

Eritrea

Key Facts

Total Population:	5,228,000 (2015)
Population aged under 5years:	1,060,300
Population aged 0-14 years:	40.25% - male 1,320,752/female 1,306,357
Population aged 15-24 years:	20.43% -male 665,900/female 667,509
Migration to the UK:	2001 Census identified over 7,000
Capital:	Asmara
Area:	117,400 sq km (45,300 sq miles)
Languages:	Tigrinya Arabic English Tigre Kunama Afar other Cushitic languages
Ethnic groups:	Tigrinya 55%, Tigre 30%, Saho 4%, Kunama 2%, Rashaida 2%, Bilen 2%, other (Afar, Beni Amir, Nera) 5%
Major religions:	Muslim Coptic Christian Roman Catholic Protestant
Life expectancy:	62 years male / 67 years female
Political Party:	People's Front for Democracy and Justice
President:	Isaias Afewerki



Geographical Location



Economy

Since formal independence from Ethiopia in 1993, Eritrea has faced many economic problems, including lack of financial resources and chronic drought, which have been exacerbated by restrictive economic policies. Eritrea has a command economy under the control of the sole political party. Like the economies of many African nations, a large share of the population - nearly 80% in Eritrea - is engaged in subsistence agriculture, but the sector only produces a small share of the country's total output. Prolonged periods of conflict and severe drought have adversely affected Eritrea's agriculture-based economy and it remains one of the poorest countries in Africa

Labour force by occupation	Agriculture	80%	(2004)
	Industry and services	20%	(2004)
Unemployment rate youths aged 15-24:	8.6%	(2013)	
Population below the poverty line:	50%	(2004)	

Education

Percentage of children aged over 15 who can read and write (2015):	Total	73.8%
	Male	82.4%
	Female	65.5%
School life expectancy (primary to tertiary education (2010):	Total	5years
	Male	6 years
	Female	4 years



Eritrea has the world's fifth poorest education system, with only 39% of children attending school. In particular, children living in rural areas experience the most difficulties in getting to school, sometimes having to walk several kilometres in blistering heat to get to class.

Families in Eritrea generally refuse to let young girls go to school. Their futures are already mapped out – they will be married as early as possible so there is a belief that school education is not required.

Furthermore, the facilities available in the education system are very poor, with completely out-dated or non-existent text books, buildings, sanitation facilities etc.

Child Protection

Percentage of children married:	- by age of 15:	12.9%	(2005-2013)
	- by age of 18:	40.7%	(2005-2013)
Justification of wife beating among adolescents:	- males	60.3%	(2005-2013)
	- females	51.4%	(2005-2013)
Births by age 18 years:	- total	18.8%	(2009-2013)
Female genital mutilation (FGM):	- prevalence women	83%	(2004-2013)
	-prevalence girls	33.2%	(2004-2013)
	- attitudes which support the practice	12.2%	(2004-2013)

In Eritrea, the law only forbids corporal punishment against children under the age of 15, which seriously endangers their physical and mental health. This means that punishment judged to be “reasonable” is legal. It is therefore widely accepted and practised by the population. As a result, thousands of children are victims of violence in both the family setting as well as at school. The perpetrators of inhuman and degrading treatment of children can be police and the military. For example, many children in prison are ill-treated and cruelly tortured.

There are an increasing number of children living on Eritrea's streets. They are vulnerable to become victims of trafficking or prostitution. Street children often use cannabis, alcohol, or inhale petrol fumes to escape their harsh reality.

Although the legal age at which they can get married in this country is 18, almost half of young Eritrean girls are married before the age of 18. However, customary laws allow [marriage](#) at a much younger age, in some cases at just 13 years old. Note that FGM was banned in 2007.



Politics - Key political dates:

