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Rapid fragility and migration assessment for Eritrea

Rapid Literature Review
February 2016

About this report

This report is based on 18 days of desk research and provides a short synthesis of the literature on fragility and migration in relation to Eritrea. It was prepared for the European Commission's Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace, © European Union 2016. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, and do not represent those of the European Commission, the GSDRC or the partner agencies of the GSDRC.

The authors wish to thank Jason Mosley (independent consultant) and Nicole Hirt (GIGA Institute of African Affairs, Hamburg), who provided expert input.

The authors also extend thanks to Shivit Bakrania (University of Birmingham), who acted as peer reviewer for this report, and Ed Laws (independent consultant), who assisted with compiling data and statistical information.

This paper is one of a series of fragility and migration assessments. Others in the series are:

- Avis, W. & Herbert, S. (forthcoming 2016). *Rapid fragility and migration assessment for Somalia*. (Rapid Literature Review). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.
- Carter, B. & Rohwerder, B. (2016). *Rapid fragility and migration assessment for Ethiopia*. (Rapid Literature Review). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.
- Strachan, A.L. (2016). *Rapid fragility and migration assessment for Sudan*. (Rapid Literature Review). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

See http://www.gsdrc.org/gsdrc_pub_type/literature-reviews/

Suggested citation

GSDRC (2016). *Rapid fragility and migration assessment for Eritrea* (Rapid Literature Review). Birmingham: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

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Executive summary

Key facts

- As of June 2015, 383,869 refugees and 60,157 asylum seekers originated from Eritrea (UNHCR Eritrea, 2015).
- No Eritreans were recorded as forcibly displaced in 2015 (UNHCR Eritrea, 2015).
- The top European countries receiving the largest number of Eritrean asylum applications in 2014 were Germany (13,255), Sweden (11,530), Switzerland (6,920), the Netherlands (3,910), the UK (3,300), Norway (2,880) and Denmark (2,275) (EC, 2015d; see Appendix 1).
- Sudan is currently thought to host 108,000 Eritrean refugees, although the UN Refugee Agency estimates that 80 per cent of new arrivals stay only temporarily in Sudan (UNHCR Sudan, 2015). UNHCR (2016) estimates that there are currently 155,000 Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia.
- Freedom House (2015) awarded Eritrea a score of 1 out of a possible 40 for Political Rights and Civil Liberties. Eritrea scored no points for Associational and Organisational Rights; Freedom of Expression and Belief; Political Pluralism and Participation; and Electoral Process.
- Outdated figures on remittances to Eritrea estimate that they constitute around one third of the country's gross domestic product (Fessehazion, 2005; IFAB, 2006).
- In 2013, official development assistance and official aid received by the Eritrean government was \$83.6 million (World Bank, 2015b).

Eritreans have fled the country in large numbers since the 1960s as a result of war, poverty and a lack of freedom. The 30-year long Independence war produced a diaspora of over a million people, mostly based in Sudan, the Middle East, Europe and the US. Significant numbers displaced during this war returned after Independence in 1993 and throughout the remainder of the 1990s.

The border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia from 1998 to 2000 resulted in a further mass displacement of Eritreans to Sudan, and the expulsion from Ethiopia to Eritrea of approximately 75,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean descent. The cessation of these hostilities resulted in significant numbers of these newly displaced returning almost immediately to Eritrea's western lowlands. The growing suppression of rights within Eritrea since 2001 has resulted in a year-on-year increase in the numbers of refugees in Sudan and in Ethiopia. A significant proportion of these individuals leaving Eritrea consider Europe their ultimate destination.

Eritrean asylum applicants are usually granted some form of protection, such as refugee status or subsidiary protection. Eurostat reports that 89 per cent of Eritrean asylum applicants were recognised in the European Union (EU)-28 in 2014 (EC, 2015d).

Migration trends from Eritrea are unlikely to change in the near and medium term. Migration from the country is driven primarily by indefinite national service; the suppression of political, economic and social rights; and the absence of private economic opportunities. Opposition parties are not permitted to operate within Eritrea, resulting in significant restrictions on freedom of speech. Discrimination amounting to persecution on the grounds of religion, ethnicity and political opinion constitute accepted reasons for Eritreans to claim asylum. There is no

evidence of civil conflict within Eritrea, and the country is not noted as being vulnerable to the outbreak of violence or conflict.

Migrants leaving Eritrea are mostly men below the age of 40, although there is a notable percentage of women in this age category too. Reports suggest that, as a result of young people being drafted into national service from the final year of secondary school, a large number of Eritreans leaving are unaccompanied minors. Considering national and regional contexts, these trends are not likely to change in the near future.

The Eritrean government enforces strict emigration rules, which severely limit the possibilities for citizens to leave the country legally. Irregular emigration is harshly punished by detention, and death in some cases. Whereas asylum seekers are condemned as traitors, the Eritrean state attempts to maintain a tight economic and political relationship with members of the diaspora, such as through the 2 per cent development and recovery diaspora tax. Serious concerns about the treatment of returnees have generally prevented the deportation of Eritreans.

Remittances have been estimated to constitute around one third of national gross domestic product as well as a significant proportion of private household income. Although there is no evidence on how the government uses money from abroad, research suggests individuals often use remittances to subsidise livelihoods, subsistence costs and considerable financial outlays, such as the costs of education.

There is no clear evidence of state interventions to change the rules of national service, to reform the labour market or to increase the political and civil rights of Eritrean citizens. Unless these root causes of migration are addressed, asylum flows from Eritrea are not likely to decrease in the near future.

Continued international engagement with Eritrea, both financially and diplomatically, appears essential to address economic decline and regional isolation. According to some analysts, engagement on issues concerning external relations and economic and social stability may prove more successful if the EU does not simultaneously attempt to mediate on the border issue between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Development assistance aimed at technical solutions – such as the energy and transport sectors – appears unlikely to significantly change migration patterns in the absence of sustained dialogue with the country's leadership over reform to Eritrea's political system, economic governance (specifically limitations on private enterprise) and national service requirements. Even if the main drivers of migration are addressed (mainly the rules of national service), predictions based on socioeconomic scenarios of the region do not envisage an inversion of migration trends.

Figures on Eritrean migrants remain limited in quantity and quality, not least because of the difficulties involved in registering the on-going flow of Eritreans leaving the country. Official reports often rely on unverifiable information collected from the Eritrean diaspora, migrants and refugees, and regional experts. Moreover, statistical data on the country and its economy is often outdated and unreliable. It should be noted that there has not been a national census in Eritrea since 1994, and current estimates of the population size range from 5.1 million in 2014 (World Bank, 2015b) to 6.5 million in 2015 (CIA, 2015). Very little research is conducted within the country, and data from international organisations within Eritrea is often collected by national staff through government-controlled channels. An attempt is made in this report to document the range of quantitative data on Eritrea when significant discrepancies have arisen.

1. General background

1.1 Colonial history

Eritrea was first colonised by the Italians in 1889 (Negash, 1987) and was placed under British Military Administration in 1941 (Ellingson, 1977). In 1952, it became a federal unit of Ethiopia, prior to being formally annexed by Ethiopia in 1962. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) (led by current leader President Isaias Afwerki) liberated the country in May 1991. Eritrea's full Independence was achieved after a referendum in 1993. Eritrea and Ethiopia maintained open borders and a shared currency until November 1997, when their relationship deteriorated significantly. In May 1998, war was declared between the two states (see Section 3.4).

Eritrea maintains a limited though potentially expanding relationship with Italy. In 2001, Italy's ambassador to Eritrea was made *persona non grata*, most likely for criticising the ruling party's crackdown on political dissent and freedom of the press and for Italy's support to Ethiopia during the border conflict (Novati, 2008, p.53). Recent evidence, including a diplomatic visit by the Italian minister of foreign affairs in 2014, suggests attempts by Italy to re-engage with Eritrea, given that many of the migrants arriving in Italy are Eritrean (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014).

1.2 Economy

Eritrea's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2013 was estimated at \$3,438 million in current US dollars (UN Data, 2013). Economic growth (real GDP growth) is projected at 2.1 per cent in 2015, constituting a small acceleration from the 2.0 per cent recorded in 2014 (African Economic Outlook, 2015). The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA, 2015) estimated that GDP growth in 2014 was at 1.7 per cent and GDP per capita in the same year was \$1,200. Growth is attributed to government strategies that have promoted new economic activity and increased investment in the mining sector. African Economic Outlook (2015) forecasts that the country's current account balance will possibly deteriorate to negative figures in 2015 and 2016, owing to a reduction in the number of individuals paying the 2 per cent development and recovery tax (herein the 'diaspora tax') and decreases in voluntary remittances.

