁶² This meant that the potential consequences for the safety of draft evaders and their family members also remained – including long-term detention and inhumane treatment (see also section 3.2).⁶³

⁵⁷ Egypt State Information Service, *Egypt, Eritrea discuss promoting cooperation*, 11 January 2025, [url](#); Daily News Egypt, *Egyptian FM delivers message to Eritrean president*, 1 March 2025, [url](#); Daily News Egypt, *Egypt, Eritrea, discuss regional stability, Red Sea security*, 23 March 2025, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, *Eritrean, Egyptian foreign ministers discuss bilateral ties*, 10 July 2025, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, *Report says Eritrea, Egypt planning to hold joint naval drill*, 11 July 2025, [url](#).

⁵⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, pp. 11-12, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 16, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

⁵⁹ ACLED, *Data export tool*, [url](#), accessed on 10 June 2025. Selected criteria: From: 01/12/2023 | To: 10/6/2025 | Event type: All | Actor type: All | Country: Eritrea.

⁶⁰ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁶¹ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 7, 7 May 2024, [url](#); HRCE, *Eritrea orders nationwide military mobilization, raising fears of renewed conflict*, 18 February 2025, [url](#); Borkena, *Eritrea mobilizes military reserves, imposes travel restrictions amid rising tensions with Ethiopia*, 21 February 2025, [url](#); Clingendael, *A dangerous frenemy*, 6 March 2025, [url](#); The Guardian, *Power struggle leads to coup in Tigray as war looms between Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 21 March 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 5, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

⁶² UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 7, 7 May 2024, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024.

⁶³ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 8, 7 May 2024, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024.

2 Documents, nationality and freedom of movement

Below is a description of relevant developments relating to documents and the issuance of documents in Eritrea, nationality legislation and freedom of movement.

2.1 Documents

When reading this chapter, it is important to keep the Eritrean context in mind. During the reporting period, as before,⁶⁴ there were the administrative system and the formal rules (or the absence thereof) on the one hand, and, on the other, the everyday practice with regard to documents, which often deviated from the rules. Because the population register is insufficiently developed and difficult to access, the legal requirement to register births, marriages and deaths in a timely manner was often not enforced in practice. Furthermore, Eritrea was characterised by a high degree of corruption and arbitrary authority.⁶⁵ As a result of these factors, combined with a relative lack of objectively verifiable information from the country, it remained difficult to obtain a concrete and clear-cut perspective on the issuance, possession and use of documents.⁶⁶

2.1.1 Access to government services

As far as could be ascertained, since the COI Report of December 2023, no noteworthy changes have occurred to the regulations and practice with regard to the issuance and use of identifying documents.⁶⁷

The practice with regard to accessing government services, and which identifying documents are required to do so, was not consistent and depended partly on place of residence. Although the possession of a national identity card (*menennet*) was a legal requirement for every citizen aged eighteen and over, not all citizens who had reached their majority were in possession of such a card.⁶⁸ In a report published in April 2021, researchers Daniel Mekonnen and Sara Arapiles noted that possession of the national identity card had become less important since the introduction of the residence card (*nay nebarinnet*, see section 2.1.3).⁶⁹ In 2025, sources confirmed that the residence card was more important in daily life than the identity card.⁷⁰ In practice, during the reporting period, the residence card was, generally speaking, sufficient for Eritrean citizens to demonstrate their identity, although there could be some arbitrariness in this regard.⁷¹ The sources consulted were also in agreement

⁶⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 23, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 25, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

⁶⁵ Arapiles, Sara and Daniel Mekonnen, 'Family reunification for "paperless" Eritrean refugees: A pie in the sky or a realisable right?', in: Desmet, Ellen et al., *Family reunification in Europe*, p. 212, 2024, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025; Confidential source, 2 November 2023; Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 20 February 2025; Confidential source, 13 June 2025.

⁶⁶ See also: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 25, 19 December 2023, [url](#); Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁶⁷ Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁶⁸ Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁶⁹ Mekonnen, Daniel and Sara Palacios Arapiles, *Expert report: Access to documents by Eritrean refugees in the context of family reunification*, p. 27, April 2021, [url](#).

⁷⁰ Confidential source, 11 August 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

⁷¹ Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

that, as a rule, the possession of a residence card was sufficient to obtain access to basic services provided by the government, such as subsidised food, healthcare and the opportunity to lease land.⁷²

However, not every Eritrean citizen is in possession of a residence card or a national identity card.⁷³ Percentages for possession of these documents were not known during the reporting period. The possession of residence cards was more widespread in urban areas than in rural areas.⁷⁴ The impression also emerges from the sources consulted that which documents were required to access which government services could vary per region and per *zoba* (the highest regional administrative level, comparable to a province⁷⁵). Sources describe the process as 'arbitrary' and dependent on the discretionary power of the official dealing with the case in question.⁷⁶

The impression emerges from the sources consulted that during the reporting period, as before,⁷⁷ in practice it was difficult to function in Eritrea without being in possession of some form of identification. An Eritrean citizen could be asked to produce a proof of identity or identifying documents by the local authorities at any time, for example in order to obtain subsidised food or at checkpoints.⁷⁸ One source added that identification was also required to purchase a SIM card.⁷⁹

2.1.2 *Issuance of new identity cards*

In the previous COI Report, it was stated that the Eritrean authorities had begun issuing new (provisionally digital) identity cards in 2018.⁸⁰ Reportedly, little progress had been made on the roll-out in the reporting period. A source consulted on this subject indicated that the new identity cards were hardly seen in Eritrea, and were mainly requested by Eritreans in the diaspora.⁸¹

2.1.3 *Personal and family residence cards*

Sources reveal that personal and family residence cards (*nay nebarinnet*) were the most important identifying document for Eritrean citizens in daily life.⁸² The residence card is a printout (in some cases laminated) from the digital population register of a *zoba*. It shows the name, date of birth and place of birth of the holder and his or her personal registration number (comparable with the Dutch Citizen

⁷² Confidential source, 9 October 2023; Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁷³ Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁷⁴ Mekonnen and Palacios Arapiles, *Expert report*, pp. 27-28, April 2021, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁷⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 28, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

⁷⁶ Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

⁷⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, pp. 24-25, 25 May 2022, [url](#).

⁷⁸ Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁷⁹ Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

⁸⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 26, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

⁸¹ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁸² Mekonnen and Palacios Arapiles, *Expert report*, p. 27, April 2021, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 11 August 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

Service Number (BSN)).⁸³ If an individual moves within the zoba, that number remains unchanged; if they move to a different zoba, it changes.⁸⁴ The document also states the names of the holder's parents, the holder's address and the authority that issued the card. The colour of the document varies depending on the zoba.⁸⁵

The practice of issuing the residence card is described in two reports published in 2021. Although this practice could differ per zoba, broadly speaking the issuing procedure was as follows: the family residence card was issued to the head of the family (usually the father). This card showed the personal details of all members of the family who were also recorded in the population registration system of the zoba. Each individual family member could obtain a separate residence card on request, showing only their own personal details. Minors did not have their own residence cards but were added to the family residence card.⁸⁶

There is no evidence that the practice of issuing residence cards during the reporting period deviated from the procedures described in the reports of 2021.⁸⁷ The possession of residence cards was more widespread in urban areas than in rural areas.⁸⁸ In this regard, one of the sources consulted explained that more government services were offered in Eritrea's cities than in the rural areas. For this reason, it was natural that more people in the cities were in possession of residence cards.⁸⁹

According to sources, individuals who had deserted from national service or were evading the draft did not qualify for the issuance of a residence card. When a residence card was issued, according to a source, the applicant would be asked to produce a certificate of leave from their unit.⁹⁰

Newly born children were generally added to the family residence card.⁹¹ In Eritrea, births were required to be registered within a statutory term of three months.⁹² However, registration after three months was generally also accepted.⁹³ In its answers to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2025, an Eritrean delegation stated that late registration could result in a fine.⁹⁴

⁸³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 28, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 30, 19 December 2023, [url](#); Confidential source, 11 August 2025.

⁸⁴ Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), *Focus Eritrea*, p. 42, 21 January 2021, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024.

⁸⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 28, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 30, 19 December 2023, [url](#); Confidential source, 11 August 2025.

⁸⁶ SEM, *Focus Eritrea*, pp. 41-44, 21 January 2021, [url](#); Mekonnen and Palacios Arapiles, *Expert report*, pp. 27-28, April 2021, [url](#).

⁸⁷ Confidential source, 30 July 2025.

⁸⁸ Mekonnen and Palacios Arapiles, *Expert report*, pp. 27-28, April 2021, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁸⁹ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁹⁰ Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁹¹ Mekonnen and Palacios Arapiles, *Expert report*, pp. 27-28, April 2021, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

⁹² United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), *Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports submitted by Eritrea under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2020 (CRC/C/ERI/5-6)*, 21 July 2023, [url](#); UN CRC, *Experts of the Committee on the Rights of the Child praise Eritrea's proposed data collection system on child protection, ask about harmful practices and the compulsory military training programme*, 15 January 2025, [url](#); UNICEF, *Data: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 15 August 2025; Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 11 August 2025.

⁹³ UN CRC, *Experts of the Committee on the Rights of the Child praise Eritrea's proposed data collection system on child protection, ask about harmful practices and the compulsory military training programme*, 15 January 2025, [url](#); UNICEF, *Data: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 15 August 2025; Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 11 August 2025.

⁹⁴ UN CRC, *Experts of the Committee on the Rights of the Child praise Eritrea's proposed data collection system on child protection, ask about harmful practices and the compulsory military training programme*, 15 January 2025, [url](#).

As stated above, as a rule, the production of a residence card was enough to serve as an identifying document when requested by the authorities.⁹⁵ The sources consulted were also in agreement that generally speaking, the possession of a residence card was sufficient to obtain access to basic services provided by the government. The services mentioned by the sources in this regard included the provision of subsidised food, healthcare, the opportunity to lease land, the issue of trading licences and schooling (see section 2.1.1).⁹⁶

Two sources consulted stated that when obtaining a new residence card, the holder was not required to surrender the old residence card.⁹⁷ One of those sources added that the old card would, however, be declared invalid at that time.⁹⁸ A third source questioned, by contrast, asserted that, as in other areas, the inconsistent procedures followed by the authorities meant that it was impossible to make any general pronouncement on the matter. In some zobas, according to the source, old cards were retained by the authorities, while in other zobas they were not.⁹⁹

2.1.4 *Civil registry and registration*

During the reporting period, Eritrea had no national registration system for persons and life events.¹⁰⁰ The registration of events took place at local level.¹⁰¹

In summary, the previous two COI Reports stated that registration of life events in the government's registration systems, and the associated issuance of documents, were incomplete and inadequate. The registration of events such as births and marriages was not consistent or reliable.¹⁰² Although the registration of births was increasingly common, registration within the statutory period of three months was rare, particularly in rural areas.¹⁰³ Other types of registrations were also not normal practice, or a subject for concern, for the average Eritrean, especially in rural areas. The population registers were reported to be incomplete and many events were reportedly registered which had actually taken place long before, often solely because the applicant needed a document. Permanent residents of Eritrea apparently often had no reason to request official civil registry records. Reportedly, the registration of life events was largely a voluntary act.¹⁰⁴

The view that emerges from the sources consulted during the current reporting period is that the practice outlined in the previous two COI Reports had not substantially changed, and that, particularly in the rural areas of Eritrea, registration

⁹⁵ Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

⁹⁶ SEM, *Focus Eritrea*, pp. 41-44, 21 January 2021, [url](#); Confidential source, 9 October 2023; Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 11 August 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

⁹⁷ Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 11 August 2025.

⁹⁸ Confidential source, 11 August 2025.

⁹⁹ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹⁰⁰ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Eritrea: UNFPA country programme*, 29 May 2023, [url](#); Confidential source, 2 November 2023.

¹⁰¹ See also: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 30, 19 December 2023.

¹⁰² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, pp. 23, 30-31, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 29, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

¹⁰³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 30, 25 May 2022, [url](#).

¹⁰⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 29, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

and document issuance were not necessarily the norm.¹⁰⁵ For example, researchers Mekonnen and Arapiles wrote in 2024 that Eritrea had a 'lack of necessary institutional infrastructure at the basic level' for registration and document issuance. Reportedly, some of the most important documents of life events (such as birth and marriage certificates) were frequently not issued.¹⁰⁶ Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant congregations kept their own handwritten registers of life events such as births, baptisms, marriages and deaths. These certificates were used to register with schools, childcare centres or courts, for example. No information was found about developments in this area during the current reporting period.¹⁰⁷

UNICEF estimated that in 2016, 60% of children below the age of five were registered in the urban areas of Eritrea, but it did not have data for the rural areas. UNICEF did not have reliable percentages of a more recent date than 2016 at its disposal.¹⁰⁸ In their answers to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2023 and 2025, respectively, Eritrean delegations did state that most urban areas and larger villages now had a functioning system of birth registration. They reported that in the Maekel zoba (Asmara), 90% of births were registered, and that progress was also being made in the other zobas. No specific percentages were given for those other zobas.¹⁰⁹

Because not all Eritrean citizens are officially registered at birth, in practice (as was the case previously¹¹⁰), other documents were apparently accepted as proof of the holder's identity. For example, Mekonnen and Arapiles indicated that it was common in some rural areas to use church baptismal certificates as proof of identity. Reportedly, the authorities in urban areas would also issue birth certificates based on the details shown on these baptismal certificates. Church authorities also issued marriage certificates, and in some cases, vaccination records were also accepted as proof of children's ages. As regards members of the Muslim community, the authorities assigned evidential value to vaccination records and religious marriage certificates.¹¹¹

2.1.4.1 The Civil Code of 2015

In 2015, the Eritrean government published the New Civil Code of Eritrea (NCCE), intended to replace the Transitional Civil Code (TCC) of 1991.¹¹² However, during the reporting period, the NCCE had not yet come into effect, and the TCC was still in force.¹¹³

¹⁰⁵ Arapiles and Mekonnen, 'Family reunification', 2024, [url](#); Confidential source, 19 June 2025.

¹⁰⁶ Arapiles and Mekonnen, 'Family reunification', 2024, [url](#).

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 29, 19 December 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ UNICEF, *Eritrea; Country programme document (E/ICEF/2021/P/L.19)*, pp. 4, 14, 9 July 2021, [url](#); UNICEF, *Birth registration in sub-Saharan Africa: Current levels and trends*, p. 3, 25 March 2025, [url](#).

¹⁰⁹ UN CRC, *CRC/C/ERI/5-6*, 21 July 2023, [url](#); UN CRC, *Experts of the Committee on the Rights of the Child praise Eritrea's proposed data collection system on child protection, ask about harmful practices and the compulsory military training programme*, 15 January 2025, [url](#).

¹¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 32, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 31, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

¹¹¹ Arapiles and Mekonnen, 'Family reunification', 2024, [url](#).