- 300-600 - Present-day Eritrea forms part of the kingdom of Aksum.
- 1889-1941 - Italy colonises Eritrea.
- 1941-52 - British forces occupy and take over administration of Eritrea.
- 1952 - UN establishes Eritrea as an autonomous region within Ethiopia.
- 1961 - Ethiopia annexes Eritrea, triggering a 30-year war.
- 1991 - Eritrean People's Liberation Front wins war of independence, assisted by Ethiopian rebels who together with their Eritrean allies succeed in toppling Ethiopian President Mengistu Haile Mariam.
- 1993 - Eritrea votes for independence from Ethiopia, Eritrea becomes independent and joins the United Nations.
- 1997 - New constitution is drawn up but never implemented.
- 1998-2000 - Border war with Ethiopia. Tens of thousands are reportedly killed.
- 2000 - Eritrea, Ethiopia ceasefire and peace agreements envisage troop withdrawals and UN peacekeepers.
- 2005 April - World Food Programme warns of a dire food situation after a series of droughts. It extends emergency operations to help more than 840,000 people.
- 2009 - UN imposes sanctions on Eritrea for its alleged support of Islamist insurgents in Somalia.
- 2010-2011 - Rebel groups say they have been operating jointly to topple the government, and claim military successes.
- 2011 June-September - Horn of Africa hit by worst drought in 50 years. Aid agencies warned that millions in the region were affected by food shortages, Eritrea denied it had a crisis on its hands
- 2013 May - Brutal repression, including extrajudicial killings, forces thousands to flee Eritrea.
- 2013 December - A study presented to the European Parliament says as many as 30,000 Eritreans have been abducted and taken to Egypt's Sinai to be tortured and ransomed since 2007. Eritrea denies the accusation that its officials are involved.
- 2015 - UN report accuses the Eritrean government of crimes against humanity. The government dismisses the report as politically motivated.

Eritrea emerged from its long war of independence in 1993 only to plunge once again into military conflict, first with Yemen and then, more devastatingly, with Ethiopia leaving Ethiopia landlocked. Relations between the two neighbours have proved to be uneasy, and are complicated by issues such as Ethiopian access to Eritrean ports and unequal trade terms. This conflict ended with a peace deal in June 2000, but not before leaving both sides with tens of thousands of soldiers dead. A security zone separates the two countries. The UN patrolled the zone at one time but pulled out, unable to fulfil its mandate. Today, a fragile peace prevails and Eritrea faces the gigantic tasks of rebuilding its infrastructure and of developing its economy after decades of conflict.

President Isaias Afewerki has governed Eritrea since it became an independent country in 1993. His People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) is the sole political party. Presidential elections planned for 1997 never took place and a constitution ratified in the same year has never been implemented. Mr Isaias has been criticised for failing to introduce democratic reforms.



National Service

Eritrean Armed Forces consist of the Eritrean Ground Forces, the Eritrean Navy and the Eritrean Air Force. There is an 18 month conscript service obligation beginning from the age of 18 years.

Human Rights

Two key developments in 2015 highlighted the consequences of President Isaias Afwerki's authoritarian rule: the continuing flow of Eritreans escaping the country, and the publication of a scathing 453-page report by a United Nations commission of inquiry describing the serious human rights violations prompting thousands to seek refuge outside Eritrea. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees reported at the end of 2014 that 416,857 Eritreans have lodged asylum claims or are registered as refugees, over 9 percent of the country's population. UNHCR released no comprehensive figures for 2015 but reported about 39,000 Eritreans had applied for asylum by October in 44 industrialized countries alone. The commission of inquiry concluded that grave human rights violations "incite an ever-increasing number of Eritreans to leave their country." Based on over 500 interviews, the UN commission found that the Eritrean government engages in "systemic, widespread and gross human rights violations," and that the abuses occur in the "context of a total lack of rule of law" with the result that it "is not the law that rules Eritreans, but fear."

The government has never allowed any UN special mechanism investigators into the country. In June, the UN Human Rights Council extended the commission's mandate until mid-2016, instructing it to further investigate whether some abuses constitute crimes against humanity. Indefinite Military Service and Forced Labour By law, each Eritrean is compelled to serve 18 months in national service starting at 18. In practice, conscripts serve indefinitely, many for over a decade. Most Eritreans begin military training as part of the last year of high school, but children as young as 15 are sometimes conscripted. Assignments include forced labour for government-owned construction firms, farms, or manufacturers. Conscripts receive inadequate pay to support themselves, much less a family. They are subject to military discipline and are harshly treated throughout their long service. Perceived infractions result in incarceration and physical abuse often amounting to torture. Military commanders and jailers have absolute discretion to determine the length of incarceration and the severity of physical abuse. Female conscripts are often sexually abused by commanders. There is no mechanism for redressing abuses; protest can result in more severe punishment.

Law and government

In Eritrea there is a mixed legal system of civil, customary, and Islamic religious law.

Arbitrary arrests are the norm. A prisoner is rarely told the reason for the arrest; often prison authorities are not informed. Detainees are held indefinitely. Few detainees are brought to trial. Prisoners are held in vastly overcrowded cells, underground dungeons, or shipping containers, with no space to lie down, little or no light, oppressive heat or cold, and vermin. Food, water, and sanitation are inadequate. Beatings and other physical abuse in detention have frequently been reported, sometimes resulting in deaths. Many prisoners simply disappear.