African Economic Outlook (2015) breaks the current GDP composition into services (59.9 per cent); non-manufacturing (17.3 per cent); agriculture, hunting, forestry and fisheries (16.9 per cent); and industry (5.9 per cent). The CIA (2015) alternatively breaks it down into agriculture (12.3 per cent), industry (28.7 per cent) and services (59 per cent), with 80 per cent of the population employed in agriculture and 20 per cent in industry and services. The main industries are food processing, beverages, clothing and textiles, light manufacturing, salt and cement (ibid.). Eritrea's top five exports in 2015 were fish; coral; sesame seeds; cucumbers and gherkins; and goat or kid skin leather (WITS, 2015). The country's top five export partners in 2015 (in descending order) were Sudan, Singapore, Italy, the Netherlands and India. The top five import partners in 2015 (in descending order) were the US, the UAE, Italy, Saudi Arabia and India (ibid.).

1.3 Eritrea's fragilities

Eritrea is one of the most fragile states in the world, particularly in terms of access to justice for all; effective, accountable and inclusive institutions; resilience to social, economic and environmental shocks; and economic foundations. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2015) projects that no significant progress will be made in building institutions by the year 2030. The Fragile States Index, compiled by the Fund for Peace (2015), places Eritrea in the 'alert' category, noting that the country's fragility over the past

decade has undergone 'significant worsening'. Eritrea ranked in the bottom quintile in The Brookings Institution's (2008) rankings for social welfare, gross national income (GNI) per capita, economic strength and political status.

Eritrea's geographic context heightens fragility, with several neighbouring countries recently experiencing leadership struggles or conflicts (see Section 2.4). In 2011, Eritrea reintegrated into the African Union and began reactivating its membership of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

The country lacks any viable plan for transitional arrangements were President Isaias to step down or die. The International Crisis Group (ICG, 2013, p. i) states that, 'Since the state lacks any institutional mechanisms for peaceful transition of power or even a clearly anointed successor, instability is to be expected, with the corrupt army the likely arbiter of who will rule next.' Mosley (2014) has suggested that there is 'no guarantee' that a change of leadership in Eritrea would lead to a 'significantly different foreign policy' (p.1).

1.4 International relations

Eritrea's most significant international conflict occurred between 1998 and 2000 with Ethiopia. Causes included ideological disagreements, the indeterminacy of the shared border and fiscal policy (Mengisteab, 2009). The last round of fighting in May 2000 caused 90,000 Eritreans to flee to Sudan, and anywhere between 600,000 (NRC, 2005) and 1.1 million (USCR, 2001) individuals to become internally displaced between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The continuing impasse over border demarcation with Ethiopia is widely cited as having contributed heavily to political repression within Eritrea (Mosley, 2014). The Eritrean government maintains it is unprepared to decommission its defences until the international community enforces the ruling of the Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission on Ethiopia, which has not respected the Commission's recommendations. In March and May 2012, Ethiopia made military incursions into Eritrea (ICG, 2013).

From 1994 to 2006, Sudan and Eritrea accused each other of supporting each other's rebel groups and opposition politicians, resulting in periodic tensions. However, in the past three years, the countries' presidents have collaborated on infrastructural projects, energy provision and trade and commerce (Sudan Tribune, 2015). Sudan remains a key ally for Eritrea, given Eritrea's hostile relations with all its other neighbours, and it provides many vital resources to Eritrea overland, not least oil (The Economist, 2014).

Eritrea has been accused of supporting warring factions in other countries, most notably Somalia. Sanctions were imposed on Eritrea in 2009 'over its role in Somalia' and 'refusal to withdraw troops following conflict with Djibouti' (UNSC, 2009). The sanctions stipulated an arms embargo, travel restrictions and asset freezes. The arms embargo was extended again in October 2015, justified in part by the UN Security Council (UNSC) not wishing to lift sanctions for a country that it had not been allowed to visit. The Eritrean government contests these sanctions on the grounds that there has been no evidence of its alleged support for Al-Shabaab and that it still awaits Qatari mediation of the 2008 dispute between it and Djibouti (UNSC, 2015a). The Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea states that they 'found no evidence that Eritrea was supporting Al-Shabaab' (UNSC, 2015b, p.3).

Yemen and Eritrea fought a territorial dispute over the Hanish Islands in December 1995. International arbitration proved successful in concluding this conflict (Lefebvre, 1998; Stansfield, 2001). More recently, Eritrea has been involved with the conflict in Yemen, providing the Saudi-led Arab coalition with access to its port, airspace and territorial waters (Stratfor, 2015; UNSC, 2015a). There is also 'credible evidence' that Eritrean soldiers are fighting with this coalition in Yemen (UNSC, 2015a, p.3). It is speculated that their involvement is in exchange for fuel and financial compensation, which could be in violation of the sanctions regime against Eritrea if funds are diverted to the military. Eritrea is also accused of supporting the Houthi Rebels (UNSC, 2015a), which illustrates to some extent its inconsistent foreign policy (Reid, 2009). It is widely reported that the UAE has leased the port of Assab, in southeast Eritrea, for 30 years, and that Eritrean authorities have signed a 'security and military partnership

agreement' with Saudi Arabia (UNSC, 2015a). Recent strategic partnerships with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and by association with countries such as the US, which are also supporting this coalition in Yemen, suggest an attempt by Eritrea to reduce its isolation by re-establishing diplomatic relationships.

1.5 Political context

Since 1994, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) has been the sole political party within Eritrea. The party emerged from the former EPLF, the main faction involved in the liberation struggle (1961-1991). The PFDJ had widespread domestic and international support throughout the 1990s but two coup-like incidents after 2000 are notable. In 2001, a group of prominent politicians and advocates – all of whom had once been pro-PFDJ – signed an open letter criticising the government's failure to implement the Constitution, convene any of the Central and National Councils and hold democratic elections. Eleven of the 15 members of this group were arrested in September 2001, and reports suggest nine of those arrested have since died in custody (Amnesty International, 2015).

On 21 January 2013, approximately 200 disaffected soldiers reportedly seized control of the Ministry of Information in Asmara. These soldiers forced the director of the state-run media service to read a list of their demands, which included implementation of the Constitution and the release of political prisoners. The 'mutiny' resulted in no direct political change, but some suggest it illustrated 'widespread disaffection within the military, the gradual erosion of the authority of high-ranking officers and the increase in serious breaches of discipline' (Mesfin, 2013).

There is no evidence to suggest diasporic groups pose a significant threat to the PFDJ's leadership. Much of their mobilisation occurs online (Bernal, 2006a) and within both the pro- and the anti-PFDJ camps it is highly factionalised. The diaspora has coordinated some subversive activities within Eritrea, such as the Freedom Friday movement and its underground newspaper (Estefanos, 2013). There is no evidence that these small-scale activities are likely to result in any major political upheavals, however, because of 'the opposition's disunity and failure to organize joint campaigns' (Hirt & Mohammad, 2013, p.3).

1.6 Recent shocks affecting Eritrea's stability

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) website has no data for Eritrea but reports 'the worst drought in more than 50 years' in areas of Ethiopia bordering Eritrea (2015). Poor rainfall throughout 2015 is recorded as having severely depressed agricultural production. This suggests FEWS NET predictions for a 'crisis' phase of acute food insecurity for early 2016 in parts of eastern Ethiopia may well be experienced in rural parts of Eritrea too. Eritrea is noted as being 'particularly vulnerable to climate change' because 'current adaptive capacity is low and the country has Africa's highest level of food insecurity, accompanied by high levels of malnutrition' (Adaptation Fund, 2011).

Regarding economic shocks, Libya's collapse is noted as having reduced the country's access to fuel as, since 2004, a Libyan state oil company has held a majority share in Eritrea's gasoline distribution network (Eritrea Daily, 2004). Eritreans attribute the increasing unreliability of electricity within the country to this.

Continuing UN sanctions have had a large impact on Eritrea's economy and arguably have worsened people's living conditions. Some scholars believe sanctions alerted diasporic Eritreans to the PFDJ's support of armed insurgencies, resulting in a decrease in individuals' willingness to pay the diaspora tax. Generally, sanctions are evaluated as having 'been successful in diminishing Eritrea's role as a regional spoiler, but their impact on facilitating regime change has been indirect at best' (Hirt & Mohammad, 2013, p.25).

2. The economics and politics underlying migration

2.1 Labour market in Eritrea

Seventy per cent of Eritrea's population is engaged in agriculture or fishing as a primary livelihood (African Economic Outlook, 2015). The contribution of agricultural production to GDP is disproportionately low as a result of environmental factors, low levels of mechanisation, low profit margins and continuing inter-state fragility (ibid.). A total of 78.7 per cent of the population aged 15 or older are employed, and the labour force participation rate for individuals in the same age category is 84.8 per cent (80.0 per cent for females and 89.8 per cent for males).¹ Meanwhile, 77.4 per cent of those working are classified as 'working poor' with a purchasing power parity of \$2 per day (UNDP, 2015).