¹¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 47, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 32, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

¹¹³ USDOS, *2024 Investment Climate Statements: Eritrea*, Chapter 3, 17 July 2024, [url](#); UN CRC, *Summary record of the 2850th meeting (CRC/C/SR.2850)*, p. 5, 22 January 2025, [url](#); UN CRC, *CRC/C/ERI/5-6*, p. 2, 21 July 2023, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, pp. 5, 8, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

2.1.5 *Schooling*

The practice with regard to the presentation of documents to obtain access to educational establishments was not consistent throughout Eritrea but differed per region and per school.¹¹⁴ According to a source, the most common way of demonstrating the identity of a child of school-going age was to present a birth certificate. This could either be a certificate issued by a government body or a church baptismal certificate. Vaccination records could also be accepted as proof of identity and age of children of school-going age. In addition, manually updated family registers at municipal level could be used to demonstrate the identity of a child.¹¹⁵ If the parents were in possession of a family residence card, this could be used to enrol the child at a school, according to two other sources. In some cases, the parents' identity cards were said to be sufficient.¹¹⁶

2.1.6 *Declaration of completion of compulsory national service*

Provisions with regard to compulsory national service are laid down in Proclamation number 82/1995 (Proclamation of national service). Article 20 stipulates that citizens who have completed compulsory national service receive a certificate demonstrating this fact.¹¹⁷

In 1998, there was a border war raging between Eritrea and Ethiopia. In response, the Eritrean authorities declared a state of emergency. Since that decree, in practice compulsory national service has been of indefinite duration. A source consulted on the subject indicated that since 1998, the authorities have only sporadically issued the official certificate of completion of compulsory national service. Before 1998, the certificate was issued systematically and consistently. The source added that the certificate actually consisted of two different documents: a document in A4 format (*miskir*) and a smaller laminated document (*miskirnet*). The larger document was intended for hanging on a wall at home as an honourable proof of completion of compulsory national service. The smaller document was intended to be carried on the person, for example in order to be shown at checkpoints.¹¹⁸

After 1998, the practice became more inconsistent, according to the same source. The official certificate of completion of compulsory national service was only issued sporadically, but most Eritreans who had performed compulsory national service did receive a different written proof of this fact – generally a declaration in A4 format. These declarations were issued by the Ministry of Defence or the department in which the conscripted individual had completed their compulsory civilian service and were not consistent in form. In some cases, conscripts who had completed compulsory military service and were then assigned to compulsory civilian service received a document to demonstrate that they had completed the military component of compulsory national service – whereas they had not yet completed the civilian component of compulsory national service.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Confidential source, 3 September 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹¹⁵ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹¹⁶ Confidential source, 11 August 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

¹¹⁷ Government of Eritrea, *Proclamation No. 82/1995; Proclamation of national service*, 23 October 1995, [url](#).

¹¹⁸ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹¹⁹ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

Other sources consulted on this subject indicated that they were not aware whether documents were issued to Eritrean citizens after completion of their compulsory national service (see also section 3.2).¹²⁰

2.1.7 *Passports*

It was not ascertained during the research period whether digital records were kept of the issuance of passports in Eritrea.

2.1.8 'Seven year card'

Three of the sources consulted for this research were aware of the existence of a document known as the 'seven year card'.¹²¹ Four other sources were not familiar with the term.¹²²

In September 2025, the Belgian organisation Cedoca (the country of origin information research unit of the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons – CGRS) wrote that the issuance of the seven year card was linked to so-called 'diaspora status'.¹²³ Sources consulted by Cedoca indicated that persons who had been living abroad for three years or more and signed a so-called 'regret form'¹²⁴ could apply for a so-called 'seven year card' from the Eritrean authorities. The document was valid for seven years. Holders of the document had privileges; for example, they were not called up for compulsory national service. Holders could also enter and leave Eritrea freely. However, they could not settle in the country permanently; if they did so, they would lose the privileges attached to the seven year card. The sources consulted by Cedoca were divided on the question of whether it was necessary for the holder to have a residence permit abroad in order to obtain a seven year card.¹²⁵

The two other sources who had knowledge of the seven year card confirmed that it was a document that could be requested by Eritreans in the diaspora and allowed holders to enter and leave the country freely.¹²⁶ One of those sources stated that the seven year card was intended for persons who regularly travelled back to Eritrea and stayed for several months at a time, for example on business. The primary benefit of the card was the privilege of being able to travel back and forth without applying for entry and exit visas. The source indicated that the seven year card was the same thing as the 'residence clearance form' (RCF).¹²⁷ Previous COI Reports described the RCF as formal confirmation of diaspora status. They noted that the period of validity of the RCF was unpredictable: it could range from three to ten

¹²⁰ Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

¹²¹ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, pp. 38-39, 19 September 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 11 August 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹²² Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

¹²³ For more information on diaspora status, see also: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, pp. 51-52, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

¹²⁴ For more information on the regret form (also known as 'letter of regret', and formally as 'form 4/4.2'), see also: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 23, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 25, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

¹²⁵ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, pp. 38-39, 19 September 2025, [url](#).

¹²⁶ Confidential source, 11 August 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹²⁷ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

years.¹²⁸ The source consulted in 2025 also reported having heard of the RCF having varying periods of validity, but that at a certain point the period of validity was formally established at seven years – hence the fact that from that point onwards, the term ‘seven year card’ was used.¹²⁹

In 2022, researchers Daniel Mekonnen and Amanuel Yohannes wrote that an RCF could be requested from the Eritrean Ministry of Immigration and Nationality, and that the conditions for obtaining an RCF included: payment of the diaspora tax;¹³⁰ signing the regret form, and; presenting proof that the applicant had been living outside Eritrea for at least three years.¹³¹ There is no evidence that this application and issuance practice has changed since then.¹³² Broadly speaking, the procedure described by Mekonnen and Yohannes corresponded with the description of the application process for the seven year card by Cedoca in 2025.

As stated, the holder of the seven year card was permitted to enter and exit Eritrea freely, and to remain in the country for an extended period each time. Exactly how long a stay might last before the holder was once again regarded as a resident of Eritrea is not entirely clear.¹³³ One of the sources consulted stated that the holder was permitted to stay for ‘an extended period’, without specifying further how long that period might be.¹³⁴ The Belgian organisation Cedoca quoted some sources as saying there was ‘no fixed period’ and another as referring to a period of three years.¹³⁵

The seven year card could be extended following expiry.¹³⁶ However, one of the sources who commented on this matter stated that obtaining the card in itself offered no guarantee that it would later be extended. For example, if the holder of the card ran into problems with the authorities during its period of validity, an extension could be refused.¹³⁷ Cedoca wrote that preferential status offered no guarantees against persecution by the Eritrean authorities. In this regard, sources pointed to incidents involving visitors who, despite being in possession of the seven year card, were detained by the authorities – for example, because they were not in possession of an Eritrean identity card, had not signed the regret form (form 4/4.2), had financial links with a school at which a revolt had taken place or had engaged in activities abroad that were regarded as being anti-government.¹³⁸

¹²⁸ See: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 44, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 51, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

¹²⁹ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹³⁰ The diaspora tax is regulated by proclamation 67/1995 and was initially introduced by proclamation 17/1991. Formally, the tax is 2% of ‘net income’ from ‘employment, rental of moveable or immovable property, or any other commercial, professional or service-rendering activity or employment’, but in practice, consular staff at Eritrean embassies have a large degree of discretion to determine the actual level of this tax (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 23, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 25, 19 December 2023, [url](#)).

¹³¹ Mekonnen, Daniel and Amanuel Yohannes, *Independent expert report written to Connection e.V. & Förderverein Pro Asyl e.V. (Germany)*, pp. 3, 15-16, May 2022, [url](#).

¹³² Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹³³ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, pp. 38-39, 19 September 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹³⁴ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹³⁵ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, p. 38, 19 September 2025, [url](#).

¹³⁶ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, pp. 38-39, 19 September 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹³⁷ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹³⁸ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, pp. 38-39, 19 September 2025, [url](#).

2.2 Nationality legislation

The conditions for Eritrean nationality are laid down in Proclamation 21/1992 (Eritrean Nationality Proclamation).¹³⁹ No changes are known to the legislation relating to obtaining or losing Eritrean nationality during the reporting period.

2.3 Freedom of movement

As was previously the case, the Eritrean government restricted the freedom of movement of its citizens during the current reporting period, both within Eritrea and between Eritrea and other countries.¹⁴⁰ Below is a description of relevant developments.

2.3.1 Internal travel restrictions

As before, Eritrean citizens experienced internal travel restrictions during the current reporting period, and they were generally only permitted to travel between different regions of the country after obtaining an internal travel permit. Enforcement took the form of static and mobile checks.¹⁴¹ The US State Department noted that citizens travelling to remote areas and border regions were more likely to be checked.¹⁴²

One source consulted reported the three most common ways for migrants to reach the borders of Eritrea from their place of residence or the place where they were staying:

- Migrants whose place of residence was located in or near the border region and who had been stationed or deployed elsewhere in the country would request an internal travel permit for a family visit, after which they would cross the border from their place of residence;
- Migrants who had been stationed or deployed in or near the border region would cross the border from there;
- Migrants whose place of residence was not located in or near the border region and who had also not been stationed or deployed there generally used the services of smugglers to reach the border.¹⁴³

These three commonly used methods of reaching the border were also cited in an article dating from 2023.¹⁴⁴ The impression emerges from the other sources consulted that it was unlikely that migrants would be able to travel towards Eritrea's borders by road using motorised transport without encountering controls, as there

¹³⁹ Government of Eritrea, *Eritrean Nationality Proclamation (No. 21/1992)*, 6 April 1992, [url](#). See also: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea*; May 2022, p. 32, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea*; December 2023, pp. 32-33, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

¹⁴⁰ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, pp. 16-17, 22 April 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 7, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 13 June 2025; Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 1 August 2025.

¹⁴¹ Palacios-Arapiles, Sara, 'Enslaved by their own government: Indefinite national service in Eritrea,' in: Reisen, Mirjam van, Munyaradzi Mawere, Kai Smits and Morgane Wirtz (ed), *Enslaved; Trapped and trafficked in digital black holes: Human trafficking trajectories to Libya*, p. 231, January 2023, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 7, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 19 June 2025.

¹⁴² USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, p. 16, 22 April 2024, [url](#).

¹⁴³ Confidential source, 19 June 2025.

¹⁴⁴ Smits, Kai and Morgane Wirtz, 'Escaping Eritrea: The vulnerability of Eritreans to human trafficking,' in: *Enslaved; Trapped and trafficked in digital black holes*, p. 275, January 2023, [url](#).

were many checkpoints on the roads.¹⁴⁵ As stated, people who travelled towards the border by road mostly did so with the help of smugglers. The smugglers would bribe the soldiers at the checkpoints to let the migrants through.¹⁴⁶ This meant that evading travel restrictions was generally associated with high costs for the migrant. One source stated that migrants could also reach the border without motorised transport, for example on foot. This was reportedly not likely from Asmara because frequent checks were performed around the city, but from other parts of the country it was.¹⁴⁷ In this way, migrants could attempt to evade the checks on the roads. For instance, the article 'Escaping Eritrea: The vulnerability of Eritreans to human trafficking' (2023) contains examples of migrants who reached border regions on foot, generally in groups.¹⁴⁸

2.3.1.1 Internal travel permit

As before, Eritrean citizens¹⁴⁹ were required to obtain an internal travel permit (*manqesaqesi*) for travel within Eritrea. The travel permit was required for travel between zobas.¹⁵⁰ The sources consulted in this regard were of the opinion that, during the reporting period, the travel permit was only required by those of conscription age.¹⁵¹ However, as in the previous COI Report,¹⁵² there was no certainty in this regard. One source noted having observed that in practice it was easier for older people (those aged over 55/60) to travel within Eritrea, but the source was not aware whether this meant that they did not require a travel permit or that they found it easier to obtain one.¹⁵³ Another source stated that obtaining a travel permit was only necessary for non-conscripts if they were not in possession of an identity card.¹⁵⁴

The form of the travel permit was not standardised. The most common form was a certificate in A4 format. Sometimes, an A5 format was used. The permit in any event showed the following details: the work or military unit of the holder, the destination and the purpose of the journey. The holder's national identity number was generally also stated, or the military identity number, or both.¹⁵⁵

2.3.2 Exit policy

During the reporting period, the Eritrean government continued to severely restrict foreign travel for its citizens.¹⁵⁶ Citizens who were liable to perform compulsory national (military or civilian) service were rarely if ever given permission to leave

¹⁴⁵ Confidential source, 13 June 2025; Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

¹⁴⁶ Confidential source, 13 June 2025; Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

¹⁴⁷ Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

¹⁴⁸ Smits and Wirtz, 'Escaping Eritrea', p. 276, January 2023, [url](#).

¹⁴⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 27, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, pp. 17-18, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

¹⁵⁰ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 7, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 11 August 2025.

¹⁵¹ Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 11 August 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹⁵² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 17, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

¹⁵³ Confidential source, 1 August 2025.

¹⁵⁴ Confidential source, 11 August 2025.

¹⁵⁵ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹⁵⁶ See also: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 19, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 19, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

the country. Citizens who left the country without permission risked a prison term on their return (see section 5.2.3).¹⁵⁷

2.3.2.1 Exit visa

In order to leave Eritrea legally, Eritrean citizens needed an exit visa.

The legal requirements for the issue of exit visas are laid down in article 17 of Regulation No. 4/1992 of 1992 on Travel Documents and Immigration¹⁵⁸ and in Proclamation No. 24/1992¹⁵⁹). The requirements do not stipulate any specific conditions for the issuance of the exit visa. Article 13 of Proclamation 24/1992 does contain grounds for refusal. The application may be refused if: 1) a court has ruled that the applicant may not leave Eritrea; 2) a court has ordered the applicant to appear before the court in connection with criminal or civil proceedings; 3) the Minister of Internal Affairs judges that the applicant's departure could harm the national security or interests of the state.¹⁶⁰

As in the previous reporting periods¹⁶¹, exit visas were difficult to obtain in practice during the reporting period, and the authorities presented the issuance of an exit visa more as a privilege than as a right. As a rule, only a limited category of people, those granted the 'privilege of lawful exit'¹⁶², were considered for the issuance of exit visas.¹⁶³

In November 2022, researchers Milena Belloni and Georgia Cole reported that their fieldwork had yielded the following view with regard to persons to whom exit visas could or could not be issued and whether there were conditions attached:

- No exit visas were issued to citizens who had not completed compulsory national service and had no exemption, regardless of their age;
- Some citizens currently performing compulsory civilian service could reportedly obtain exit visas under strict conditions;
- Women aged 25 and over who had a formal exemption from compulsory national service could obtain exit visas;
- Men aged over 60 might be subject to the additional requirement that they demonstrate that alongside compulsory national service, they had also served in the People's Army. It is not known how a person could demonstrate having served in the People's Army;¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁷ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, 22 April 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 16, 7 May 2024, [url](#); Borkena, *Eritrea mobilizes military reserves, imposes travel restrictions amid rising tensions with Ethiopia*, 21 February 2025, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025; Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

¹⁵⁸ Government of Eritrea, *Regulation No. 4/1992 of 1992 of Travel Documents and Immigration*, 15 July 1992, [url](#).