Freedom of Speech and Association President Isaias rules without institutional restraint. A constitution adopted in 1997 remains unimplemented. No national elections have been held since independence. Eritrea has had no legislature since 2002. The court system is subject to executive control and interference. Nongovernmental organizations are not permitted.

Religion

The government persecutes citizens who practice religions other than the four it recognizes —Sunni Islam, Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran churches. Prayer meetings of unrecognized religions are disrupted and participants are arrested. A condition for release is usually a signed statement by the prisoner recanting his religious affiliation. Jehovah's Witnesses are especially persecuted.



The government also interferes with the practices of the four religions it recognizes. The government appointed the Sunni imam in 1996, deposed the patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church in 2005, and appointed his successor. The deposed patriarch remains under house arrest 10 years later.

Trafficking and forced labour

Eritrea is a source country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of forced labour domestically and, to a lesser extent, sex and labour trafficking abroad. The country's national service program is often abused, with conscripts detained indefinitely and subjected to forced labour. Eritrean migrants, often fleeing national service, face strict exit control procedures and limited access to passports and visas, making them vulnerable to trafficking. Eritrean secondary school children are required to take part in public works projects during their summer breaks and must attend military and educational camp in their final year to obtain a high school graduation certificate and to gain access to higher education and some jobs. Some Eritreans living in or near refugee camps, particularly in Sudan, are kidnapped by criminal groups and held for ransom in the Sinai Peninsula and Libya, where they are subjected to forced labour and abuse.

Eritrea does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. The government fails to investigate or prosecute any trafficking offenses or to identify or protect any victims.

Media

The government owns all media and media beyond the state-sanctioned newspapers and TV is non-existent. The Committee to Protect Journalists identified Eritrea as the most censored country in the world, media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in its 2015 World Press Freedom Index placed Eritrea last behind North Korea.

International Relations

In 2014, the Danish Immigration Service issued a report suggesting that human rights conditions in Eritrea were better than reported and that no harm would come to Eritreans who were returned from countries where they sought asylum. In 2015, the report was repudiated by two of its three authors amid growing questions about the credibility of the report's methodology. One of the report authors contended that quotations in the report were taken out of context by his superiors to achieve a political goal of discouraging Eritrean asylum seekers. Despite widespread criticism of the Danish report, the United Kingdom's Home Office changed its guidance about Eritrea in early 2015 to assert that asylum seekers "who left [Eritrea] illegally are no longer considered per se to be at risk of harm or mistreatment amounting to persecution on return."

Key International Actors Eritrea's relations with neighbouring Ethiopia and Djibouti remain severely strained. Fifteen years after a bloody border war, Ethiopia occupies slivers of territory identified by a boundary commission as Eritrean, including the town of Badme where the war began. President Isaias uses the pretext of "no-war, no peace" to keep his countrymen under totalitarian control.

Eritrea continues to host armed Ethiopian opposition groups. The UN Security Council maintained an arms embargo on Eritrea for another year after receiving a report from its Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea that found no evidence Eritrea was still supporting Al-Shabaab rebels in Somalia, but complained Eritrea had not cooperated in Monitoring Group investigations and had not provided information about Djiboutian prisoners of war captured in border clashes in 2008.

Much of Eritrea's foreign exchange income comes from foreign gold/copper mining company projects in which the Eritrean government holds a 40 percent stake. China is Eritrea's largest trading partner, investor, and contractor.



Family life

Marriage

Customary rules of marriage vary among the ethnic groups. Generally, girls marry at an early age, sometimes as young as fourteen. A large share of the marriages in the rural areas are still arranged by the family groups of concern.

Domestic Unit

Generally, people live together in nuclear families, although in some ethnic groups the family structure is extended. The man is the public decision-maker in the family, whereas the woman is responsible for organizing the domestic activities of the household.

In all ethnic groups, children are raised under the strong influence of parents and close relatives, as well as neighbours and the kin group. While conducting domestic chores or working in the fields, mothers usually carry the infants on their backs. The lifetime average number of children per women is 5.

Child Rearing

From an early age, both boys and girls are expected to take part in the household's activities: boys as herders of the family's livestock, girls as assistants to their mother in domestic affairs.