The private sector is limited mainly to trade and services, and is affected by limitations on access to hard currency (African Economic Outlook, 2015). In 2015, the PFDJ issued a new currency to fight the black market (primarily people smuggling and money changing), to reduce inflation, to increase the currency in circulation (as rumours suggested the banks were running out of currency) and to fight corruption and contraband (Awate, 2015).

Most young people are employed in the national service, whether in military or civilian jobs. During the initial training period, an individual may earn 150 nakfa (around \$10) per month (EASO, 2015; UN COI, 2015). The most common salary for national service recruits is 500 nakfa (\$33) per month (US Department of State, 2014). Some higher-ranking army officers may earn up to 3,000 nakfa per month, and well-paid civilian roles vary between 700 and 1,500 nakfa per month, with professions such as medicine rewarded with the higher salaries (EASO, 2015). Some reports suggest the PFDJ has recently reformed this system, increasing the wage for new recruits to at least 2,000 nakfa (Madote, 2016). Their stated goal is to progressively extend this increase to all national service employees. There is no minimum wage for individuals in the private sector, and no data on their incomes or wages. Considering the high rate of inflation and the high cost of basic products in the country,² these wages are mostly insufficient for family survival, which is becoming increasingly dependent on remittances (see Section 8.3).

There is evidence of self-employment in Eritrea. Petty trading and commerce in Asmara is anecdotally reported to have increased over the past five years. Some loosening of restrictions on imports and foreign exchange has resulted in growth in small businesses, such as clothing stores and cafes.³

2.2 Economic prospects

Twenty-six per cent of Eritrea is cultivable arable land, but only 4 per cent is currently in use (African Economic Outlook, 2015). The country's main economic prospects appear to be in the mining sector (gold, copper, potash, iron ore, granite and marble) (World Bank, 2015a). The expansion of Bisha mine in mid-2016 by Nevsun, a Canadian mining company, is forecast to generate 700 jobs (African Economic Outlook, 2014). African Economic Outlook (2014) suggests 'the capital-intensive nature of mining and weak linkages with the other economic sectors has however limited its impact on job creation' (p.4). China's largest state-owned mining firm had to

¹ This high percentage of labour market participation should be understood in the context of national service and the state controlled drafting of most of the labour force.

² Eritrea's inflation rate (consumer prices) was rated in 2013 as the third highest in Africa, after Malawi and Sudan (<http://www.indexmundi.com/map/?t=20&v=71&r=af&l=en>) (CIA, 2015).

³ Based on author's observations in Asmara in 2014.

withdraw from Eritrea in 2014 because UN sanctions had made the development of mines extremely challenging (Awate, 2014a).

Chinese companies have invested widely, including in gold exploration, food storage units, the power sector and manufacturing plants (Human Rights Watch, 2014a). China was the main country to express interest in the construction of a free trade zone in Massawa, first discussed in 2001 (US Department of State, 2013). African Economic Outlook (2015) suggests the nature of trading relationships with Asian and Middle-Eastern countries, as well as wider relationships with the international community and continued high expenditure on security infrastructure because of tensions with Ethiopia, will be prime determinants of Eritrea's medium-term economic prospects.

Eritrea experiences several impediments to economic growth. The US Department of State (2015) argues that, beyond the sanctions regime, 'Unreliable power, complicated and changing import regulations, difficult air and ground transportation links, insufficient port facilities, lack of fuel, unrealistic exchange rate, restrictions on repatriation of profits, the near impossibility of getting a construction permit unless the project is government-sanctioned, and in-country travel restrictions all work to undermine trade and investment' (p.3). The World Bank (2015a) ranks Eritrea last out of 189 countries for its 'ease of doing business'. Almost all trade and business is conducted through parastatals, most notably the PFDJ-run Hidri Trust. As such, the US Department of State (2006) argues that, 'Government actions over the past few years have essentially sidelined the private sector.'

The government has shown willingness to consider changing this system. The US Department of State (2014), however, argues the PFDJ has long resisted internal pressures to reform its command economy, to develop its private sector and 'to loosen business practices, correct macroeconomic imbalances or address foreign currency restrictions and shortages' (p.1). The capacity of donors to address these constraints is uncertain. Investment by countries such as China, without conditionalities on economic and political reform, is likely to alleviate economic pressures through improvements to transport infrastructure and manufacturing capacity. Pushing for significant economic reform may well antagonise the Eritrean government, which has long defended its right to determine domestic policies in line with national ideologies (Reid, 2009). It has previously expelled all NGOs for failing to adhere to its strict restrictions and guidelines (Smith-Simonsen, 2003).

Shroeder (2007) further suggests Eritrea is unlikely to recover to pre-1998 levels of trade and industry because the regional market has been lost to cheaper industries in Ethiopia and imports from China. Services in Djibouti have significantly improved, and the port infrastructure in Mombasa is being redeveloped. It is yet to be seen how UAE investment in the port of Assab will alter this.

2.3 Political issues underlying migration

The PFDJ remains the only legal political party within Eritrea, and it does not tolerate political dissent. Freedom House (2015) has given Eritrea a score of 1 out of a possible 40 for Political Rights and Civil Liberties. The country scores no points for Associational and Organisational Rights; Freedom of Expression and Belief; Political Pluralism and Participation; and Electoral Process (ibid.). Amnesty International (2015) states that 'no political opposition parties, independent media or civil society organisations were allowed to operate, and thousands of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners continued to be held in arbitrary detention' (p.9). The government closed all independent press networks in 2001, and maintains a near complete monopoly on domestic sources of information (Human Rights Watch, 2014a). International news outlets, such as the BBC, France24 and Al Jazeera, are broadcast within the country.

Freedom House (2015) gives Eritrea a score of 0 out of 15 for Rule of Law. It states that 'the judiciary...is understaffed, unprofessional and does not issue rulings at odds with government positions. Most criminal cases

are heard by the Special Court, composed of PFDJ loyalists chosen by the president.’ Prison conditions are widely cited as harsh, overcrowded and unsanitary and brutal, and death in captivity and torture are not unusual (Amnesty International, 2015; Freedom House, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2014a).

Eritrea maintains a national service commitment for all men and unmarried women, which is widely considered to be the main driver of migration out of the country. The law limits national service to 18 months, but conscripted individuals have not been demobilised *en masse* since 2001 (Bozzini, 2011). National service takes two forms, dependent on an individual’s performance during training at the Sawa Defence Training Centre, where all high school students are required to spend their final year of school. Escapees describe conditions at Sawa as ‘poor’ and students as receiving ‘harsh punishments for infractions’ (Amnesty International, 2015, p.146). High performers continue to higher education or PFDJ ministries, before completing mandatory national service in predominantly bureaucratic jobs. The rest enter mandatory military service, which includes manual labour in state-led infrastructural ventures. Former conscripts describe ‘working long hours for minimal food rations, primitive lodging, and wages too low to sustain themselves’ (Human Rights Watch, 2014a, p.2). As of mid-2012, all men between the ages of 50 and 80 have been required to periodically serve in a militia. They are expected to carry weapons, undergo physical training exercises and complete patrol duties (*ibid.*).

A number of recent announcements suggest some political changes within the country.⁴ The Danish Immigration Service (2014) states that, ‘Since last year there has been consent within the ruling party to deal with [the indefinite nature of national service] and rumour has it that the government is considering returning to the original 18 months of National Service that is stipulated by the law.’ In May 2014, President Afwerki announced plans to draft a new Constitution. There is much scepticism surrounding the sincerity of both commitments (Awate, 2014b; Sudan Tribune, 2014), and the Danish Report has been extensively critiqued (Human Rights Watch, 2014d). Some ‘positive steps in its engagement with the international community on human rights’ were nonetheless recorded in late 2014 (FCO, 2015). The country participated in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process led by the UN Human Rights Council, and ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The UPR resulted in 200 recommendations being made to the Eritrean government, which accepted 92 of these and formed an interdepartmental working group to implement them (*ibid.*).