¹⁵⁹ Government of 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*, January 1994, [url](#).

¹⁶⁰ Government of 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*, article 13, January 1994, [url](#).

¹⁶¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 19, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 19, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

¹⁶² Quotation from: Mekonnen and Yohannes, *Independent expert report*, p. 22, May 2022, [url](#).

¹⁶³ Mekonnen and Yohannes, *Independent expert report*, p. 22, May 2022, [url](#); Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

¹⁶⁴ For more information on the People's Army, see: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 47, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

- Special rules applied to citizens whose husband or wife had left the country illegally: they had to demonstrate that their partner had signed a so-called regret form and had paid the diaspora tax for the previous five years.¹⁶⁵

In July 2023, the Upper Tribunal of the United Kingdom described largely the same practice, and added that the categories of citizens who were eligible for the issue of an exit visa included:

- Children below the age of five (in some cases this could be extended to older children for purposes of family reunification);
- Citizens who had been exempted from compulsory national service on medical grounds;
- Citizens travelling abroad for medical treatment;
- Citizens who were studying or visiting a conference abroad;
- Businesspeople and sportspeople;
- Former freedom fighters and their relatives;
- Authority representatives in leading positions.¹⁶⁶

In a general sense, it was reported that the rules shown continued to apply during the reporting period.¹⁶⁷ However, in 2025 one source indicated that in practice, no exit visas were issued to persons who were currently performing compulsory civilian service.¹⁶⁸ Three sources stated in 2025 that in practice, citizens wishing to travel abroad for medical treatment were also not granted exit visas in all cases.¹⁶⁹ As with the issuance of other documents, during the reporting period, the actual issuance of exit visas was therefore inconsistent, arbitrary and non-transparent.¹⁷⁰

The predominant impression that emerges from the sources is that the Eritrean authorities issued few exit visas in practice. For example, in May 2024, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea stated that legal exit from Eritrea was virtually impossible due to the condition of obtaining an exit visa.¹⁷¹ Another source consulted indicated that since the intensified mobilisation effort from February 2025, the government had made it even more difficult to obtain exit visas.¹⁷² In April 2025, the NGO Migration Policy Institute confirmed that exit visas were “nearly impossible to obtain”.¹⁷³

The Swiss *Staatssekretariat für Migration* (SEM, 2021) and the US State Department (2024) noted that exit visas were regularly denied to critics of the government, family members of persons who had left the country illegally, family members of persons who had not paid the diaspora tax, members of non-recognised religious groups (see also section 3.4),¹⁷⁴ children over the age of seven, men below the age of forty, women below the age of thirty or for arbitrary and unstated reasons.¹⁷⁵ Another source consulted confirmed that people who had a family member abroad

¹⁶⁵ Belloni, Milena and Georgia Cole, ‘The right to exit as national and transnational governance: The case of Eritrea,’ in: *International Migration*, volume 63, issue 1, November 2022, [url](#).

¹⁶⁶ UK Upper Tribunal, *Tribunal decisions: UI-2022-001709*, 19 July 2023, [url](#).

¹⁶⁷ Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025; Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

¹⁶⁸ Confidential source, 30 July 2025.

¹⁶⁹ Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025; Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

¹⁷⁰ SEM, *Focus Eritrea*, p. 37, 21 January 2021, [url](#); USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Belloni and Cole, ‘The right to exit’, November 2022, [url](#); Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

¹⁷¹ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 16, 7 May 2024, [url](#).

¹⁷² Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

¹⁷³ Migration Policy Institute (MPI), *Severe repression in Eritrea has prompted decades of exodus*, 9 April 2025, [url](#).

¹⁷⁴ SEM, *Focus Eritrea*, p. 39, 21 January 2021, [url](#).

¹⁷⁵ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, 22 April 2024, [url](#).

were regularly denied exit visas.¹⁷⁶ Still other sources confirmed that individuals who had attracted the negative attention of the authorities would definitely not be issued exit visas,¹⁷⁷ and generally speaking nor would individuals whose partners had left the country illegally.¹⁷⁸

It was possible for children to be added to their parents' exit visas and to leave Eritrea with them. However, this only applied to young children.¹⁷⁹ The State Department cited a maximum age of seven;¹⁸⁰ the SEM and three other sources put the age at approximately five years old.¹⁸¹

Although two sources cited in the previous COI Report¹⁸² asserted that (in certain cases involving official travel) the exit visa was subject to a time limit within which the holder must return to Eritrea, various other sources consulted on this matter explicitly stated that exit visas were not subject to a deadline for return.¹⁸³ According to sources, the exit visas of persons leaving the country legally bore a date of expiry, which meant that the holder of the exit visa had to have left Eritrea before that date.¹⁸⁴ Following their departure, the holder could return to Eritrea at any time.¹⁸⁵

One source added the nuance that in some cases, although the exit visa did specify a maximum permitted length of stay abroad, a longer stay was usually not problematic as long as the migrant had demonstrated loyalty to the regime during that time. Demonstrating loyalty could take the form of refraining from expressing anti-regime sentiments and attending pro-regime events. The most important way of demonstrating loyalty was to sign a regret form and pay the diaspora tax.¹⁸⁶

2.3.3 Border crossings

Eritrea borders Ethiopia to the south, Sudan to the west and Djibouti to the south-east.

The border crossings between Eritrea and Ethiopia remained formally closed during the reporting period.¹⁸⁷ In late June 2025, a few border crossings between the two

¹⁷⁶ Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

¹⁷⁷ Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

¹⁷⁸ Confidential source, 19 June 2025.

¹⁷⁹ SEM, *Focus Eritrea*, p. 38, 21 January 2021, [url](#); USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 August 2025.

¹⁸⁰ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, 22 April 2024, [url](#).

¹⁸¹ SEM, *Focus Eritrea*, p. 38, 21 January 2021, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 August 2025; Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

¹⁸² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, pp. 20-21, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

¹⁸³ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRBC), Research Directorate, *Responses to information requests; ERI105741.E; Eritrea: Information on exit procedures, including type of exit document issued and validity period of the document; whether exit stamps that were issued in 2012 or prior, were valid for 2016 (2011-February 2017)*, 13 March 2017, [url](#); European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *Eritrea: National service, exit, and return*, p. 45, September 2019, [url](#); SEM, *Focus Eritrea*, p. 36, 21 January 2021, [url](#); Confidential source, 12 February 2025; Confidential source, 26 February 2025 and 3 March 2025.

¹⁸⁴ Government of Eritrea, *Regulation No. 4/1992 of 1992 of Travel Documents and Immigration*, 15 July 1992, [url](#); Danish Immigration Service (DIS), *Eritrea: National service, exit and entry*, p. 34, January 2020, [url](#); SEM, *Focus Eritrea*, p. 36, 21 January 2021, [url](#).

¹⁸⁵ IRBC, *Responses to information requests; ERI105741.E*, 13 March 2017, [url](#); EASO, *Eritrea: National service, exit, and return*, p. 45, September 2019, [url](#); SEM, *Focus Eritrea*, p. 36, 21 January 2021, [url](#); Confidential source, 12 February 2025; Confidential source, 26 February 2025 and 3 March 2025.

¹⁸⁶ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

¹⁸⁷ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, 22 April 2024, [url](#); UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, *Foreign Advice Travel: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 26 May 2025; BBC News, *Joyful Ethiopians and Eritreans*

countries were opened in regions of Tigray that were occupied by the EDF (see section 1.1.2.1). The Zalembessa border crossing was one of those that was opened. Additionally, a new road from the village of Ihssa to Eritrea was inaugurated. This took place against the wishes of the Ethiopian government. The Eritrean authorities had no formal involvement in the opening, but had reportedly given the green light.¹⁸⁸

In May 2025, Eritrea and Sudan concluded a trade agreement that provided for the opening of the official border crossing between the two countries for goods. As part of the implementation of the agreement, a delegation inspected the Al-Laffa border crossing.¹⁸⁹ A source consulted indicated that Sudanese citizens were subsequently permitted to use the official border crossing, but Eritrean citizens were not.¹⁹⁰ It is clear that in practice, many people crossed the border between the two countries.¹⁹¹ The impression that emerges from the sources is that the border region was porous, and that smugglers and migrants were able to profit from the relative absence of Sudanese troops, who were occupied by the war in that country.¹⁹²

Whether the border crossings between Eritrea and Djibouti were formally opened or not during the reporting period is not clear from the sources consulted. On 11 August 2025, the Canadian government reported that the border between the two countries was formally closed.¹⁹³

The impression that emerges from the sources consulted is that most Eritrean migrants crossed the borders with neighbouring countries away from the border posts. They often did so during the hours of darkness, in order to also evade mobile border controls.¹⁹⁴ Residents of border areas knew the border region well and had the knowledge to make the crossing themselves. As such, they were able to cross the border unaided if they so wished.¹⁹⁵ However, most migrants crossed the border in groups, many relying on the assistance of smugglers, residents of the border areas or members of their own personal networks who knew the way.¹⁹⁶ One source consulted indicated that most migrants used the help of smugglers or local residents to cross the border.¹⁹⁷ In a report published in April 2025, the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) noted that a general shift was taking place in this regard: due to unrest and insecurity in the Horn of Africa, migrants were increasingly being forced to use smugglers on their migration routes.¹⁹⁸

embrace at rare border reopening, 23 June 2025, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Tigray forces 'resist Ethiopian push' to fight Eritrea, Fano militia*, 1 July 2025, [url](#); Africa Intelligence, *Abiy Ahmed powerless over reopening of Tigray-Eritrea border*, 3 July 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 1 August 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

¹⁸⁸ BBC News, *Joyful Ethiopians and Eritreans embrace at rare border reopening*, 23 June 2025, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Tigray forces 'resist Ethiopian push' to fight Eritrea, Fano militia*, 1 July 2025, [url](#); Africa Intelligence, *Abiy Ahmed powerless over reopening of Tigray-Eritrea border*, 3 July 2025, [url](#).

¹⁸⁹ X.com (@tesfanews), *Sudan – Eritrea cross border trade to resume*, 22 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

¹⁹⁰ Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

¹⁹¹ Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), *Where to next?: Eritrean displacement amidst shrinking spaces of refuge*, p. 23, April 2025, [url](#); UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, *Foreign Advice Travel: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 26 May 2025; X.com (@tesfanews), *Sudan – Eritrea cross border trade to resume*, 22 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 August 2025.

¹⁹² MMC, *Where to next?*, p. 23, April 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 1 August 2025.

¹⁹³ Government of Canada, *Eritrea travel advice (Last updated: August 11, 2025)*, [url](#), accessed on 22 August 2025.

¹⁹⁴ Smits and Wirtz, 'Escaping Eritrea', pp. 275-278, January 2023, [url](#); Confidential source, 13 June 2025; Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

¹⁹⁵ Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

¹⁹⁶ Smits and Wirtz, 'Escaping Eritrea', pp. 275-278, January 2023, [url](#); Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 1 August 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

¹⁹⁷ Confidential source, 1 August 2025.

¹⁹⁸ MMC, *Where to next?*, pp. 35-36, April 2025, [url](#).

As before,¹⁹⁹ short-term visits by residents of areas bordering Ethiopia or Sudan were generally tolerated by the Eritrean authorities during the reporting period. For example, by members of the Afar population group in the east and the Beja in the west. They generally reached the neighbouring countries away from the official border crossings, without showing official documents.²⁰⁰ Two sources indicated that the Eritrean authorities might have economic motives for permitting these travel movements. The border residents often brought goods with them from the neighbouring countries, which could benefit the local economy in Eritrea.²⁰¹ No specific information is known about the toleration of travel movements to surrounding countries by citizens other than the residents of the border areas referred to above.

¹⁹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 20, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 22, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

²⁰⁰ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 August 2025; Confidential source, 8 September 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

²⁰¹ Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 August 2025.

3 Human rights

Below is a description of relevant developments in the field of human rights in Eritrea.

3.1 General

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, issued annual reports in May 2024 and May 2025. Eritrea did not recognise the mandate of the rapporteur and refused to provide cooperation. As a result, the rapporteur was unable to pay an official visit to the country, but presented a grim view of the human rights situation in Eritrea based on conversations with witnesses, victims and their family members and other confidential sources, combined with the input of NGOs.²⁰² This view largely corresponds with that presented in the human rights chapters of the previous COI Reports.²⁰³ There is no reason to update that view for the current reporting period. The Eritrean authorities continued to suppress the fundamental freedoms of their citizens, including freedom of expression and association, freedom of the press and freedom of religion. Compulsory national service was unaltered, continued to have far-reaching consequences for the lives of Eritreans and drove thousands of them to flee. As before, the repression also extended to the Eritrean diaspora.²⁰⁴

3.2 Compulsory national service

The Eritrean authorities continued to enforce the system of indefinite compulsory national service during the reporting period, often under poor conditions and with the conscripts having no say in the nature or location of their deployment. Compulsory national service was divided into a military and a civilian part.²⁰⁵

In both 2024 and 2025, the UN special rapporteur determined that the authorities had not implemented any noteworthy changes to the system of compulsory national service. Although the law stipulated a period of compulsory national service of eighteen months, since the declaration of the state of emergency by the authorities in 1998, in practice it had been of indefinite duration. The rapporteur described the duration of compulsory national service as 'arbitrary' and dependent on the discretion of the authorities, without clearly described criteria for discharge or exemption.²⁰⁶ The authorities similarly took no steps on other aspects of compulsory national service, including the use of conscripts for forced labour, inhuman or

²⁰² UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²⁰³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, pp. 34-48, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, pp. 34-53, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

²⁰⁴ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, 7 May 2024, [url](#); HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 3, 12 May 2025, [url](#); CIVICUS, *Civic space still under siege in Eritrea*, 16 June 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024.

²⁰⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 country report – Eritrea*, p. 4, 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 7, 7 May 2024, [url](#); U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), *2023 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Eritrea*, 5 September 2024, [url](#); HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 6, 12 May 2025, [url](#); CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, p. 23, 19 September 2025, [url](#).

²⁰⁶ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 7, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 6, 12 May 2025, [url](#). Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, pp. 43-44, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

degrading conditions during compulsory national service, the incidence of gender-based and sexual violence and torture, and the requirement that all school pupils spend their final school year in the Sawa military camp.²⁰⁷ The rapporteur noted having received numerous reports of the persistence of abuses such as harsh punishments in detention, torture and forced labour in various sectors of the economy, often arduous work under poor conditions, sexual harassment and violence, and denial of conscripts' right to a family life by not giving them permission to visit their families, sometimes for years at a time.²⁰⁸

Other sources consulted confirmed that during the reporting period, no noteworthy developments had occurred with regard to the system of compulsory national service.²⁰⁹

3.2.1 *Conscription practice*

The previous COI Report stated that most sources were not aware of formal demobilisations following the end of the conflict in Tigray in 2022. One source stated that demobilisations took place, but only on a very small scale.²¹⁰ During the current reporting period, there were no signs of meaningful demobilisation in Eritrea.²¹¹ In this regard, one source observed that since the end of the conflict, the country had in effect been in a permanent state of vigilance, accompanied by ongoing mobilisation.²¹² The UN rapporteur had reached the same conclusion in May 2024.²¹³ In 2025, the Belgian organisation Cedoca spoke to multiple sources who, put briefly, indicated that since the end of the conflict in Tigray, mobilisations and round-ups (*giffas*) were still taking place, but that the pressure they exerted on the population was less than it had been during the conflict. A Cedoca source also noted that in the summer of 2023, people gradually started returning from the front.²¹⁴

According to various sources, in response to the rising tensions with Ethiopia (see section 1.1.2.1), the Eritrean authorities intensified their mobilisation efforts in February 2025.²¹⁵ BBC News, Human Rights Concern Eritrea (HRCE, a London-based Eritrean NGO) reported that Eritrea had announced a general mobilisation. HRCE and Borkena (a Canada-based news medium primarily focused on Ethiopia) reported that all reservists and former soldiers under the age of sixty were being called up to take part in military training. According to Cedoca sources, the measures did not amount to a general mobilisation but rather involved periodic training activities and refresher courses. The measures, which were implemented by the local authorities, reportedly also applied to previously demobilised conscripts.²¹⁶ BBC News cited the

²⁰⁷ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 6, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²⁰⁸ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 8, 7 May 2024, [url](#).

²⁰⁹ Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 16, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

²¹¹ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 7, 7 May 2024, [url](#); CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, pp. 33-34, 19 September 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024.

²¹² Confidential source, 1 August 2025.

²¹³ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 3, 7 May 2024, [url](#).

²¹⁴ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, pp. 31-32, 19 September 2025, [url](#).

²¹⁵ HRCE, *Eritrea orders nationwide military mobilization, raising fears of renewed conflict*, 18 February 2025, [url](#); Borkena, *Eritrea mobilizes military reserves, imposes travel restrictions amid rising tensions with Ethiopia*, 21 February 2025, [url](#); Amnesty International, *The HRC should condemn forced return of Eritrean refugees*, 27 February 2025, [url](#); Clingendael, *A dangerous frenemy*, 6 March 2025, [url](#); The Guardian, *Power struggle leads to coup in Tigray as war looms between Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 21 March 2025, [url](#).

²¹⁶ HRCE, *Eritrea orders nationwide military mobilization, raising fears of renewed conflict*, 18 February 2025, [url](#); Borkena, *Eritrea mobilizes military reserves, imposes travel restrictions amid rising tensions with Ethiopia*, 21 February 2025, [url](#); BBC News Amharic, (Translated from Amharic:) *Eritrea calls up former army members for*

example of a demobilised soldier who was denied permission to leave the country due to the mobilisation measures.²¹⁷ According to Borkena, in some cases prisoners and married women with children were also called up.²¹⁸ During the current reporting period, the authorities again carried out *giffas* in the villages and towns of Eritrea with the aim of identifying conscripts and apprehending them in order to perform compulsory national service.²¹⁹ It was not clear from the sources consulted whether more *giffas* than usual took place during the reporting period. One source noted not having observed more *giffas* than usual during visits to Eritrea during the reporting period.²²⁰

The mobilisation measures described were still in force at the end of the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the Eritrean authorities also continued to employ the system whereby secondary school pupils were required to complete a year of compulsory military training in the Sawa military camp in their final school year.²²¹

3.2.2 *Compulsory civilian service*

As was the case previously,²²² compulsory national service was divided into compulsory military and civilian service, both of which fell under the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence.²²³ At the end of the final school year, which all pupils spent in the Sawa military camp, they sat a final exam. The result of that exam played an important role in their allocation to either military or civilian compulsory national service. As a rule, the pupils with the better results were deployed in civilian roles.²²⁴ One source noted a further distinction: pupils who passed the exam with the highest marks were directly assigned to civilian roles; pupils who passed with less high marks remained in Sawa and completed vocational training, usually followed by a civilian deployment; pupils who failed the exam were assigned to military roles.²²⁵

As part of compulsory civilian service, conscripts could be assigned to all kinds of roles in diverse sectors. They could be deployed at ministries or the local authorities, at schools, hospitals, the judiciary, or at companies in sectors such as development work, infrastructure, construction, agriculture or mining.²²⁶ The

training, but keeps citizens out of the country, 21 February 2025, [url](#). CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, p. 33, 19 September 2025, [url](#).

²¹⁷ BBC News Amharic, (Translated from Amharic:) *Eritrea calls up former army members for training, but keeps citizens out of the country*, 21 February 2025, [url](#).

²¹⁸ Borkena, *Eritrea mobilizes military reserves, imposes travel restrictions amid rising tensions with Ethiopia*, 21 February 2025, [url](#); Clingendael, *A dangerous frenemy*, 6 March 2025, [url](#).

²¹⁹ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 7, 7 May 2024, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²²⁰ Confidential source, 1 August 2025.

²²¹ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, pp. 10-11, 7 May 2024, [url](#); USDOL, *2023 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Eritrea*, 5 September 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, pp. 10-11, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 38, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, pp. 41-42, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

²²³ UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 7, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Arapiles, Sara, *Slave soldiers and their protection under international refugee law*, 18 June 2025, [url](#).

²²⁴ UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 7, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²²⁵ Confidential source, 30 July 2025.

²²⁶ UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 7, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Arapiles, Sara, *Slave soldiers and their protection under international refugee law*, 18 June 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

recruits themselves had no say in where they were deployed.²²⁷ One source consulted considered it likely that there were positions within compulsory civilian service that indicated particular privileges or a favoured position.²²⁸ However, no more concrete information was available on this during the reporting period.

It should be pointed out that there was no hard and fast dividing line between compulsory military and civilian service, in part because both fell under the competence of the Ministry of Defence. Military conscripts could, if it was deemed necessary, be required to perform civilian tasks – particularly in agriculture. Civilian conscripts, in turn, could be required to follow military training. It was not clear from the sources consulted whether civilian conscripts who had to follow military training were also reservists.²²⁹

The nature and conditions of activities in compulsory civilian service varied. Compulsory civilian service could involve a wide range of activities, from work in mining or agriculture to work at ministries or schools. One source indicated that generally speaking, recruits preferred to be assigned to compulsory civilian service than to compulsory military service, where conditions tended to be harsher.²³⁰ In May 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Eritrea stated that the risk of severe punishment was the same in compulsory military and civilian service.²³¹ Another source consulted confirmed that the nature and severity of disciplinary punishment did not differ significantly between compulsory military and civilian service. According to the source, the incidence of detention, ill-treatment and torture and sexual violence was the same.²³² Another source, by contrast, was of the opinion that punishment for civilian conscripts could be somewhat less severe, but emphasised that any individual engaged in compulsory national service who refused tasks or orders would be punished – often with detention.²³³ According to the same source, reservists were sometimes also called up to perform tasks in compulsory civilian service. If they refused, they could also face punishment, usually a prison term.²³⁴

3.2.3 *Evasion of compulsory national service and desertion*

As was previously the case, the Eritrean authorities punished evasion of compulsory national service and desertion severely during the current reporting period. The UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Eritrea wrote that the authorities interpreted evasion and desertion as a lack of loyalty to the regime, and hence as treason. Draft evaders and deserters faced severe punishment, including long-term detention and torture.²³⁵

The previous COI Reports noted that family members of draft evaders and deserters could also face repercussions, including interrogation, threats and imprisonment, as

²²⁷ MPI, *Severe repression in Eritrea has prompted decades of exodus*, 9 April 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 7, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²²⁸ Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²²⁹ Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

²³⁰ Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²³¹ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 7, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²³² Confidential source, 30 July 2025.

²³³ Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²³⁴ Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²³⁵ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 8, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 7, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

well as fines, the denial of government services and restriction of access to agricultural land.²³⁶ This remained the case during the reporting period.²³⁷

The UN rapporteur cited examples of family members of conscripts who were put under pressure by the authorities to induce the conscript to report for duty. If they did not, the family members might be placed in detention or evicted from their homes; in a number of cases, their houses were subsequently demolished, their crops destroyed or their livestock starved.²³⁸ The US State Department noted that the authorities seized property, homes and businesses of family members of draft evaders or confiscated their livestock, generally without appropriate restitution. According to the State Department, houses and businesses were usually given back to the owners once the family member had reported for compulsory national service. Livestock was not returned.²³⁹

Other sources consulted confirmed that family members of draft evaders could be pressured into inducing the conscripts to report for compulsory national service. Besides arrest and eviction from their homes, according to the sources this could also take the form of restricting their access to subsidised food,²⁴⁰ seizure of harvests or possessions and financial penalties.²⁴¹ It was not possible to provide a clear description of the specific situations or circumstances in which the authorities resorted to which types of repercussions or means of coercion. Two sources described this process as arbitrary.²⁴² One source added that family members of draft evaders who were known to have left the country could be subjected to the measures described above. In this case, the measures were more a punishment than a means of putting pressure on them.²⁴³

Completing compulsory national service is a condition for access to basic services in Eritrea.²⁴⁴ It was reported that if draft evaders requested access to services from the authorities, they would be required to complete compulsory national service. For example, in May 2025, the UN rapporteur noted that families only received access to subsidised food after demonstrating that all family members who were liable for compulsory national service had completed it.²⁴⁵ Four other sources consulted for this COI Report confirmed that those who evaded or refused to perform compulsory national service in Eritrea were generally unable to access government services.²⁴⁶

The sources consulted gave somewhat conflicting accounts of the opportunities for deserters and draft evaders to remain under the radar of the authorities within Eritrea for a period of years. Two sources considered it virtually impossible for such individuals to remain undetected within Eritrea for an extended period, particularly in view of the *giffas* and checkpoints, and the pressure that could be exerted on family members to trace the draft evaders.²⁴⁷ Two other sources, while accepting

²³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 41, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 46, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

²³⁷ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, p. 11, 22 April 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 8, 7 May 2024, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²³⁸ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 8, 7 May 2024, [url](#).

²³⁹ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, p. 11, 22 April 2024, [url](#).

²⁴⁰ Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²⁴¹ Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²⁴² Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 30 July 2025.

²⁴³ Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²⁴⁴ UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 7, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

²⁴⁵ UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 7, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²⁴⁶ Confidential source, 13 June 2025; Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²⁴⁷ Confidential source, 13 June 2025; Confidential source, 30 July 2025.

that it would be difficult for draft evaders to remain under the authorities' radar within Eritrea for an extended period, did consider it possible in principle. Whilst they would not be able to access government services, to some extent they would be able to count on assistance from family networks. Such individuals did not live in their own homes or with family, performed work in the informal sector, for example in agriculture or illegal mining, and had to rely on warnings from acquaintances as to when *giffas* were taking place.²⁴⁸

3.3 Freedom of expression

As in preceding reporting periods,²⁴⁹ the current reporting period saw no changes in terms of freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly in Eritrea: all three remained severely restricted.²⁵⁰

Eritrean nationals continued to be denied the right to exercise their civil and political rights. The government continued to suppress all forms of dissenting opinions, for example by means of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances of actual or supposed critics. Any behaviour that could be perceived by the government as dissenting or anti-regime, or could otherwise be interpreted as a sign of lack of loyalty, was dealt with severely.²⁵¹ Other than those cited below, the sources did not provide concrete examples of this. Nor are exact figures available for the numbers of people detained on such grounds. For instance, the fate of a group of former politicians – known under the name G-15 – who were arrested and detained in 2001 because they had called for free elections remained unknown during the reporting period. The same was true of the sixteen journalists who were arrested due to suspected links with the G-15 (see also section 3.3.2).²⁵² Former Finance Minister Berhane Abrehe, who was arrested in 2018 after publishing a book calling for democratic reforms, and who was reported in the previous COI Report as still being in detention,²⁵³ died in prison in August 2024.²⁵⁴

The authorities also arrested and detained family members of (suspected) dissidents.²⁵⁵ A well-known example was Ciham Ali Abdu, the daughter of a former minister who had allegedly been involved in preparations for a coup d'état. She was arrested in 2012, at the age of fifteen, while trying to flee to Sudan. Her fate has been unknown since then.²⁵⁶

²⁴⁸ Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²⁴⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; May 2022*, p. 46, 25 May 2022, [url](#); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, pp. 48-49, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

²⁵⁰ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 12, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2025: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 9 May 2025; UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 12, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²⁵¹ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 12, 7 May 2024, [url](#); HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#).

²⁵² OHCHR, *Dire human rights situation in Eritrea*, 28 February 2024, [url](#); Amnesty International, *Eritrea 2024*, April 2025, [url](#); BBC News, *Three decades, one leader - how Eritreans had their hopes dashed*, 20 June 2025, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025.

²⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 49, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

²⁵⁴ BBC News, *Ex-minister dies in Eritrean jail after six years without charge*, 23 August 2024, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2025: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 9 May 2025.

²⁵⁵ Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025.

²⁵⁶ Amnesty International, *Honoring an invisible struggle: International day of the victims of enforced disappearances*, 23 August 2024, [url](#); HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

The ongoing system of political persecution forced dissident voices, including journalists, human rights activists and political opposition, to practise self-censorship or flee the country. As before, there was no organised domestic opposition against the regime of President Isaias during the current reporting period.²⁵⁷ The impression emerges from the sources consulted that the ongoing repression of (supposed) dissidence was forcing Eritrean to practise a high degree of self-censorship, and a resulting lack of public expression, critical expression about society or open dialogue.²⁵⁸

3.3.1 *Domestic opposition*

As before, there was no organised domestic opposition against the regime of President Isaias during the current reporting period.²⁵⁹

However, during the reporting period, more activities than before were reported by Eritrean opposition groups outside Eritrea.²⁶⁰ The most visible example took place in January 2025, when the opposition groups EANC and *Brigade Nhamedu* convened a meeting in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and opened offices in the city (see section 1.1.2.1).²⁶¹ There was no evidence that either group had an organised presence within Eritrea.²⁶²

3.3.2 *Political activists and human rights activists*

As indicated above, during the reporting period there was no scope for civil society or political opposition in Eritrea, and neither, therefore, for political activists or human rights activists. The country had no independent NGOs and the authorities refused access to the country to foreign NGOs.²⁶³

3.3.3 *Journalists*

There was no press freedom in Eritrea during the reporting period. There were still no independent media: the Ministry of Information controlled the only operational media channels, which served as platforms for state propaganda.²⁶⁴ Media channels operated by the Eritrean diaspora barely had any reach within the country itself.²⁶⁵

²⁵⁷ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 12, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 12, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²⁵⁸ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 12, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025; Confidential source, 13 June 2025; Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

²⁵⁹ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 12, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 12, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025; Confidential source, 1 August 2025.

²⁶⁰ See, for example: Africa Intelligence, *Disunity among Eritrean Afar opposition*, 19 August 2025, [url](#).