2.4 Internal conflict

The OECD (2015) states that Eritrea is not noted as being vulnerable to the outbreak of violence or conflict and is not currently engaged in any significant civil conflict. The US Department of State (2014) suggests ‘Some remote areas of the nation are not entirely under [Eritrean government] control’ (p.10) and that the country’s disputed border regions with Ethiopia and Djibouti remain tense. There are reports that opposition groups, such as the Eritrean Islamic Jihad and the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrean Kunama, are agitating across borders in Sudan and Ethiopia. These mobilise on ethnic, religious and political grounds. This is likely to continue as certain demographics, such as the Afar ethnic group, continue to feel isolated (UN COI, 2015), though there is no data on the likelihood of cross-border incursions by these groups. The greatest reporting of violence within the country is linked to ‘state institutions, such as military camps, army and places of detention’ (*ibid.*, p.21). The large number of young people leaving the country suggests emigration provides a route for individuals to express discontent, thus diminishing the likelihood of civil conflict within Eritrea (ICG, 2014).

⁴ The PFDJ has also shown increased openness by allowing some international journalists and analysts to access the country (Atlantic Council, Chatham House, The Guardian, The Wall Street Journal and the BBC).

2.5 Internal constraints to mobility

Citizens and expatriates within Eritrea face considerable restrictions on internal movement within the country (Bozzini, 2011; Laub, 2015). The UN Commission on Inquiry (COI) (2015) states that the PFDJ ‘strives to control strictly any human movement both internally and for those who wish to leave the country’ (p.6). This is achieved through ‘an intricate system of travel permits and identity cards, which must be produced during identity check to verify an individual’s status with regard to compulsory national service and that person’s authorization to travel’ (ibid., p.6). Checkpoints on the roads monitor that Eritreans have their national identification documents and permission to travel internally. Conscripts must obtain permission from their superior officer for movements to different areas of the country. This is a general mechanism of population control, which also aims to prevent individuals travelling to border areas where their escape might be easier (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2014).

2.6 State–diaspora relationships

The diaspora provided considerable funding to the EPLF during the independence war. Once Eritrea was liberated, those from the diaspora who voted in the referendum were provided with citizenship documents and incorporated into state institutions through their obligation to pay the diaspora tax (Hirt & Mohammad, 2013). Payment of the tax enables access to certain services, not least the ability to renew one’s passport, which remains critical for individuals whose access to work permits is conditional on a valid passport (ibid.). This tax must be paid either from wages or as a percentage of welfare support. Nationals within the country feel that the PFDJ has given many within this community, especially those who have accumulated significant financial resources, preferable treatment in terms of rights and opportunities within Eritrea (Riggan, 2013).

There are regular fundraising drives by Eritrean embassies and pro-government organisations to solicit ‘voluntary’ contributions to support vulnerable groups within society. Combined with familial expectations of remittances, these demands place a significant economic burden on those leaving the country (Hirt, 2014). Some countries, such as Canada (Bell, 2012), have sought to prevent embassies from collecting the diaspora tax.

3. Political and economic exclusion

3.1 Identity-based characteristics of the Eritrean population

Eritrea has three official languages (Tigrinya, Arabic and English) and several non-official languages, including Tigre, Kunama and Afar. The country has nine recognised ethnic groups, with an uneven population weighting: Tigrinya (55 per cent), Tigre (30 per cent), Saho (4 per cent), Kunama (2 per cent), Rashaida (2 per cent) and Bilen (2 per cent), with the remaining 5 per cent composed of Beni Amer, Afar, Nera and others (CIA, 2015). Many of these ethnic groups span borders with Ethiopia and Sudan and have historically been in competition with neighbouring communities for political power and natural resources (Bassi, 2014; Donham & James, 1986).

Although the Eritrean government has sought to promote a dominant nationalistic character, people still identify strongly with religious and ethnic identities. The geographic and climatic divide between Eritrea’s highlands and lowlands is often used to categorise the populations inhabiting those areas. Highlanders are traditionally Tigrinya-speaking Coptic Christians. The Tigrinya have traditionally competed for political power in the area with the Amhara (Bassi, 2014; Donham & James, 1986). Until today, the Tigrinya constitute the dominant cultural and political group within Eritrea, and members of other groups, most notably the Kunama and the Afar, have complained of being marginalised and discriminated against (FCO, 2015). The lowlanders are predominantly

Muslim nomadic pastoralists from different ethnic groups, with the exceptions of the Kunama and Bilen groups, which are agriculturalists and often non-Coptic Christians.

3.2 Discrimination towards minorities

Public discourses celebrate the rich cultural heritage of different Eritrean minorities, but this has not prevented ethnic persecution occurring, especially in the case of the Kunama and the Afar. The Kunama have experienced persecution from neighbouring communities since pre-colonial times (Longrigg, 1945; Naty, 2002; Pollera, 1935). Since the Ethiopia–Eritrea border conflict, their situation has again deteriorated (Tronvoll, 2009). The Kunama opposition fronts (e.g. the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of the Eritrean Kunama) were accused of supporting the Ethiopian army and administering the captured areas from 1999 to 2000, and of going with the Ethiopian troops when they fled. This resulted in generalised retaliations by government forces once the war ended. Those from the Kunama who fled in 2000 were among the first Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia and constitute the main population in Shimelba refugee camp (ibid.). Several reports (Human Rights Watch, 2015; ILO & ACHPR, 2009) document that the Kunama continue to leave Eritrea, to escape national service and as a consequence of on-going land expropriation by the Eritrean government. However, discrimination towards the Kunama is also rooted in wider 'societal attitudes that regard them as uncivilised and inferior' (ILO & ACHPR, 2009, p.52).

Political organisations (e.g. EASE, 2015), journalists and humanitarian agencies have documented persecution towards members of the Afar ethnic group. Research on this issue is rare, though anecdotal reports suggest the Afar face specific ethnic and cultural persecution in Eritrea (Connell, 2015). This discrimination may also be connected to Afar secessionist political aspirations (EASE, 2014).

3.3 State role in the marginalisation of minorities

The Eritrean government envisages Sawa Defence Training Centre as a tool of social engineering for nation-building, through inspiring greater loyalty to the nation than pre-existing familial, community or religious connections (Healy, 2007). Its success in this regard is hard to quantify.

Land reform policies have reinforced traditional patterns of discrimination and marginalisation. They are argued to have had a 'disproportionate impact on pastoralists, such as the Afar and Kunama minorities' and have been 'used as a means by authorities to harass and punish perceived enemies, in particular members of unauthorized religions, opponents and relatives of people who fled the country' (UN COI, 2015, p.12).

There is currently little evidence of particular minority groups experiencing worsening marginalisation, although the consequences of systematic exclusion may become more visible over time. State interventions, such as land expropriation and national service, disrupt traditional livelihoods and may increasingly impact minorities and their ability to survive in a challenging environment that is forecast to worsen as a result of climate change (see Section 1.6). This may result in increased migration towards neighbouring countries. It should also be considered that the Kunama and Afar ethnic groups live across the Ethiopian border and that, in the case of the Afar, migration has traditionally represented a way to cope with climatic and political adversities (Yasin, 2008).⁵ This implies that the Afar may progressively resort to migration as a strategy to circumvent intrusions of the Eritrean state in their traditional lifestyles. Kibreab (1987) noted similar patterns in the 1960s, with lowlanders in western Eritrea crossing the border comparatively easily as a result of cross-border ethnic affiliations.

⁵ For further information on migration in the Ethiopian context, see Carter and Rohwerder (2016).

3.4 Religious and gender issues

There is limited freedom of religion in Eritrea, with individuals permitted to belong to one of four faiths: Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism as practised by the Evangelical Church of Eritrea and Islam (Freedom House, 2015). Individuals practising other faiths, in particular Jehovah's witnesses and those belonging to Pentecostal or Evangelical churches, have experienced discrimination, harassment, torture and imprisonment by the government (Mekonnen & van Reisen, 2013). Same-sex sexual relations are widely condemned in Eritrean society and face worse criminal sentences in Eritrea than paedophilia, and LGBT individuals face discrimination at a social and legal level. There is no legislation to prevent this, and the Eritrean government has voiced 'that they do not intend to change this situation' (FCO, 2015).

The Eritrean government has, since the liberation war, sought to promote equality between the sexes, including through legal protection. However, women still face challenges as a result of cultural attitudes and lack of economic opportunities, especially for female guerrilla fighters, who struggled to reintegrate after their demobilisation (Bernal, 2006b; Dore, 2002). Female genital cutting (FGC) remains a concern. The Eritrean government has launched several information campaigns discouraging these practices and in 2007 completely banned FGM, mandating severe punishments for those performing such mutilations. However, it is reported that 83 per cent of Eritrean women had been mutilated and these practices are deeply rooted in cultural and religious beliefs (UNICEF, 2013). FGM remains common in all ethnic groups, although the kind and severity of the mutilation varies greatly between ethnic groups, with the Hidareb having the highest percentage of the most drastic kind of FGM (ibid.).