²⁶¹ Martin Plaut, *Brigade N'Hamedu: From diaspora to Asmara*, 5 February 2025, [url](#); Clingendael, *A dangerous frenemy*, 6 March 2025, [url](#); ICG, *Ethiopia and Eritrea slide closer to war amid Tigray upheaval*, 27 March 2025, [url](#); Martin Plaut, *'Brigade nHamedu', its recently established office in Ethiopia and its objectives*, 17 April 2025, [url](#).

²⁶² Confidential source, 1 August 2025.

²⁶³ HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025; Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

²⁶⁴ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 12, 7 May 2024, [url](#); HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 13, 12 May 2025, [url](#); CIVICUS, *Civic Space still under siege in Eritrea*, 16 June 2025, [url](#).

²⁶⁵ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 13, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

In the RSF World Press Freedom Index 2025, Eritrea occupied last place – one place below North Korea.²⁶⁶

On 1 December 2024, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) registered sixteen journalists who were detained in Eritrea. Twelve of them had been detained since 2001, the other four since 2002 or 2005.²⁶⁷ They had all been arrested during crackdowns against opposition and independent media such as the G-15 (see also section 3.3).²⁶⁸ In most cases, the authorities had not filed charges since the journalists' detention and no legal proceedings had taken place. The journalists were being held in incommunicado detention and their families could obtain no information about their whereabouts or state of health.²⁶⁹ The best known among them was the Swedish-Eritrean Dawit Issak, who is generally believed to be the longest detained journalist in the world.²⁷⁰

3.3.4 Internet access and monitoring

Internet access remained very limited during the reporting period and was primarily available via a small number of internet cafes and hotels.²⁷¹ According to data from the World Bank, the percentage of the Eritrean population making use of the internet was around 20%.²⁷²

All the sources consulted in this regard stated that the authorities monitored internet use in Eritrea.²⁷³ This led to a high degree of self-censorship among Eritrean citizens, which also extended to telephone communication – which was also monitored.²⁷⁴ In addition, websites were reportedly regularly blocked, or internet cafes would be temporarily closed.²⁷⁵ Besides monitoring the content of communication media, the authorities also physically monitored internet cafes. For this reason, it was reported that many citizens avoided internet cafes.²⁷⁶ In order to gain access to an internet cafe, users had to provide identification.²⁷⁷

Because internet access and Wi-Fi were generally limited to internet cafes and hotels, where internet access and use were monitored, it was difficult for citizens to

²⁶⁶ RSF, *World Press Freedom Index 2025*, [url](#), accessed on 10 June 2025.

²⁶⁷ Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *16 Journalists Imprisoned in Eritrea; As of December 1, 2024*, [url](#), accessed on 13 August 2025.

²⁶⁸ OHCHR, *Dire human rights situation in Eritrea*, 28 February 2024, [url](#); Amnesty International, *Eritrea 2024*, April 2025, [url](#); BBC News, *Three decades, one leader - how Eritreans had their hopes dashed*, 20 June 2025, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025.

²⁶⁹ OHCHR, *Dire human rights situation in Eritrea*, 28 February 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 12, 7 May 2024, [url](#); Yohannes, Habtom, *Eritrese journalisten al 23 jaar spoorloos verdwenen omwille van het vrije woord*, 30 August 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 9, 12 May 2025, [url](#); RSF, *Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 13 August 2025.

²⁷⁰ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 5, 7 May 2024, [url](#); BBC News, *World's longest detained journalist wins rights prize*, 12 November 2024, [url](#); De Volkskrant, *Zweedse mensenrechtenprijs voor langst vastzittende journalist ter wereld: Dawit Issak. Wie is hij?*, 18 November 2024, [url](#).

²⁷¹ UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 13, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 13 June 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

²⁷² World Bank Group, *Individuals using the Internet (% of population) - Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 September 2025.

²⁷³ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, p. 15, 22 April 2024, [url](#); UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 13, 12 May 2025, [url](#); RSF, *Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 13 August 2025; Confidential source, 13 June 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²⁷⁴ UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 13, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 13 June 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

²⁷⁵ UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 13, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025.

²⁷⁶ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, p. 15, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²⁷⁷ RSF, *Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 13 August 2025.

be active online without government surveillance.²⁷⁸ There was a radio station, *Radio Erena*, that operated from France and could be received in Eritrea. Listeners had to tune in in secret.²⁷⁹ According to a survey conducted by *Deutsche Welle* in 2017, around 520,000 Eritreans listened to this station at least once per week.²⁸⁰

The authorities also kept an eye on critical views expressed by Eritreans in the diaspora. During the reporting period, there were regular reports of online intimidation against critical members of the Eritrean diaspora, and of smear campaigns directed against them.²⁸¹ In 2024, the Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Eritrea observed that these had reached an 'alarming level'.²⁸² Although sources consulted reported that there was a fear among members of the diaspora that critical views expressed online could lead to negative consequences for family members in Eritrea, no concrete examples of this were found during this research.²⁸³ For more information about the influence of the Eritrean authorities on Eritreans in the diaspora, the reader is referred to section 3.8.1.

Little was known about the screening of individuals' online activities on arrival in Eritrea. One source consulted raised the possibility that, during the return process, returnees to Eritrea could be screened for their online activities outside the country.²⁸⁴ No further information was available.

3.4 Religious groups

The Eritrean government recognises four religious groups: the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Evangelical Church and Sunni Islam. As before, members of other, non-recognised denominations were not permitted to²⁸⁵ freely practice their faith or participate in religious gatherings during the reporting period.²⁸⁶

There was no significant change to the situation regarding religious freedoms during the reporting period. In fact, the Eritrean authorities did not permit any form of civil society organisation whatsoever, and were intent on permanently preventing any loss of control over parts of the population through religion, according to a source.²⁸⁷ Adherents of both recognised and non-recognised religious denominations were subjected to arbitrary detention and intimidation, and were constantly restricted in their right to freely practice their faith.²⁸⁸ For example, the Special

²⁷⁸ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 13, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 30 July 2025.

²⁷⁹ Martin Plaut, *Radio Erena, Eritrea's rare free media, in danger of dying out*, 11 November 2024, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²⁸⁰ DW Akademie, *Impressive reach in Eritrea*, 29 November 2017, [url](#).

²⁸¹ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, pp. 10-11, 22 April 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, pp. 13-14, 7 May 2024, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025; HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, pp. 13-15, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²⁸² UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, pp. 13-14, 7 May 2024, [url](#).

²⁸³ UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

²⁸⁴ Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

²⁸⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 36, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

²⁸⁶ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), *USCIRF – Recommended countries for particular concern (CPC)*, 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 10, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024.

²⁸⁷ Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024.

²⁸⁸ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, p. 11, 7 May 2024, [url](#); HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); USCIRF, *USCIRF – CPC*, 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 10, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024.

Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Eritrea reported that the Eritrean authorities interfered with the freedom of religious groups to appoint religious leaders, provide education and disseminate religious material, communicate with citizens and communities about religious matters and set up charitable and humanitarian institutions, and with the right of parents to take responsibility for the religious and moral instruction of their children.²⁸⁹ Members of non-recognised groups were regularly apprehended during raids on prayer houses and other religious gatherings. This made participation in activities risky for members of those groups. According to the UN rapporteur, members of non-recognised religions also experienced problems finding burial places for their family members, which were reportedly often denied them.²⁹⁰

During the current reporting period, reports continued of arrests and detentions of leaders and members of both recognised and non-recognised religious groups. For instance, in January 2024, thirty evangelical Christians were apparently arrested at a children's party in Asmara, and dozens of others in May and December 2024, including children.²⁹¹ In 2024 and 2025, it was reported that approximately three to five hundred Christians had been detained.²⁹² They were said to include a number who had been detained for twenty years or more and about whose fate since then little if anything was known.²⁹³ Of the 103 Christians arrested in April 2023 mentioned in the previous COI Report,²⁹⁴ fifty remained in detention in May 2025.²⁹⁵

No information was found indicating problems between citizens belonging to the different religious groups.

3.4.1 *Jehovah's Witnesses*

In a proclamation of 25 October 1994, President Isaias stated that by refusing to participate in the referendum on Eritrea's independence and by refusing to perform compulsory national service, Jehovah's Witnesses had renounced their nationality. As a result of this continuing presidential position, Jehovah's Witnesses were still largely unable to obtain official identity documents during the current reporting period, which meant, among other things, that they could not work for the government, study at public institutions, access government services – including the provision of subsidised food – open bank accounts, or travel.²⁹⁶

During the current reporting period, reports also continued of arrests and detentions of Jehovah's Witnesses. For example, the UN rapporteur described the arrest in November 2024 of four pupils at a school who had supposedly refused to contribute to a student association affiliated to the regime, and the arrest in April 2025 of 24 believers during a religious service in a private house.²⁹⁷ In 2024 and 2025, dozens

²⁸⁹ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 12, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²⁹⁰ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, pp. 10-11, 7 May 2024, [url](#).

²⁹¹ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, pp. 10-11, 7 May 2024, [url](#); HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, pp. 10-11, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²⁹² UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, pp. 10-11, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 11, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²⁹³ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, pp. 10-11, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 11, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²⁹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 38, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

²⁹⁵ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 11, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²⁹⁶ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, p. 16, 22 April 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, pp. 10-11, 7 May 2024, [url](#); USCIRF, *Eritrea 2023 international religious freedom report*, March 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, pp. 10-11, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

²⁹⁷ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, pp. 10-11, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

more Jehovah's Witnesses were reportedly being held in detention (estimates range from forty to 64), some of them for many years.²⁹⁸

3.5 Ethnic groups

Eritrea is a multi-ethnic state with nine recognised ethnic groups: the Tigrinya (approximately 50% of the population), Tigre (30%), Saho (4%), Afar (4%), Kunama (4%), Bilen (3%), Hedareb/Beja (3%), Nara (2%) and Rashaida (1%).²⁹⁹ The Tigrinya dominate the government, economic, military, political and education sectors. Ethnic and religious minorities remained underrepresented as students in higher education and in government institutions during the current reporting period.³⁰⁰ Although Eritrean law prohibited discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin, reports of such discrimination continued.³⁰¹ However, the information found on the subject during the present investigation was limited.

In his report published in May 2023, the Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Eritrea had reflected at length on the treatment of the Afar by the authorities. He had observed discriminatory treatment of this population group in, for example, the provision of government services such as education, access to work, healthcare and humanitarian aid.³⁰² In the rapporteur's reports of 2024³⁰³ and 2025³⁰⁴, the Afar were no longer mentioned, but other sources did continue to report discriminatory treatment directed against them, for instance in accessing government services.³⁰⁵ One source added that one of the reasons for the poor treatment of the Afar was the fact that they had organised politically (outside Eritrea).³⁰⁶ Set against this, however, was the fact that the authorities often tolerated the Afar travelling back and forth between Eritrea and neighbouring countries without them having to show official documents (see also section 2.3.3).³⁰⁷

Sources also reported that other minorities could face discrimination. Those named included the Kunama and the Rashaida. One source asserted that the Kunama were not permitted to continue their traditional way of life.³⁰⁸ For example, in January 2025 a representative of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child reported the exclusion of Kunama and Afar children from certain social care programmes.³⁰⁹ The Bertelsmann Stiftung also stated in 2024 that members of minority groups felt

²⁹⁸ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, pp. 10-11, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, pp. 10-11, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024.

²⁹⁹ Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe (SFH), *Factsheet Eritrea – September 2024*, September 2024, [url](#).

³⁰⁰ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 country report – Eritrea*, p. 21, 2024, [url](#).

³⁰¹ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 country report – Eritrea*, 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UN CRC, CRC/C/SR.2850, p. 3, 22 January 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

³⁰² UN HRC, *Situation of human rights in Eritrea; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker (A/HRC/53/20)*, p. 12, 9 May 2023, [url](#); See also: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 35, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

³⁰³ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, 7 May 2024, [url](#).

³⁰⁴ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

³⁰⁵ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 country report – Eritrea*, 2024, [url](#); UN CRC, CRC/C/SR.2850, p. 3, 22 January 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 19 June 2025.

³⁰⁶ Confidential source, 19 June 2025.

³⁰⁷ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 1 August 2025; Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

³⁰⁸ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 country report – Eritrea*, 2024, [url](#); UN CRC, CRC/C/SR.2850, p. 3, 22 January 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 13 June 2025; Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

³⁰⁹ UN CRC, CRC/C/SR.2850, p. 3, 22 January 2025, [url](#).

marginalised and disadvantaged or excluded from access to government services such as education or government jobs.³¹⁰

No information was found indicating problems between citizens belonging to the different population groups.

3.6 Law enforcement and legal protection

The previous COI Report noted that it was difficult for citizens to have recourse to protection from the authorities in Eritrea, and that fair trials barely existed. The Eritrean justice system was not independent and followed guidelines drawn up by President Isaias.³¹¹

There is no reason to modify the above observation for the current reporting period. The Eritrean justice system remained inadequate to the task of enforcing and protecting the fundamental human rights of citizens.³¹² The justice system was poorly organised and a fair and timely judicial process could hardly be said to exist. In this regard, in 2024 the UN special rapporteur cited the absence of rule of law and of efficient and transparent institutions underpinning the constitutional state.³¹³ Suspects were regularly arrested, detained for several months or even years without official charge, and then released.³¹⁴ The Bertelsmann Stiftung attributed the weakness of the judicial system in part to the closure of Eritrea's only university in 2006. After this, many trained lawyers left the country.³¹⁵ Other sources, including the Enhancing Africa's Ability to Counter Transnational Crime (ENACT³¹⁶) project, added that deeply-rooted corruption and bribery within the law enforcement system also played a role.³¹⁷

One of the sources consulted specified that Eritrean citizens could call on the protection of the judicial system if they encountered problems from other citizens. According to that source, in such cases the courts acted in accordance with laws and regulations. However, this was only so in cases in which neither of the parties involved had connections within the government or the army, or paid money to influence the judicial process. The latter was allegedly often the case.³¹⁸

The same source added that it was even harder for certain religious and ethnic groups to call on the protection of the government and the judicial system. According to the source, this was particularly true for Jehovah's Witnesses, but also for members of other non-recognised religious groups (see section 3.4) and ethnic minorities such as the Kunama and Afar (see section 3.5).³¹⁹

³¹⁰ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 country report – Eritrea*, 2024, [url](#).

³¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 49, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

³¹² UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 8, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 8, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

³¹³ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 8, 7 May 2024, [url](#).

³¹⁴ Dirar, Luwam and Kibrom Tesfagabir Teweldebirhan, *Introduction to Eritrean legal system and research*, July 2023, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 country report – Eritrea*, p. 11 2024, [url](#); USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, pp. 8-9, 22 April 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 9, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 9, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025; ENACT, *Global Organized Crime Index: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 10 September 2025.

³¹⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 country report – Eritrea*, p. 11, 2024, [url](#).

³¹⁶ ENACT is an EU-funded collaborative project between the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Interpol and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

³¹⁷ ENACT, *Global Organized Crime Index: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 10 September 2025; Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

³¹⁸ Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

³¹⁹ Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

3.7 Women

3.7.1 Protection against sexual violence

In 2020, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) asserted that women and girls in Eritrea who were victims of sexual or gender-based violence had long faced obstacles in seeking redress from the law.³²⁰ The COI Report of 2023 noted that support for these victims was limited. In practice, it was observed that victims often did not report these types of violence, or seek protection from them. There was a taboo on the subject, and women who were victims of sexual violence generally kept the fact secret in order to avoid stigmatisation within the community.³²¹

Based on the sources consulted during the current reporting period, there is no reason to modify the above findings. In 2024, in its answers to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Eritrean delegation stated that according to data gathered by the national police, 195 instances of rape were reported in 2022.³²² However, these data could not be independently verified. Nor was it possible to verify to what extent reports of rape were followed by investigations and prosecution. The US State Department stated that in some cases, the authorities had arrested suspects of rape, but it did not have any information about subsequent prosecutions.³²³ Another source consulted confirmed that in certain cases, rape suspects did face criminal prosecution, as long as the rape had not taken place within the army.³²⁴

However, by far the greatest number of cases of rape reportedly took place within the army. Two sources consulted in this regard explained that in practice, it was not possible to report sexual violence perpetrated within the army or by a government official.³²⁵

Eritrean law contains no specific provisions on domestic violence.³²⁶ Rape within marriage was not a criminal offence (article 589, paragraph 1 of the Penal Code).³²⁷ The State Department claimed that the authorities rarely intervened in domestic violence.³²⁸ As in the case of sexual violence, it was reported that women often did not come forward, due in part to the stigma attached to the subject of domestic violence and a lack of confidence in the authorities.³²⁹

³²⁰ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), *Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Eritrea (CEDAW/C/ERI/CO/6)*, 10 March 2020, [url](#).

³²¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, pp. 47-48, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

³²² UN CRC, *Replies of Eritrea to the list of issues in relation to its combined fifth and sixth periodic reports (CRC/C/ERI/RQ/5-6)*, p. 8, 11 November 2024, [url](#).

³²³ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, pp. 22-23, 22 April 2024, [url](#).

³²⁴ Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

³²⁵ Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

³²⁶ CEDAW, *CEDAW/C/ERI/CO/6*, 10 March 2020, [url](#); World Bank Group, *Women, business and the law 2024: Eritrea*, 2024, [url](#); USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, pp. 22-23, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Open Doors, *Eritrea: Background information*, September 2024, [url](#); HRCE, *Eritrea: Violations of women's rights*, 8 March 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

³²⁷ Ethiopia, *The Penal Code of Ethiopia 1957 (Eritrean Transitional Penal Code)*, [url](#); USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, pp. 22-23, 22 April 2024, [url](#); HRCE, *Eritrea: Violations of Women's Rights*, 8 March 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 24 October 2025.

³²⁸ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, pp. 22-23, 22 April 2024, [url](#).

³²⁹ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, pp. 22-23, 22 April 2024, [url](#); HRCE, *Eritrea: Violations of Women's Rights*, 8 March 2025, [url](#).

3.7.2 FGM

The Eritrean authorities banned the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) in 2007 and launched public campaigns to reduce its prevalence.³³⁰ Most sources assume that the percentage of women and girls undergoing FGM has fallen sharply since then.³³¹ In January 2025, the Eritrean authorities stated that 12 of the country's 67 sub-zobas were now free from FGM, and that nationally only 2.3% of girls under the age of 5 and 4.4% of girls between the ages of 5 and 15 had undergone FGM.³³² Various NGOs presenting data on this subject based their figures on Eritrean government statistics from 2010 and the period 2016-2018. Due to the limited access of independent inspectors and organisations to Eritrea, it was not possible to independently verify the data presented by the Eritrean authorities on the prevalence of FGM.³³³ Various more recent sources still noted the incidence of FGM in Eritrea, particularly in rural areas.³³⁴

3.8 Diaspora

The reporting period was characterised by a further increase in tensions between Eritrean diaspora communities in the West, particularly across the fault line dividing proponents and opponents of the regime. The latter group (in some cases united under the name Brigade Nhamedu, see also sections 1.1.2.1 and 3.3.1) regularly sought to disrupt Eritrean festivities organised by government supporters. Since the summer of 2023, Eritrean festivals in countries including the Netherlands, Canada, Germany, Israel, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States have ended in fights between the two groups. In the Netherlands, the biggest confrontation took place in February 2024, when violence broke out between proponents and opponents of the regime at an events venue in The Hague. Several police officers were injured in the fighting.³³⁵

3.8.1 Influence of the Eritrean authorities

The Eritrean authorities continued to exert influence on Eritreans in the diaspora during the reporting period. Where possible, they suppressed critical voices, not only in Eritrea itself but also in Eritrean communities abroad. The authorities attempted to control freedom of expression within the communities, for instance by monitoring and intimidating activists, independent journalists and (suspected) political opponents, and by issuing threats against family members of those individuals still living in Eritrea (see also section 3.3.4).³³⁶

³³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 47, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

³³¹ Harvard University, FXB Center for Health & Human Rights, *Accelerating the eradication of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Eritrea*, January 2017, [url](#); UNICEF, *Case study on ending female genital mutilation in the State of Eritrea*, April 2021, [url](#); UN CRC, *Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Eritrea (CRC/C/ERI/5-6)*, 5 March 2025, [url](#).

³³² UN CRC, *CRC/C/SR.2850*, p. 2, 22 January 2025, [url](#).

³³³ Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides (OFPRA), *Erythrée: Les mutilations sexuelles féminines (MSF)*, 17 March 2025, [url](#).

³³⁴ UN CRC, *CRC/C/SR.2850*, p. 4, 22 January 2025, [url](#); OSAR, *Érythrée: mutilations génitales féminines (MGF)*, 11 January 2018, [url](#); HRCE, *Eritrea: Violations of Women's Rights*, 8 March 2025, [url](#).

³³⁵ NOS Nieuws, *Zeker vier agenten gewond bij rellen rond bijeenkomst Eritreeërs in Den Haag*, 17 February 2024, [url](#); NOS Nieuws, *'De lange arm van Eritrea': hoe een dictatuur in Afrika hier leidt tot geweld*, 19 February 2024, [url](#); BBC News, *Why Eritreans are at war with each other around the world*, 24 May 2024, [url](#).

³³⁶ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, pp. 10-11, 22 April 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, p. 13, 7 May 2024, [url](#); HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, pp. 13-15, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

The authorities reportedly maintained a network of informers within Eritrean diaspora communities.³³⁷ The informers monitored the statements and movements of persons suspected of having oppositional views and were often aware of details of their family members and home addresses.³³⁸ They could also draw up lists of individuals they were monitoring and send them to Asmara. Those who featured on such lists might be arrested if they returned to Eritrea.³³⁹ A source added that the informers were not necessarily supporters of the Eritrean regime: they might choose to pass information to the authorities because they stood to gain privileges in return, such as being able to move more easily between Eritrea and abroad.³⁴⁰

The Eritrean authorities also kept an eye on critical views expressed online by Eritreans in the diaspora. During the reporting period, there were regular reports of online intimidation against critical members of the Eritrean diaspora, and of smear campaigns directed against them.³⁴¹ In 2024, the UN rapporteur observed that these had reached an 'alarming level'.³⁴²

In both 2024 and 2025, the UN rapporteur also noted reports by members of the Eritrean diaspora that Eritrean government officials had threatened their family members in Eritrea. A number of them told the rapporteur that their family members in Eritrea had actually been subjected to intimidation and interrogation, and in some cases detention.³⁴³ Other sources consulted on the subject confirmed that intimidation by the authorities extended to family members of members of the diaspora who were living in Eritrea.³⁴⁴ In this context, one of those sources specified that the intimidation of family members in Eritrea was often not physical in nature. It often consisted of other methods – such as the revocation of a family member's permit to operate a shop, resulting in their losing income.³⁴⁵

An important component of the influence exerted by the Eritrean authorities on the diaspora remained the diaspora tax. For example, Eritrean diplomatic missions abroad might refuse to provide consular services to Eritreans who had not paid the tax.³⁴⁶ According to sources, family members in Eritrea of persons in the diaspora could also face legal and administrative obstacles if the tax was not paid. In this regard, in 2025 the Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Eritrea cited obstacles in the execution of wills, the registration of property, the extension of permits and business transactions.³⁴⁷ Other sources confirmed that failure of a family member in the diaspora to pay the tax could lead to repercussions within Eritrea.³⁴⁸

³³⁷ UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, pp. 13-15, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

³³⁸ UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#).

³³⁹ Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

³⁴⁰ Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

³⁴¹ USDOS, *Eritrea 2023 human rights report*, pp. 10-11, 22 April 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, pp. 13-14, 7 May 2024, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025; HRW, *World report 2025; Eritrea*, 17 January 2025, [url](#); UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, pp. 13-15, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

³⁴² UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, pp. 13-14, 7 May 2024, [url](#).

³⁴³ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, pp. 13-14, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UK Parliament, *TRUK0174*, March 2025 (published on 24 April 2025), [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, pp. 13-15, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

³⁴⁴ Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

³⁴⁵ Confidential source, 13 June 2025.

³⁴⁶ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, pp. 13-14, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, pp. 13-15, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 13 June 2025.

³⁴⁷ UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, pp. 13-15, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

³⁴⁸ DSP group Amsterdam & Tilburg School of Humanities, Department of Culture studies, *The 2% Tax for Eritreans in the diaspora; Facts, figures and experiences in seven European countries*, p. 115, June 2017, [url](#); Confidential source, 13 June 2025.

Two sources stated that, during the reporting period, the diaspora tax was mainly levied within Eritrea itself, on family members of Eritreans in the diaspora.³⁴⁹ According to various sources, the tax stood at 2 percent of net income.³⁵⁰ One of the sources explained that this could be viewed as a response by the Eritrean authorities to growing criticism from European governments of the system of taxing the diaspora, and increased monitoring of bank payments.³⁵¹ The sources consulted were unaware of specific risks associated with paying diaspora tax in Eritrea for a family member abroad.³⁵²

3.9 Unaccompanied minors

No recent statistics are available about unaccompanied minors in Eritrea. No new information has been gathered since the Population and Health Survey of 2010. In 2025, UNICEF wrote that approximately 45% of the Eritrean population was below the age of eighteen.³⁵³

International organisations and local NGOs were barely able to operate in Eritrea, if at all, and hence they were not able to gather data. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was responsible for the care of unaccompanied minors. In its answers to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2024, an Eritrean delegation stated that the Ministry managed one care institution for children in the country, the Asmara Child Care Center, where unaccompanied children from the whole country were cared for. There were also two 'group homes' in the country, where smaller-scale care was provided.³⁵⁴ Another source consulted confirmed that Eritrea's only reception centre for children was in Asmara, and that this centre faced a shortage of funding.³⁵⁵ In its answers to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2025, the Eritrean delegation stated that the procedure around placement in the reception centre or group home consisted of the following steps: when an unaccompanied child was found, it was reported by the community to the police. The police would take the child to the hospital for a medical check. The child would then be transferred to a reception centre, where it would remain for some time while the police established whether the child still had family that it could go to. Should this investigation produce nothing, the child would remain in the reception centre or go to a group home.³⁵⁶ However, insufficient objectively verifiable information was available to confirm how the procedures were in practice. This was also true in a general sense: there was a marked lack of information about minors in general, and more specifically about the provision of care for them.³⁵⁷ One source did indicate that minors who were refugees or asylum seekers virtually never returned to Eritrea.³⁵⁸ Another source stated that minors who did return might end up in a military camp in Bahri.³⁵⁹

³⁴⁹ Confidential source, 3 September 2025; Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

³⁵⁰ IWGIA, *The Indigenous World 2024: Eritrea*, 15 March 2024, [url](#); Eritrea Today, *Eritrean Diaspora Demographics: A Profile of Displacement and Resilience* | *Eritrea Today*, 14 November 2025, [url](#). Embassy of the State of Eritrea in Washington DC – US, *General Information*, accessed on 17 December 2025, [url](#).

³⁵¹ Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

³⁵² Confidential source, 3 September 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

³⁵³ UNICEF, *Eritrea: Annual report 2024*, p. 4, February 2025, [url](#).

³⁵⁴ UN CRC, *CRC/C/ERI/RQ/5-6*, p. 17, 11 November 2024, [url](#).

³⁵⁵ Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

³⁵⁶ UN CRC, *Summary record of the 2850th meeting (CRC/C/SR.2850)*, pp. 5-6, 22 January 2025, [url](#).

³⁵⁷ Confidential source, 17 September 2025.

³⁵⁸ Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

³⁵⁹ Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024.

4 Refugees and displaced persons

Below is a description of relevant developments relating to refugees and displaced persons.

4.1 Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers

In 2021, the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) recorded a steady increase in refugees and asylum seekers from Eritrea. The number of registered refugees under the mandate of the UNHCR rose from approximately 512,000 to approximately 551,000 between 2021 and 2024. The number of UNHCR registered asylum seekers rose from approximately 77,000 to approximately 112,000.³⁶⁰ According to an estimate by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), by 2024 some 17% of the Eritrean population had fled the country, making Eritrea one of the biggest countries of origin in terms of numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in proportion to the size of its population.³⁶¹ In 2025, the Migration Policy Institute even estimated that one third of the Eritrean population had fled the country.³⁶² Regionally, the largest numbers of Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers were registered in Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda. In Europe, the main destinations for Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers were Germany, Sweden, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.³⁶³

Refugees were also received in Eritrea itself, albeit on a small scale: in 2024, UNHCR registered 119 refugees in Eritrea falling under its mandate. The great majority of them were from Sudan.³⁶⁴

No information was known about internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Eritrea. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, an NGO affiliated with the Norwegian Refugee Council that catalogues displacement, also registered no IDPs in the country.³⁶⁵

4.1.1 Eritrean migrants in Ethiopia

In 2024 and 2025, UNHCR registered approximately 180,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Ethiopia.³⁶⁶ In 2023, the figure was approximately 165,000.³⁶⁷ A source consulted indicated that the data were probably overestimates, since many refugees and asylum seekers who left Ethiopia did not notify their departure. According to the source, the actual figure in 2025 was around 130,000.³⁶⁸ The Eritrean community in Addis Ababa, including unregistered individuals, was said to consist of around 200,000 people.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁰ UNHCR, *Refugee Data Finder*, [url](#), accessed on 5 September 2025.

³⁶¹ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, pp. 14-15, 7 May 2024, [url](#).

³⁶² MPI, *Severe repression in Eritrea has prompted decades of exodus*, 9 April 2025, [url](#).

³⁶³ MPI, *Severe repression in Eritrea has prompted decades of exodus*, 9 April 2025, [url](#); UNHCR, *Refugee Data Finder*, [url](#), accessed on 5 September 2025.

³⁶⁴ UNHCR, *Refugee Data Finder*, [url](#), accessed on 5 September 2025.

³⁶⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Eritrea; Displacement data*, [url](#), accessed on 5 September 2025.