4. Migration from Eritrea

4.1 Intent to migrate and future scenarios

Young Eritreans aged between 15 and 40 are most likely to leave to avoid national service and in response to their perceived limited prospects within the country (Bozzini, 2011; Müller, 2012; Riggan, 2013; Treiber, 2009). Hirt and Mohammad (2013) stress that structural militarisation of the country has progressively led to family disintegration, as men are kept away from their families for long periods, and to a general worsening in the population's economic conditions. Worsening economic conditions, in turn, make households increasingly dependent on remittances from abroad and increase the motivations of young people to leave the country to provide for their families. Riggan (2013) reports that, inspired by previous migrant generations, young Eritreans even consider leaving the country to be a patriotic duty.

Despite the Eritrean government's strict emigration policies, reports in the past three years suggest hundreds of Eritreans leave their country every month (UNHCR Eritrea, 2015). Some authors suggest the total number of departures may have been up to 5,000 a month in some periods (van Reisen et al., 2013). UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) figures record, as of June 2015, 383,869 refugees and 60,157 asylum-seekers originating from Eritrea (UNHCR Eritrea, 2015).

Even if the main drivers of migration were addressed (mainly the rules of national service), the predictions based on socioeconomic scenarios of the region do not envisage an inversion of migration trends. The Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS, 2015a) suggests that, although natural and political hazards are hard to predict, there remain some drivers of migration from the region that are unlikely to change. The population growth rate, which is expected to remain high until 2050, may increase migratory pressures (although depopulation through emigration may offset this). Moreover, as theorised by migration scholars (e.g. de Haas, 2010), greater economic

development may provide individuals with greater financial resources to facilitate their out-migration. Similarly, it could be expected that successful emigration of Eritreans may increase the capacity of those left behind, either financially or through increasing aspirations (Massey et al., 1998). In fact, in spite of significant generational and political divides within the diaspora (Arnone, 2008), Eritreans abroad constitute a large social network that potential migrants and asylum seekers can draw on to establish the means to move out of the country and move onwards.

4.2 The Eritrean diaspora

Fifty years of considerable out-migration has resulted in an Eritrean diaspora throughout Africa, the Middle East, Europe and America. However, there are no clear statistics on the size of the Eritrean diaspora, including migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, individuals that have been resettled, and previous generations of migrants and their children. This is mainly due to the difficulty in assessing a continuously oscillating flow of migrants, who are sometimes recorded as asylum seekers and at other times as labour migrants. In 1994 at the end of the Independence war the Eritrean diaspora was calculated as amounting to one million (UNICEF, 1994). It is widely considered that many Eritreans did not repatriate after independence (see section 8). More recently, the number of Eritrean refugees has almost doubled, from 185,000 in 2008 to 380,000 in 2014 (UNHCR Ethiopia, 2015). Today, UNHCR states that there are 450,000 Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers worldwide, and does not anticipate any reduction in this number given the structural conditions underpinning these flows (UNHCR Eritrea, 2015).

4.3 Destination countries

UNICEF (2015) states the top five countries or areas of destination for Eritrean labour migrants in 2013 were Sudan (144,170), Saudi Arabia (39,834), the US (36,565), the UK (20,173) and the UAE (17,404). The main destinations for refugees were Sudan, Ethiopia, Israel, Italy and Switzerland (ibid.). More recent data suggests that asylum destinations in Europe are rapidly changing, with Eurostat (2015) recording Germany (13,255), Sweden (11,530), Switzerland (6,920), Netherlands (3,910), the UK (3,300), Norway (2,880) and Denmark (2,275) as having received the highest number of asylum applications from Eritreans in Europe in 2014 (see Appendix 1) and Israel as receiving virtually no applications (RMMS, 2014).

4.3.1 Sudan

Eritreans leaving the country without a regular exit visa predominantly cross the border into Ethiopia or Sudan. Sudan – specifically Kassala state, Khartoum and Port Sudan – has received Eritrean refugees since the 1960s, when the country's liberation struggle began. Today, UNHCR statistics (2015a) cite Sudan as hosting around 108,000 Eritrean refugees.⁶ This refugee population may be far greater, as many Eritreans do not register with UNHCR (RMMS, 2014). There are now more than two generations of Eritrean refugees who were born and raised in Sudan, without access to Sudanese nationality and citizenship rights. Many of them still live in camps, although some have integrated to some extent by mixing with local populations and engaging in informal business activities (Bascom, 2008; Kuhlman, 1990; Smock, 1982). Sudan has also constituted a transit state to other countries, mostly in Europe (RMMS, 2014). Transiting to Europe through Sudan occurred during the liberation war (Kibreab, 1991, 1996) and continues to be reported now. UNHCR estimates that 80 per cent of new arrivals stay only temporarily in Sudan (UNHCR Sudan, 2015).

⁶ For further information on migration in the Sudan context see Strachan (2016).

These secondary movements result predominantly from limited prospects for long-term integration in Sudan, as well as the protection issues facing Eritreans in the country. Sudan has historically enacted an encampment policy for refugees. A new asylum act passed in 2014 maintains restricted freedom of movement for refugees. Refugees are formally allowed to work in any job not directly connected to national defence or security (UNHCR Sudan, 2015), but in practice refugees have limited access to the regular labour market. UNHCR (2013) suggests 52 per cent of refugees in eastern Sudan in 2013 lived below the poverty line. Furthermore, since bilateral relations between Sudan and Eritrea have improved, Eritreans in Sudan have experienced adverse consequences. For instance, after President Afwerki's 2011 visit to Sudan, there were reports of Sudanese security forces detaining prominent anti-PFDJ journalists and of forced repatriations of Eritreans from the country (Reporters Without Borders, 2012).

4.3.2 Ethiopia

Owing to historical animosity between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the latter became a recipient of Eritrean refugees only from 2000 onwards. According to UNHCR (2015b), there are approximately 155,000 Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, mostly living in the camps in Tigray and Afar regions (north Ethiopia) and in Addis Ababa.⁷ Ethiopia is rarely the final destination for Eritreans. Although precise numbers are not available, UNHCR reports 'Eritrean refugees, including unaccompanied minors who continue to arrive in increasing numbers, tend to move on from Ethiopia to a third country, a situation which presents a major challenge in providing protection' (UNHCR Ethiopia, 2015). These movements are mostly due to the lack of long-term prospects for refugees in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention on refugees, but maintains reservations against Article 17 (freedom of movement) and Article 19 (right to work) of the 1951 Convention. Refugees must thus seek permission to leave the camps, and employment is limited and mostly irregular (*ibid.*). Since 2011, an out-of-camp policy has been implemented, enabling refugees to access university and live outside the camps if an Ethiopian national takes responsibility for them. As this provides no access to local integration or legal employment opportunities, these policies are not likely to reduce onward migration.

4.3.3 Middle East

Mainly because of political interests in the region, Saudi Arabia and Yemen maintained an open door policy towards Eritrean migrants during the Independence struggle. This allowed thousands of Eritreans to move there (Thiollet, 2011). Over 100,000 Eritreans are documented as living in Saudi Arabia (*ibid.*). Today, Eritrean escapees also sail to Yemen. Although research on this route is scarce, media coverage and reports describe the situation of many Eritreans stranded in Sanaa, usually waiting to move onwards to other countries (RMMS, 2014). Trafficking of Eritreans is also documented in Yemen (Human Rights Watch, 2014b, 2014c).

4.3.4 The US

Many Eritreans reached the US as university students as a result of educational initiatives between Emperor Haile Selassie in Ethiopia and the US government while the country was under Ethiopian rule (Getahun, 2007). In the 1980s, the US had a favourable resettlement policy towards Eritreans as a result of their being persecuted by the Communist Dergue regime. Kibreab (1996) reports that over 5,000 Eritreans were resettled to the US in that period. In 2008, the US promoted the resettlement of over 8,000 Eritrean refugees from Shimelba camp in

⁷ For further information on migration in the Ethiopian context see Carter and Rohwerder (2016).

Ethiopia. Anecdotal evidence suggests some Eritrean refugees now manage to move to the US or Canada through family reunification procedures or sponsored visas.

4.3.5 Europe

Previous historical connections have favoured the migration of Eritrean domestic workers to Italy since the 1960s (Marchetti, 2013). Increasingly intense conflict in Eritrea in the 1970s and 1980s saw more Eritreans moving there. Some remained in Italy, and these constitute significant communities in cities such as Milan and Rome. Many moved onwards to other European countries, such as Germany, Sweden and the UK (Capalbo, 1982; Melotti, 1988; Scalzo, 1984). Europe continues to constitute the most popular end destination for Eritreans who leave the country to claim asylum. Eurostat calculates that around 147,000 Eritreans have applied for asylum in Europe since 2008 (see Appendix 1). Most arrive in Europe through Italy, although few stay there. Among the 34,000 arrivals registered in Italy in 2014, only 450 sought asylum there (ANCI et al., 2015; Italian Ministry of Interior, 2015). The others continued their journeys northwards. These unregistered secondary movements may decrease following the creation in 2015 of an emergency response mechanism to assist Italy and Greece by relocating Eritreans with international protection needs to other EU Member States (EC, 2015a).

4.3.6 Israel

Throughout the 2000s, a significant number of Eritrean refugees fled to Israel. A community of approximately 40,000 settled there, despite hostile country policies towards asylum seekers (RMMS, 2013, 2014). Border crossings to Israel have recently stopped as a result of recent push-back practices and the enactment of the 2012 Amendment to the 1954 Prevention of Infiltration Law. This allows systematic detention practices for all those (including asylum seekers) who enter Israel irregularly (Yaron et al., 2013). The Israeli government also signed an agreement with Uganda and Rwanda in 2015 to deport Eritrean and Sudanese migrants and refugees there, in exchange for various economic incentives (Loewenstein, 2015; Sabar, 2013).

4.3.7 Other destinations

Beyond Europe, other exploratory studies suggest Eritreans often travel to Uganda, Angola, South Sudan, South Africa and Kenya for work or to follow the bureaucratic procedures for family reunification elsewhere (Altai, 2015; Araia, 2005; Jourdan, 2012; RMMS 2014).

4.4 The choice of the destination country

It is likely structural contingencies, geographic accessibility, previous social ties and information about conditions of life in different countries that inform the choice of final destination (Brekke & Five Aarset, 2009; Havinga & Böcker, 1999; Neumayer, 2005). Information on journeys successfully completed, and on the different reception, integration conditions and employment opportunities in European states, is also considered influential (Bariagaber, 2013; Brekke & Brochman, 2015). This type of information is often spread through refugees' informal networks (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002), and is likely to orient refugees' trajectories prior to their arrival in Europe. Historical linkages with previous colonial powers do not seem to determine the choice of destination for current Eritrean asylum seekers. In spite of well-established Eritrean communities in Milan, Rome and other cities, most Eritreans continue to other destinations.

4.5 Trend of recent Eritrean migration

A precise trend of contemporary migration from Eritrea is hard to draw, given the difficulties involved in collecting data (RMMS, 2014, p.19). Dependent on the risks involved on different routes over time, Eritreans may choose to cross the border with Sudan or that with Ethiopia, and this may result in an increase of arrivals in Tigray and a decrease in Kassala region (RMMS, 2014, p.18). However, often individuals do not register as refugees in camps – especially in the case of Sudan – and move directly onwards to other destinations.⁸ Their movements thus remain unrecorded. Still, it is clear that Eritreans have increasingly left their country in the past six years (UNHCR Eritrea, 2015). Some spikes have been registered in connection with specific political instances, such as widespread failures to travel to Sawa for national service. The flow is nonetheless markedly constant, showing that Eritrean migration is rooted in the progressive disruption of livelihoods as a consequence of structural political, social and economic conditions in the country (Hirt and Mohammed, 2013).

4.6 Return and inward migration to Eritrea

Following the country's liberation, until the mid-1990s, approximately 189,000 Eritreans living in Sudanese camps returned to the country independently as well as under the joint UN–Eritrean government repatriation programme (Bascom, 2008; Kibreab, 2003). Accounts suggest that, although some individuals returned from the diaspora to Eritrea, the 'majority chose to remain in their respective host countries' and maintain links transnationally (Life & Peace Institute, 2015).

The next significant influx occurred with the expulsions of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean descent from Ethiopia in 1998, when many were suddenly expelled without their spouses or children (Bariagaber, 2000; Bascom, 2008). When these hostilities ended, many of those displaced to Sudan during the two years of fighting returned almost immediately (UNHCR, 2003). There is little evidence of inward migration since the early 2000s.

For those who have recently left the country through illegal channels, return to Eritrea is dependent on having paid the diaspora tax and signing a 'letter of apology' at the Eritrean embassy prior to returning home (Human Rights Watch, 2015). There is also 'no information available on the specific profile of persons who are able to benefit from this practice' (Danish Immigration Service, 2014). Very limited evidence exists, however, to suggest this population wishes to return to Eritrea, given their continuing objections to national service requirements and repressive government policies.

Serious concerns about treatment on return have generally prevented the deportation of Eritreans. The UK, for example, removed 49 Eritreans between April and June 2015, but this was most likely to their European country of first entry (Home Office, 2015). The Sudanese government has been accused of breaching legal standards by deporting Eritreans, and UNHCR (2011) has stated that Sudan has 'repeatedly forced back Eritrean asylum-seekers and refugees to Eritrea, where they risk persecution'.

Eritrea itself hosts a small refugee population, mainly from Somalia: 2,944 refugees, according to UNHCR Eritrea (2015). In 2013, it also had a total migrant stock within the country of 8,188 individuals from Somalia (2,434), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1,672), Uganda (1,510), South Sudan (1,475) and Mozambique (1,096) (UNICEF, 2015).

⁸ For further information on migration in the Sudan context see Strachan (2016).

5. Migrant profiles

5.1 Demographic, socioeconomic and educational profile

Of the 53,200 Eritreans recorded by OECD (2012) in 2005/06 as born in Eritrea and living in OECD countries, 26 per cent were highly educated and 32 per cent low-educated. Seventy-five per cent of Eritreans living in OECD countries were participating in the labour market, mostly in commerce (20 per cent) and elementary occupations (20 per cent). A total of 8,833 of the international migrant stock mid-year in 2015 were male and 7,108 were female (UN DESA, 2015). There is no specific data on the socioeconomic profiles of the members of the diaspora.

Refugees from Eritrea are predominantly men in their 20s and 30s⁹. Male refugees largely outnumber females in refugee flows from Eritrea, likely because of the greater impact of national service on men and their ability to act as 'breadwinners' for their families (Hirt & Mohammad, 2013). In the past few years, the numbers of unaccompanied minors leaving Eritrea appear to have increased (UNHCR Eritrea, 2015). This is probably to preempt conscription into national service by leaving before they complete secondary school. Many are too young to be legally employed and are at high risk of trafficking and smuggling (UNHCR Ethiopia, 2015). Specific programmes, such as the EU's Regional Development and Protection Programme, are needed to address their vulnerabilities in refugee camps in the region.

The Tigrinya, being the most numerous proportion of the population, constitute the highest number of those leaving Eritrea. Specific government interventions such as land expropriation and cultural homogenisation have disproportionately affected certain ethnic minorities, such as the Kunama and the Afar. After the Tigrinya, these are the most represented ethnic groups of Eritrean refugees. In contrast with the Tigrinya, minority ethnic groups appear to participate less in secondary movements to Europe. This is probably because of their limited access to the social and economic resources of the diaspora, which predominantly comprises the Tigrinya (Belloni, 2015).

5.2 Recognition rates

International acknowledgement of the lack of political, civil and religious freedom in Eritrea means Eritrean asylum applicants are usually granted some kind of protection (refugee status, subsidiary protection, etc.). Eurostat reports that 89 per cent of Eritrean asylum applicants were recognised in the EU-28 in 2014 (Eurostat, 2015). In the US, 70 per cent of Eritrean asylum applications were granted in 2014 (US Department for Justice, 2014). Israel represents an exception, as recent anti-infiltrator measures have meant African migrants are rarely allowed to access asylum procedures (Yaron et al., 2013).

Given the demographic profile of Eritreans leaving the country (below 40 years of age and fleeing to avoid national service and punitive state policies), migration might be expected to decrease only if national service requirements change and the domestic labour market reforms to allow the entry of Eritrean youth. Having stated that these major structural reforms are necessary prior to the successful implementation of in-country support packages, it is plausible to think that economic support for agricultural livelihoods in rural areas and for young professionals to establish businesses could contribute towards changing the way young people feel about opportunities within Eritrea in the longer term.

⁹ Authors' private communications with UNHCR Ethiopia (2014).