³⁶⁶ UNHCR, *Refugee Data Finder*, [url](#), accessed on 5 September 2025; UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal: Ethiopia*, [url](#), accessed on 8 September 2025.

³⁶⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 56, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

³⁶⁸ Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

³⁶⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, p. 71, January 2024, [url](#).

Ethiopia has been an important host country for Eritreans leaving their country for many years. Before 2020, Eritreans who crossed the border were automatically granted asylum status in Ethiopia. In January 2020, the Ethiopian authorities ended that policy. In 2021, the Ethiopian authorities then stopped registering Eritrean asylum seekers in the country.³⁷⁰ Reportedly, registration resumed in 2023.³⁷¹ UNHCR also provided registrations.

According to reports, it was increasingly common for the Ethiopian authorities to impose large financial penalties on Eritrean migrants for every day they had been in the country without the required immigration documents.³⁷² In November 2024, the Europe External Programme with Africa (EEPA) reported that the daily penalty had been increased from 3 US dollars to 10 dollars per day, as a result of which fines could rise to thousands of dollars. For some Eritreans who had spent three and a half years in Ethiopia, fines had increased to around 12,000 dollars. The Ethiopian authorities would reportedly release individuals who had been arrested against an advance payment of 2,000 dollars per person, but they were not permitted to leave Ethiopia until they had paid the rest of the fine.³⁷³

In addition, the Ethiopian authorities were reportedly arresting and detaining Eritreans on a large scale. Hundreds of Eritreans had also been deported to Eritrea.³⁷⁴ The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea reported that the deported Eritreans included both registered and unregistered asylum seekers, and registered refugees. They were not permitted to go through a formal asylum procedure before deportation.³⁷⁵ Precise figures for the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers deported to Eritrea were lacking, but sources in any event refer to hundreds of individuals in late 2024 and early 2025.³⁷⁶

No specific information was available about the treatment of the category of migrants deported from Ethiopia by the Eritrean authorities.³⁷⁷ As regards the risks to returnees in general, the reader is referred to section 5.2.

4.1.2 *Eritrean migrants in Sudan*

In 2024, UNHCR registered approximately 132,000 Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers in Sudan.³⁷⁸ By late July 2025, the number had risen to approximately

³⁷⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 56, 19 December 2023, [url](#); MPI, *Severe repression in Eritrea has prompted decades of exodus*, 9 April 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

³⁷¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, p. 71, January 2024, [url](#).

³⁷² Europe External Programme with Africa (EEPA), *Situation report: Detained Eritreans in Addis Ababa required to pay high fines for release; SAF recaptured Sinja city, Sennar state; Gunfire reported from Juba*, 25 November 2024, [url](#); Addis Standard, *News: Ethiopian Immigration Service denies allegations of arbitrary fees, deportation of Eritrean nationals*, 13 December 2024, [url](#); Africa Intelligence, *Eritreans detained in Ethiopia sue for release amid tense bilateral relations*, 23 December 2024, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

³⁷³ EEPA, *Situation report*, 25 November 2024, [url](#).

³⁷⁴ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, pp. 14-15, 7 May 2024, [url](#); BBC News, *Eritrean refugees describe police crackdown in Ethiopia*, 29 November 2024, [url](#); Amnesty International, *The HRC should condemn forced return of Eritrean refugees*, 27 February 2025, [url](#); MPI, *Severe repression in Eritrea has prompted decades of exodus*, 9 April 2025, [url](#); MMC, *Where to next?*, p. 19, April 2025, [url](#); EEPA, *Situation report: Getachew Reda in process of forming a new political party; Executions by RSF in Omdurman; Round ups of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia*, 1 May 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 16, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

³⁷⁵ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, pp. 14-15, 7 May 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 16, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

³⁷⁶ Amnesty International, *The HRC should condemn forced return of Eritrean refugees*, 27 February 2025, [url](#); MPI, *Severe repression in Eritrea has prompted decades of exodus*, 9 April 2025, [url](#); MMC, *Where to next?*, p. 19, April 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 16, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

³⁷⁷ UN HRC, *A/HRC/56/24*, pp. 14-15, 7 May 2024, [url](#); Confidential source, 30 July 2025.

³⁷⁸ UNHCR, *Refugee Data Finder*, [url](#), accessed on 5 September 2025.

138,000.³⁷⁹ See section 7.7.3 of the Country of Origin Information Report on Sudan of December 2025 for more information about Eritreans in Sudan.³⁸⁰

The situation of Eritrean migrants in Sudan was also precarious during the reporting period. Many were further displaced by the ongoing war in Sudan. In particular, movements were observed from Khartoum to other provinces of Sudan and to other countries in the region, such as Ethiopia, Uganda, South Sudan and Egypt.³⁸¹

A survey by the Mixed Migration Centre in 2025 revealed that fifty percent of newly arrived Eritreans regarded Sudan as a transit country.³⁸² This category of incomers generally spent a short time in Sudan before continuing their journeys to neighbouring countries. Eritreans in transit generally made no effort to obtain official documents in Sudan. Eritreans who were attempting to build a new life in a Sudanese refugee camp or in an urban area did generally make the effort to register, according to a source consulted.³⁸³

The sources made somewhat contradictory statements about the potential risks run by unregistered Eritreans in Sudan. One source asserted that unregistered Eritreans ran the risk of exploitation.³⁸⁴ Another source observed that Eritreans did not so much run the risk of deportation but rather of being arrested and fined. According to the source, police officers had turned the practice into a 'revenue model'. For this reason, Eritreans spending an extended period in Sudan benefitted from being registered. Otherwise, they constantly ran the risk of being arrested and fined, according to the source.³⁸⁵

During the reporting period, by far the most Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers were living in the Kassala province, mainly in refugee camps. There were also several thousands living in camps in Gedaraf and Red Sea provinces.³⁸⁶

Several sources consulted observed that since the outbreak of the armed conflict in Sudan in 2023, the Sudanese authorities had been deporting Eritrean asylum seekers to Eritrea.³⁸⁷ No exact data were available. A source noted that Eritrean migrants in Sudan who paid the diaspora tax and had also demonstrated their loyalty to the Eritrean authorities in other ways were able to travel freely between Sudan and Eritrea.³⁸⁸

No specific information was available about the treatment of migrants deported from Sudan by the Eritrean authorities.³⁸⁹ As regards the risks to returnees in general, the reader is referred to section 5.2.

4.1.3 *Eritrean migrants in Uganda*

³⁷⁹ UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal: Sudan*, [url](#), accessed on 8 September 2025.

³⁸⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Sudan*, p. 107, December 2025 [url](#).

³⁸¹ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, pp. 15-16, 7 May 2024, [url](#); MPI, *Severe repression in Eritrea has prompted decades of exodus*, 9 April 2025, [url](#); MMC, *Where to next?*, pp. 35-36, April 2025, [url](#); UNHCR, *Eritrean refugees overview in Sudan*, 31 July 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

³⁸² MMC, *Where to next?*, p. 23, April 2025, [url](#).

³⁸³ Confidential source, 16 May 2025.

³⁸⁴ Confidential source, 15 July 2025.

³⁸⁵ Confidential source, 16 May 2025.

³⁸⁶ UNHCR, *Eritrean refugees overview in Sudan*, 31 July 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 22 October 2024.

³⁸⁷ MPI, *Severe repression in Eritrea has prompted decades of exodus*, 9 April 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 22 October 2024; Confidential source, 15 July 2025; Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

³⁸⁸ Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

³⁸⁹ Confidential source, 30 July 2025.

Due to the instability in Ethiopia and Sudan, the role of Uganda as a destination and transit country for Eritrean migrants increased during the reporting period.³⁹⁰ In 2024 and 2025, UNHCR registered approximately 60,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Uganda.³⁹¹

In January 2025, the Ugandan authorities decided not to accept any more asylum applications from Eritrean asylum seekers.³⁹² *Landinfo* (the Norwegian research unit for information on the countries of origin of asylum seekers) stated that applications already in progress and applications submitted by vulnerable individuals were still being considered.³⁹³ The new Ugandan policy made it more difficult for Eritrean asylum seekers to legalise their stay in Uganda.

It is not known whether the Ugandan authorities forcibly deported Eritrean migrants to Eritrea during the reporting period. Two sources consulted offered conflicting statements in this regard. The Mixed Migration Centre cited a Ugandan directive not to deport Eritreans,³⁹⁴ while another source reported that deportations were taking place.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁰ MPI, *Severe repression in Eritrea has prompted decades of exodus*, 9 April 2025, [url](#); MMC, *Where to next?*, p. 26, April 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

³⁹¹ UNHCR, *Refugee Data Finder*, [url](#), accessed on 5 September 2025; UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal: Uganda*, [url](#), accessed on 8 September 2025.

³⁹² *Landinfo, Uganda; Asylum seekers and refugees: Registration, documentation and other aspects*, p. 11, 10 February 2025, [url](#); Africa Intelligence, *Kampala quietly blocks arrival of Eritrean asylum seekers*, 10 June 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 2 July 2025.

³⁹³ *Landinfo, Uganda; Asylum seekers and refugees: Registration, documentation and other aspects*, p. 11, 10 February 2025, [url](#).

³⁹⁴ MMC, *Where to next?*, p. 28, April 2025, [url](#).

³⁹⁵ Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

5 Return

Below is a description of relevant developments regarding return to Eritrea.

5.1 Countries from which forced returns took place

No exact figures are available about the numbers of Eritrean migrants returning to Eritrea, whether voluntarily or forcibly. However, reports of the forced return of Eritrean migrants to Eritrea did appear during the reporting period. In May 2025, the Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Eritrea described deportations from Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt and Türkiye.³⁹⁶ Other sources confirmed that those four countries had forcibly removed Eritreans to Eritrea during the reporting period.

With regard to Ethiopia, section 4.1.1 above details the alleged deportation of Eritreans to Eritrea by the Ethiopian authorities during the reporting period.³⁹⁷ Amnesty International reported the deportation of 600 Eritreans between December 2024 and February 2025.³⁹⁸ No other reports provided exact figures. One source consulted asserted that all Eritreans deported from Ethiopia to Eritrea in 2024 and 2025 were regarded with suspicion by the Eritrean authorities as potential Ethiopian spies, and were therefore detained for some time following their return. By the end of the reporting period, virtually all of these returnees had been released.³⁹⁹

According to several sources consulted, Sudan had also deported Eritreans to Eritrea following the outbreak of the armed conflict in Sudan, as detailed above in section 4.1.2.⁴⁰⁰ No exact data were available.

The UN special rapporteur drew attention to the forced return of Eritreans from Türkiye in both 2024 and 2025. He described approximately 300 detentions and deportations in 2024,⁴⁰¹ and 203 deportations in 2025.⁴⁰² In August 2024, Amnesty International had documented the deportation of 180 Eritreans.⁴⁰³ The ACLED database records that these 180 individuals were detained following their arrival in Eritrea.⁴⁰⁴ No information on this was found in other sources.

Both the UN special rapporteur and the NGOs MMC and HRCE reported that Egypt also forcibly deported Eritrean migrants during the reporting period.⁴⁰⁵ In late March

³⁹⁶ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 15, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

³⁹⁷ UN HRC, A/HRC/56/24, pp. 14-15, 7 May 2024, [url](#); BBC News, *Eritrean refugees describe police crackdown in Ethiopia*, 29 November 2024, [url](#); Amnesty International, *The HRC should condemn forced return of Eritrean refugees*, 27 February 2025, [url](#); MPI, *Severe repression in Eritrea has prompted decades of exodus*, 9 April 2025, [url](#); MMC, *Where to next?*, p. 19, April 2025, [url](#); EEPA, *Situation report*, 1 May 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 16, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 8 September 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

³⁹⁸ Amnesty International, *The HRC should condemn forced return of Eritrean refugees*, 27 February 2025, [url](#).

³⁹⁹ Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

⁴⁰⁰ MPI, *Severe repression in Eritrea has prompted decades of exodus*, 9 April 2025, [url](#); MMC, *Where to next?*, p. 22, April 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 22 October 2024; Confidential source, 15 July 2025; Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

⁴⁰¹ UN HRC, *Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants (UA TUR 6/2024)*, 16 October 2024, [url](#).

⁴⁰² UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 16, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

⁴⁰³ Amnesty International, *The HRC should condemn forced return of Eritrean refugees*, 27 February 2025, [url](#).

⁴⁰⁴ ACLED, *Data export tool*, [url](#), accessed on 10 June 2025. Selected criteria: From: 01/12/2023 | To: 10/6/2025 | Event type: All | Actor type: All | Country: Eritrea.

⁴⁰⁵ HRCE, *Letter to UN High Commissioner for Refugees regarding illegal removal of Eritrean refugees in Egypt*, 5 March 2025, [url](#); MMC, *Where to next?*, p. 25, April 2025, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 16, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

2025, HRCE reported the forced return of 150 Eritreans to Eritrea. The NGO stated that the Egyptian authorities had cooperated with the Eritrean embassy to obtain documents for the deported Eritreans.⁴⁰⁶ The UN rapporteur made the same observation. The Egyptian authorities had reportedly apprehended Eritrean migrants and taken them to the Eritrean embassy in Cairo. There they were forced to sign documents stating that their return was voluntary. No specific information was available about the treatment of this category of migrants by the Eritrean authorities.⁴⁰⁷

Reports also emerged during the reporting period that Switzerland had for some time been intending to deport asylum seekers who had exhausted all legal avenues to Eritrea. However, the Swiss authorities did not actually carry out any deportations.⁴⁰⁸

5.2 Risks on return

There was no evidence that the situation of returning Eritrean migrants differed significantly from the situation described in the previous COI Report.⁴⁰⁹ The information obtained during the current reporting period was limited and anecdotal, and as such provides a comparatively incomplete view. Few of the sources consulted were aware of details about the treatment of migrants returning to Eritrea. Returnees were also not monitored by national or international NGOs.⁴¹⁰

A widely shared observation among the sources consulted is that persons of conscription age who returned to Eritrea and had not obtained an exemption would be sent for compulsory national service. Whether their return was forcible or voluntary in itself made no difference (although there were exceptions; see section 5.2.2).⁴¹¹ Most sources linked this to the increased tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which resulted in an ongoing need for recruits by the EDF.⁴¹² Two sources indicated that during the current reporting period, returnees above the age of 55, as well as younger returnees, could be required to perform compulsory national service, or to resume their national service.⁴¹³

Sources also shared the view that, as in other areas, there was a high degree of arbitrariness and inconsistency in the treatment of returning migrants. For example, in some cases, having paid the diaspora tax or being in possession of 'diaspora status' offered protection against prosecution, whereas in other cases it apparently did not.⁴¹⁴ A source consulted also confirmed the observation in the previous COI

⁴⁰⁶ HRCE, *Egypt secretly deporting Eritrean refugees to persecution and death*, 21 March 2025, [url](#).