6. The migrant journey and state responses to irregular migration

6.1 Risks on the migrant journey

Eritreans face huge risks during their journeys, because of traffickers' activities along the borders, the dangers associated with smugglers' services and states' border control activities.¹⁰ Most Eritreans who leave the country today cross into Ethiopia, Sudan and, to a lesser extent, Yemen (see Section 4.4) without exit visas or passports. Individuals most commonly cross the border by foot or in vehicles at night to avoid detection by authorities. They are known to disguise themselves as shepherds (RMMS, 2013). Individuals often capitalise on opportunities, such as being sent to patrol an area close to the border, to make their escape. There have been reports of Eritreans being shot at near the borders with Sudan and Ethiopia for attempting to escape in this way (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Soldiers can be executed as traitors and civilians may be sent to prison for over a year or more according to the circumstances. Officials are sometimes bribed to provide safe passage across the border (RMMS, 2014). Based on migrants' narratives, Eritreans often use smugglers' services to leave their country and throughout their journeys (UNHCR Eritrea, 2015). Border crossing is often facilitated by private guides contracted by middlemen who are in touch with customers (UNODC, 2011). However, there is also evidence of involvement by Eritrean militaries in border crossing to Sudan (RMMS, 2013). UNHCR Eritrea (2015) and RMMS (2014) both report that many Eritreans in camps in Sudan and Ethiopia rely on the services of Eritrean and Sudanese smugglers to move first to Khartoum before continuing north.¹¹

Although many Eritreans may spend years in Khartoum trying to collect the money to move onwards, others with more resources immediately continue to Libya. Hamood (2006) reports that there are several routes from Sudan to Libya: one going through north Darfur into Libya and another passing through Chad and arriving in Kufra (see also RMMS, 2014, p.35). The journey from Khartoum to Kufra may take from four to 10 days and cost between \$600 and \$1,600. This is only one of the many possible routes to Libya. Others may go through the hub of Sabha or Tobruk (Altai, 2014), and from there to Benghazi or Tripoli according to the circumstances. This may cost up to \$500 (RMMS, 2014, p.49). Militia-based violence on the Sudan–Libya border means some Eritreans travel to Libya via Egypt or from Sudan on to Saudi Arabia (RMMS, 2014, p.35; RMMS, 2015b).

Israeli policies of forced returns and push-backs have reduced the number of Eritreans travelling from Sudan through Egypt to Israel. This path was popular between 2008 and 2011 when the Italian–Libyan Friendship Agreement and Italian push-backs reduced the possibilities of reaching Europe through Libya (Paoletti, 2011). As arrivals to Italy decreased dramatically, Israel registered over 40,000 crossings between 2006 and 2012 (RMMS, 2014, p.22). This route is dangerous because of Egypt's detention of asylum seekers and reports of bandits kidnapping individuals in the Sinai. Little is known about these groups, except that they have been linked with illegal organ harvesting and withholding Eritreans to ransom to extort money (up to \$50,000) from families living in the diaspora (Human Rights Watch, 2014b; Humphris, 2013). Many have attributed the trafficking of Eritreans

¹⁰ Human smuggling and human trafficking are different in several aspects: trafficking involves the exploitation of the victim, usually sexually or for labour, and happens without his/her consent; smuggling entails profiting through the facilitation of illegal border crossings, and generally happens with the consent of the migrant (UN, 2000). In spite of these differences, the boundaries between the two phenomena are often blurred in practice (Aronowitz, 2001). There have been reports of Eritrean refugees paying smugglers to be transported to Libya and subsequently being sold by these to traffickers in the Sinai (Human Rights Watch, 2014b).

¹¹ For further information on migration in the Sudan context see Strachan (2016). For further information on migration in the Ethiopian context see Carter and Rohwerder (2016).

in Sudan and Egypt to the Rashaida (Humphris, 2013). Smugglers in Libya are accused of the same behaviour: detaining Eritreans until they have received money for their release (Altai, 2015; DRC, 2013; RMMS, 2014).

The journey through Sudan and Libya is also extremely risky not only because of potential kidnappings along the way (Eritreans have been abducted in Sudanese refugee camps (UNHCR and IOM, 2012)) but also because of the extremely hard travel conditions, whereby migrants risk death through hunger and thirst (Hamood, 2006). Conditions in Libya for asylum seekers are said to have worsened as a result of conflict and instability since Gaddafi was deposed (Altai, 2014). UNHCR has not been able to establish itself in post-Gaddafi Libya and thus has no power to facilitate the release of migrants from detention centres, where living conditions are documented as appalling (RMMS, 2014, 2015b).

Journeys from Libya to Italy are often undertaken on overcrowded makeshift boats, with a mortality rate across all journeys of 2 per cent (RMMS, 2015a). The journey usually costs \$800 to \$1,000, but the price fluctuates (RMMS, 2014, p.49). The migrant usually contacts a middleman – usually a long-term resident in Libya – who links them with a Libyan smuggler responsible for the sea crossing (RMMS, 2014, p.78). Eritreans were the most represented nationality after Syrians in Italy among arrivals by sea in 2014, with over 34,000 registered (ANCI et al., 2015, p.68).

Little is known about the characteristics of the smugglers involved in these journeys. Eritreans, Sudanese, Ethiopians and Libyans have been reported to facilitate these movements at different stages of the journey (RMMS, 2014).¹² Prices for this service vary significantly as a result of differences in service quality, time of year and basic market determinants of supply and demand (Altai, 2014; RMMS, 2014). There is no evidence that all smugglers involved in the business are part of organised criminal organisations. For instance, Hamood (2006) documented that irregular migration in Libya was managed by small groups of individuals who collaborated without being members of any overarching organisation. This is also highlighted in the 2011 report by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

6.2 Legal alternatives to irregular migration and the role of state institutions in curbing or encouraging irregular migration

The procurement of passports or exit visas is done through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and is mostly dependent on completion of national service. Because this latter is often of an undetermined duration, most Eritreans do not have access to any travel documents. This means only irregular routes are left for those wishing to leave. For citizens over the age of 50 there seems to be more freedom of movement, although age limits and regulations concerning exit visas and passports are known to be unpredictable (RMMS, 2014).

Although some Eritrean officials have been accused of being implicated in human smuggling, especially on the Eritrean–Sudanese border (RMMS, 2014), the Eritrean government is known for being particularly strict in punishing alleged human smugglers¹³ and in trying to tackle irregular emigration. Moreover, UNHCR states that the ‘Government of Eritrea, which acceded to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children in September 2014, has become increasingly engaged in international efforts to combat human trafficking’, such as through the EU–Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (UNHCR, 2014, p.5). This process, alternatively called the Khartoum Process, aims to establish and monitor a reception centre; identify

¹² For further information on migration in the Sudan context see Strachan (2016). For further information on migration in the Ethiopian context see Carter and Rohwerder (2016).

¹³ Reports from previously incarcerated Eritreans testify that alleged human smugglers are usually kept in the country’s harshest prisons (e.g. Human Rights Watch, 2009).

and prosecute criminal networks; support victims of trafficking and protect smuggled migrants; and address the root causes of irregular migration through development in countries of origin and transit countries (ECRE, 2014). The Eritrean government's interventions to curb irregular migration have, however, been criticised. It is in fact documented that soldiers have been allowed to shoot those found escaping into Ethiopia and that failed attempts to escape may result in detention and degrading treatment (Human Rights Watch, 2015; RMMS, 2014).

7. The development impacts of migration

7.1 Diaspora investment and remittances

The PFDJ hopes the diaspora and those leaving the country will contribute towards Eritrea's economic development. The party holds investment conferences within Eritrea and through embassies to canvas support. The 2012 conference emphasised the need to grow the country's private sector. Diasporic investors nonetheless raised many of the problems discussed above concerning risks to investment (see Section 2.2; Woldu, 2012).

Drawing on multiple sources, Healy (2007) suggests that, 'Overall it would appear plausible to suggest that at least 150,000 Eritreans are now resident in high-income, OECD or Middle Eastern economies and are thus able to remit significant sums home' (p.17). The large outflow of Eritreans over the past decade will, however, have altered these statistics significantly.

The Eritrean economy appears to be heavily dependent on remittances, although there is no recent quantitative data on this. In 2002, private transfers through legal channels from abroad were said to constitute 26 per cent of private income (Fessehazion, 2005; Tewolde, 2006). IFAD estimated that total remittances to Eritrea in 2006 constituted 37.9 per cent of GDP. Fessehazion (2005) argues that 'In no other African country are remittances as important to the national economy as in Eritrea, where remittances comprise slightly less than one-third of the GDP' (p. 168). The government uses remittances to mitigate the chronic lack of foreign currency resulting from the insufficiency of exports (Chatham House, 2007) UN Eritrea (2005) reports that 'A significant proportion of domestic household and business saving originates as remittances from the diaspora' (p.50) Direct taxation on remittances thus provides a large component of formal sector expenditure, while the domestic taxation system relies on family incomes derived primarily from remittances (Healy, 2007). There has nonetheless been some discussion about the 'externalisation' of the Eritrean economy as a result of its severe economic collapse. Healy (2007) states that, in order to keep forex outside of the country, significant payments such as for rent or medical treatment within Eritrea may be being made 'between relatives outside the economy' (p.20).

Tewolde's (2006) survey suggests 50 per cent of those interviewed felt money sent to Eritrea was used to construct housing on the remitter's behalf. This was interpreted as suggesting that the long-term goal of remitters was to return to Eritrea. There is no further evidence to suggest these funds are invested in productive economic activities rather than basic subsistence costs. Kifle (2007) suggests a significant portion of remittances to households with school-age children is spent on education. There is some speculation that remittances 'fuel (and finance) migration and create a form of parasitic dependency, which paradoxically causes resentment against the diaspora' (Healy, 2007, p. 7).

Tewolde (2006) further suggests two-thirds of remittances to Eritrea were transferred through informal networks (smuggled into Eritrea or sent through intermediaries), 20.8 per cent through the Bank of Eritrea and less than 13 per cent through both Western Union and Himbol. This study estimated that the average Eritrean migrant remitted \$300 to \$400 per year. Contract and temporary workers were cited as more likely to send home the highest proportion of their income in remittances, whereas permanent expatriates with dependants in their

country of residence were likely to remit less money. Recent changes to the nakfa may have serious consequences for Eritreans dependent on remittances. Individuals are now compelled to deposit dollar-based remittances in Eritrean bank accounts, which the recipients can take out at the government's official exchange rate. While the official exchange rate is \$1 to 15 nakfa, the black market rate is usually more than triple.

7.2 The impact of emigration on domestic capacity

Quantitative data on the impact of the brain drain or the loss of domestic labour on the Eritrean economy is almost non-existent. UNICEF (2015) predicts that the projected change in the working-age population (15 to 64) will be 630,000 from 2015 to 2020, 855,000 from 2025 to 2030, 856,000 from 2035 to 2040 and 780,000 from 2045 to 2050.¹⁴ The US Department of State (2014) suggests the widespread emigration of high-skilled workers from the country is 'a fact that even government officials now acknowledge as a critical economic challenge for the nation' (p.11). Anecdotal evidence suggests many university-level students have left the country illegally, after their initial visa requests have been refused, in order to take up positions in foreign universities.

The brain drain increased significantly after the conflict with Ethiopia, with more people absconding on foreign training programmes or capitalising on their dual nationality to leave Eritrea (Tessema, 2009). Tessema (2009) states that, between 2003 and 2009, 58 per cent of individuals surveyed in the diaspora felt the brain drain was having positive effects on the Eritrean economy because of remittances, seed capital, the diaspora tax and the transfers of skills and technologies. The 33 per cent who felt it was negatively affecting the economy cited the skills gaps emigration had created in medicine, tertiary education and policy specialisms, and the negative impacts on the morale of professionals who had remained in Eritrea (ibid.).

7.3 The status and role of aid

In 2013, official development assistance and official aid received by the Eritrean government was \$83.6 million (World Bank, 2015b). This had dropped from \$129.9 million in 2011 (ibid.). Eritrea is a pre-decision point Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) and thus may well be eligible for the HIPC Initiative Multilateral Debt Relief (MDR) (African Economic Outlook, 2015). African Economic Outlook (2015) documents that no discussions on Eritrea receiving MDR have occurred. Eritrea has suggested it will participate in the African Development Bank (AfDB) Transition Support Facility in the future, and continue dialogue with the IMF's capacity-building institute based in Tanzania. AfDB is supporting Eritrea's Education Sector Development Plan (2013-2017) through 'skills development for job creation' (African Economic Outlook, 2014, p.11). This complements the Eritrean government's attempts to improve basic literacy and education, as well as to provide vocational and technical training to fill domestic employment gaps (ibid.).

The UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO, 2015) suggests the UN's four-year cooperation agreement with the Eritrean government and the EU's European Development Fund programme in Eritrea is 'going well' and 'having real impact'. The UN recently commended Eritrea's progress on the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goals 4 (reduce child mortality), 5 (improve maternal health) and 6 (Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases) (UNDP, 2014).¹⁵

¹⁴ This is estimated on the basis of the medium variant.

¹⁵ Limitations of this evidence include the short duration of its consultative period (three weeks) and the fact that much of the data came from Eritrean Ministry of Health documents and national staff, given travel restrictions on expatriate staff outside of Asmara. The impartiality of both sources should be questioned.

The EU's programme for 2009 to 2013 focused on food security, rural development, infrastructural rehabilitation, restoration of national heritage and governance (EC, 2013). The \$229 million earmarked for the 11th European Development Fund for Eritrea (for 2014 to 2020) is primarily aimed at targeting the sectors of renewable energy, energy efficiency and economic governance (EC, 2015b). A report on the prospects of EU assistance contributing towards democratisation in Eritrea suggests the country's authoritarian nature and commitment to total sovereignty means it has remained 'indifferent' to EU support (del Biondo, 2015, p.206). It states that Eritrea 'can be considered an aid 'orphan' by its own choice' (ibid., p.194) because the PFDJ has 'attempted to limit dependence on foreign donors and become self-reliance' (ibid., p.200). Without interdependence between the two entities, programmes to improve governance are likely to remain largely ineffective, as the threat of withdrawal of funding has been seen to exercise little power over the PFDJ's behaviour (ibid.). The International Crisis Group (ICG) has nonetheless reiterated on several occasions (ICG 2013, 2014) that, 'Any opportunity should be seized to bring Asmara in from the cold. UN-imposed sanctions...should be kept under active review. The European Union (EU) and U.S. should work with others, such as Qatar and South Africa, that have better relations with Eritrea's ruling elite and could facilitate constructive engagement' (2013, p. i). In particular, the ICG suggests the EU should mediate to normalise regional tensions (in particular the unsolved border dispute with Ethiopia) so as to remove any external obstacle to demobilisation in Eritrea (ICG, 2015). This latter point is, however, fundamentally contradicted by Mosley (2014), who argues engagement with Eritrea must be increased but attempts to mediate between Eritrea and Ethiopia on the border issue should be avoided until Eritrea's domestic economic and social stability and external relations improve significantly. This approach recognises the PFDJ's sensitivity over the border issue and the fragility of its relationship with international donors.

An expert commented against unconditional EU development aid until demobilisation is addressed. They state that, 'As long as the national service programme will not be substantially reformed the mass exodus will continue.' Healy (2007) suggests the Eritrean government is 'trapped in its present policies by necessity (the huge reserve of labour in the military) rather than through seriously pursuing a faulty vision' (p.10). Supporting the emergence of a competitive labour market to ensure these individuals could transition into civilian jobs may thus reduce the dangers inherent to demobilisation that the PFDJ fears.

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Appendix 1: Asylum applications by Eritrean nationals in Europe 2008-2015

TIME	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
GEO								
Total	9,555 ^(d)	9,735 ^(d)	8,050 ^(d)	10,430 ^(d)	11,995 ^(d)	20,300	46,750	29,610 ^(d)
European Union (28 countries)	4,905 ^(d)	5,230 ^(d)	4,540 ^(d)	5,725 ^(d)	6,400 ^(d)	14,485	36,945	26,655 ^(d)
Germany (until 1990 former territory of the FRG)	280	380	660	650	670	3,640	13,255	10,990
Sweden	885	1,035	1,465	1,705	2,405	4,880	11,530	7,230
Switzerland	2,850	1,725	1,800	3,450	4,410	2,560	6,920	:
Netherlands	250	485	410	500	480 ^(p)	920	3,910	7,455
United Kingdom	:	1,470	815	865	785	1,460	3,300	:
Norway	1,800	2,665	1,710	1,255	1,185	3,250	2,880	2,950
Denmark	15	35	25	20	55	85	2,275	:
Belgium	40	75	110	70	80	70	820	360
France	120	425	730	935	495	430	725	:
Italy	2,935	865	180	530	735	2,110	480	:
Greece	45	45	60	35	140	155	260	:
Hungary	0	0	0	5	5	90	120	550
Austria	20	20	15	25	15	60	110	:
Malta	175	270	15	315	435	475	60	:
Luxembourg	10	10	10	15	10	5	40	:
Bulgaria	0	0	0	0	0	30	10	0
Spain	45	35	10	10	20	5	10	:
Poland	0	0	0	10	5	5	10	:
Slovakia	0	0	0	0	30	30	10	:
Finland	5	10	15	5	5	0	10	70
Ireland	80	45	15	10	5	0	5	:
Croatia	:	:	:	:	:	20	5	:
Portugal	5	20	0	0	0	5	5	:
Czech Republic	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	:
Estonia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	:
Cyprus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	:
Latvia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	:
Lithuania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Romania	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	:
Slovenia	0	0	5	0	5	0	0	0
Iceland	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Liechtenstein	0	110	0	0	0	0	0	:

Source: online EUROSTAT database