⁴⁰⁷ UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 16, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

⁴⁰⁸ Info Migrants, *Switzerland: Renewed push to deport rejected Eritrean asylum applicants*, 24 August 2024, [url](#); Swissinfo.ch, *Swiss development aid to Eritrea is cut after asylum tensions*, 3 February 2025, [url](#); Brussels Signal, *Switzerland ends aid to Eritrea over refusal to take back asylum seekers*, 4 February 2025, [url](#).

⁴⁰⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, pp. 58-64, 19 December 2023, [url](#); Amnesty International, *Turkey: Eritreans at imminent risk of forced return*, 6 September 2024, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 17, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024: Eritrea*, [url](#), accessed on 12 August 2025.

⁴¹⁰ See for example also: CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea: Mobilisatie na de oorlog in Tigray*, p. 36, 19 September 2025, [url](#).

⁴¹¹ Belloni, Milena and Georgia Cole, 'Return and retreat in a transnational world: Insights from Eritrean case,' in: *Refuge*, volume 38, number 1, p. 141, 29 April 2022, [url](#); UN HRC, A/HRC/59/24, p. 17, 12 May 2025, [url](#); CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea*, pp. 35-36, 19 September 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 8 September 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

⁴¹² Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

⁴¹³ Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 31 July 2025.

⁴¹⁴ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea*, p. 35, 19 September 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 19 June 2025.

Report⁴¹⁵ that loyal supporters of the regime with connections within the government generally ran less risk upon their return than persons who lacked such connections.⁴¹⁶

On the other hand, some factors reportedly increased the risks upon return. Those said to be at greater risk were: persons who had left Eritrea while performing the military component of compulsory national service,⁴¹⁷ persons who had taken part in anti-regime activities abroad⁴¹⁸ and supporters of non-recognised religious denominations.⁴¹⁹

5.2.1 *Forced return*

In May 2025, the Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Eritrea stated that he had received information from multiple sources indicating that forcibly returned Eritreans were subjected to interrogation, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and conscription for national service of indefinite duration following their arrival in Eritrea. The rapporteur emphasised the risks of forced return, also in the light of documented cases of torture and extreme conditions during detention and compulsory national service. However, in the report of May 2025 he made no distinction between returnees with particular profiles, between returnees who returned with different documents or between returnees who had left Eritrea legally or illegally.⁴²⁰

Amnesty International noted that the Eritrean authorities regarded applying for asylum abroad as a form of treason, deserving of punishment.⁴²¹ In this regard, Amnesty International cited examples including arbitrary detention and ill-treatment. Anyone forcibly returned to Eritrea could be detained, according to Amnesty International. The UN rapporteur stated that in many cases, forced return was followed by detention or compulsory national service.⁴²² A source claimed that returnees who left Eritrea during their military service would be viewed as traitors and potentially faced more severe punishment.⁴²³ Another source asserted that returnees who had completed military service and then left Eritrea were regarded as traitors.⁴²⁴ Other sources also identified arrest and detention, in particular, as the greatest risks upon forced return.⁴²⁵ It was not possible to make a general pronouncement about the duration of detention of deported Eritreans who were detained on their return. One source consulted stated that all Eritreans deported by Ethiopia in 2024 and 2025 had been detained for some time, after which virtually all had been released.⁴²⁶ Another source indicated that returnees who had left the country while performing compulsory military service were often detained for several months after their return – and were subsequently assigned to military units

⁴¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 61, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

⁴¹⁶ Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

⁴¹⁷ Confidential source, 3 September 2025; Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

⁴¹⁸ Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

⁴¹⁹ Confidential source, 19 June 2025.

⁴²⁰ UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 17, 12 May 2025, [url](#).

⁴²¹ Amnesty International, *Eritrea 2024*, April 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 3 September 2025; Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

⁴²² Amnesty International, *Turkey: Eritreans at imminent risk of forced return*, 6 September 2024, [url](#); Stockholm Center for Freedom, *Turkish authorities forcibly deport 300 Eritreans despite high risk of human rights violations: UN special rapporteurs*, 17 December 2024, [url](#).

⁴²³ Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

⁴²⁴ Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

⁴²⁵ Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025; Confidential source, 8 September 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

⁴²⁶ Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

again.⁴²⁷ The Belgian organisation Cedoca spoke to representatives of the Eritrean Ministry of Foreign Affairs in early 2025, who denied the detention of returnees; they claimed that they regarded asylum seekers abroad as economic migrants and did not specifically punish them.⁴²⁸

5.2.2 *Voluntary return*

Eritreans living abroad regularly travelled back to Eritrea, often for temporary visits.⁴²⁹ The impression that emerges from the sources consulted is that the individuals in question were generally those with so-called 'diaspora status' and the associated 'seven year card.' They had fulfilled the requirements made of Eritreans abroad by the Eritrean authorities, such as payment of the diaspora tax. In this way, these individuals had demonstrated their loyalty to the authorities (see also section 2.1.8).⁴³⁰ Persons with diaspora status and the seven year card were exempt from compulsory national service and the requirement to apply for an exit visa (see section 2.3.2.1), and could enter and leave the country freely during the period of validity of the card.⁴³¹ Generally speaking, these individuals were able to visit Eritrea without encountering problems with the authorities.⁴³² However, the visits must be temporary; if they settled in the country permanently, they would become liable for compulsory national service.⁴³³ It was not clear what the exact boundary between 'temporary' and 'permanent' was. One source put the boundary at several months.⁴³⁴ According to Cedoca, representatives of the Eritrean authorities had referred to a period of three years.⁴³⁵

However, as in other areas, the arbitrariness and inconsistency that characterised the actions of the Eritrean authorities meant that even possession of diaspora status or a seven year card did not completely assure returnees of an unmolested stay in the country.⁴³⁶ One source cited the example of an Eritrean who had left the country legally with an exit visa, subsequently lived abroad for years, paid the diaspora tax and came to Eritrea on a family visit in possession of diaspora status, only to be arrested and held in long-term detention.⁴³⁷

During the period of the present research, no specific information was found about potential risks faced by Eritreans who returned to Eritrea voluntarily but no longer had the passport containing the exit visa with which they had left the country.

5.2.3 *Legal or illegal exit*

The previous COI Report stated that Eritreans who had left the country illegally could, in principle, return safely if they had obtained diaspora status during their

⁴²⁷ Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

⁴²⁸ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea*, p. 36, 19 September 2025, [url](#).

⁴²⁹ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea*, pp. 37-39, 19 September 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

⁴³⁰ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea*, pp. 37-39, 19 September 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025.

⁴³¹ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea*, p. 37, 19 September 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁴³² Belloni and Cole, 'Return and retreat,' p. 141, 29 April 2022, [url](#); CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea*, pp. 37-39, 19 September 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

⁴³³ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea*, p. 38, 19 September 2025, [url](#).

⁴³⁴ Confidential source, 1 October 2025.

⁴³⁵ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea*, p. 38, 19 September 2025, [url](#).

⁴³⁶ See, for example: CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea*, pp. 37-39, 19 September 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 19 June 2025.

⁴³⁷ Confidential source, 19 June 2025.

stay abroad. Persons who had left the country illegally and returned without diaspora status risked detention, ill-treatment and being sent back into compulsory national service.⁴³⁸ Leaving Eritrea without a valid exit visa was punishable by up to five years in prison, a fine of 10,000 Birr or a combination of the two.⁴³⁹

There is no reason to amend the above as regards the current reporting period. In September 2025, Cedoca wrote that many sources consulted had no recent information about the treatment of returnees following illegal exit from the country or evasion of compulsory national service or desertion. Such risks were difficult to determine, in part because few individuals in this category returned. One source consulted by Cedoca stated that illegal exit and desertion were not punished in themselves, but that such persons were rehabilitated after their return (a process lasting approximately a month) and had to perform compulsory national service. Cedoca also noted that returning to Eritrea following a legal exit did not necessarily insure the returnee against problems. For instance, if the migrant had applied for asylum abroad having left the country legally, this was a clear risk factor (see also section 5.2.1).⁴⁴⁰

Three other sources added that returning to Eritrea following a legal exit was safer and that individuals were often able to return without problems.⁴⁴¹

Two other sources consulted stated that there was no clear difference between the treatment of returning persons who had left the country legally and those who had left the country illegally. Important factors were the purpose for which the person had travelled abroad (for example, to apply for asylum) and whether the returnee had left Eritrea during compulsory national service (which could be viewed as a form of treason).⁴⁴²

5.2.4 Access to government services

Article 37 of Proclamation number 82/1995 stipulates that leaving Eritrea at conscription age in order to evade compulsory national service is punishable by withdrawal of the right to a trading licence or visa, the right to lease land and the right to work.⁴⁴³

The previous COI Report stated that in principle, all Eritrean citizens had the right to access government services, including returnees, but that this right could be restricted. This applied, for example, to people who had not performed compulsory national service, who had not paid the diaspora tax or had made negative statements about the government.⁴⁴⁴ No contrary or additional information about this state of affairs was found during the current reporting period.

Section 3.2.3 of the present COI Report noted that completing compulsory national service was a condition for access to certain basic services in Eritrea, such as the

⁴³⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, pp. 60-61, 19 December 2023, [url](#).

⁴³⁹ Government of 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*, January 1994, [url](#).

⁴⁴⁰ CGRS/Cedoca, *COI Focus Eritrea*, pp. 35-36, 19 September 2025, [url](#).

⁴⁴¹ Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 3 September 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

⁴⁴² Confidential source, 22-23 October 2024; Confidential source, 8 September 2025.

⁴⁴³ Government of Eritrea, *Proclamation No. 82/1995; Proclamation of national service*, 23 October 1995, [url](#).

⁴⁴⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea; December 2023*, p. 62, 19 December 2023.

provision of subsidised food.⁴⁴⁵ From this it follows that returnees of conscription age had to perform compulsory national service before they could gain access to those government services. It was not possible to establish specifically which government services this applied to during the reporting period.

Whether returnees were given back possessions they had lost after their return was not determined within the time frame of the present research.

⁴⁴⁵ UN HRC, *A/HRC/59/24*, p. 7, 12 May 2025, [url](#); Confidential source, 19 June 2025; Confidential source, 30 July 2025; Confidential source, 31 July 2025; Confidential source, 27 October 2025.

6 Appendices

6.1 Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
EANC	Eritrean Afar National Congress
EDF	Eritrean Defence Forces
EEPA	Europe External Programme with Africa
ENACT	Enhancing Africa's Ability to Counter Transnational Crime
FGM	Female genital mutilation
HRCE	Human Rights Concern Eritrea
MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
NCCE	New Civil Code of Eritrea
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PFDJ	People's Front for Democracy and Justice
RSF	Reporters sans frontières (Reporters Without Borders)
RCF	Residence clearance form
SEM	Staatssekretariat für Migration
TCC	Transitional Civil Code
ToR	Terms of Reference
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UN CRC	United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN HRC	United Nations Human Rights Council

6.2 Public sources

6.2.1 Reports and publications

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- Eritrea 2024, April 2025, [url](#)

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- 'The right to exit as national and transnational governance: The case of Eritrea,' in: International Migration, volume 63, issue 1, November 2022, [url](#)

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- Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Eritrea (CRC/C/ERI/5-6), 5 March 2025, [url](#)

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6.2.2 *News sources*

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Al Jazeera	Horn Observer
BBC News	NOS Nieuws
BBC Monitoring	Reuters
BNE Intellinews	Swissinfo.ch
Borkena	The Guardian
Brussels Signal	The Habesha
Deutsche Welle	Voice of America
De Volkskrant	

6.2.3 *Websites*

ACLED: Data export tool	url
Bertelsmann Stiftung: BTI Transformation Index	url
Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)	url
Council on Foreign Relations (CFR): Global conflict tracker	url
Dankalia	url
ENACT: Global Organized Crime Index	url
Freedom House: Freedom in the world 2025	url
Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre	url
Martin Plaut	url
Open Doors	url
Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index	url
RSF: Eritrea	url
UNHCR: Refugee Data Finder	url
UNHCR: Operational Data Portal (Ethiopia)	url
UNHCR: Operational Data Portal (Sudan)	url
UNHCR: Operational Data Portal (Uganda)	url
UNICEF: Data (Eritrea)	url
World Bank Group	url

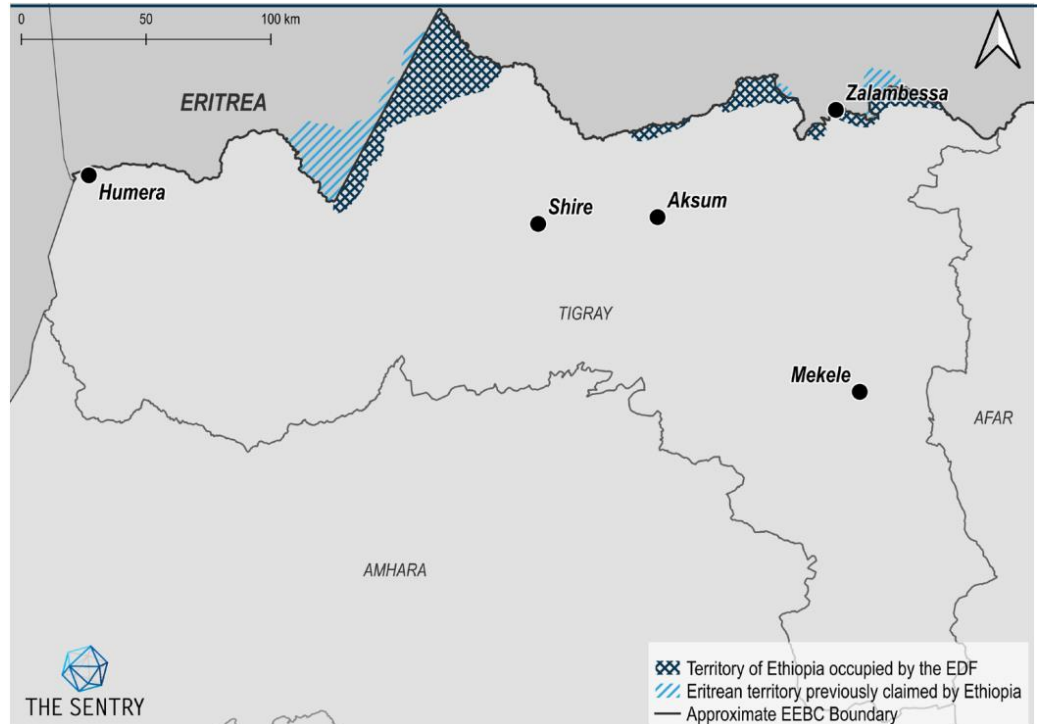
6.3 Maps

6.3.1 Map of Eritrea



The boundaries and names on this map and the designations used should not be construed as an endorsement or acceptance thereof by the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

6.3.2 Map of Tigray, Ethiopia



The above map shows the Ethiopian territory in Tigray occupied by the EDF in late 2024. The boundaries and names on this map and the designations used should not be construed as an endorsement or acceptance thereof by the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Source: The Sentry, *Power and plunder; The Eritrean Defense Forces intervention in Tigray*, p. 18, June 2025, [url](#).