Cultural Etiquette

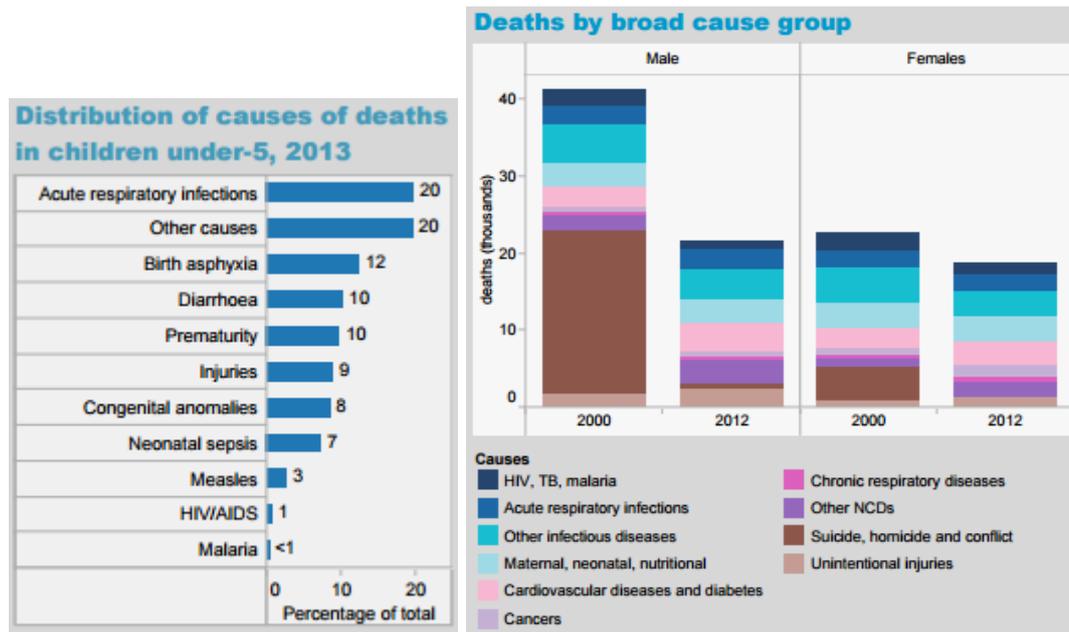
- Respect for elders and authority is deeply rooted.
- A handshake is appropriate way of greeting in most situations for men greeting men or women greeting women followed by the word, "Selam", which means "peace". An appropriate response is the "Selam". Handshakes tend to be energetic and very often linger a bit.
- Meetings between men and women typically involve a handshake or nod of acknowledgment.
- Boys and men are frequently seen holding hands as a sign of friendship. Good friends and family may hug or tap each other's right shoulder.
- Always use your right hand when shaking hands. The left hand is considered impure.
- Looking away or down during conversations is generally viewed as a sign of respect and admiration to the speaker.
- To beckon someone it is common to hold the hand with palm down and curl fingers into the hand quickly in a scratching motion.
- Raising your eyebrows during a conversation generally means 'yes'.
- Bowing down one's head means greetings to an elder.
- When there is a fight between two young adults, one of them will turn their body, lift their leg and show the other person the bottom part of his/her leg. This is an expression for telling the other person to shut up his/her mouth.

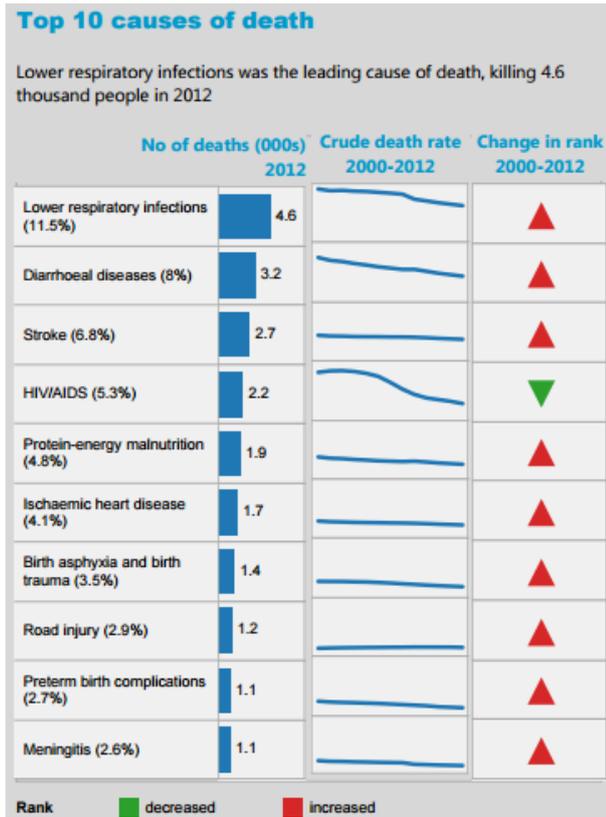


Health

Mortality

Neonatal mortality rate per 1000 live births:	18
Infant mortality rate per 1000 live births:	36
Under 5 mortality rate per 1000 live births:	50





Infectious diseases

- TB - Eritrea has a high rate of tuberculosis (40-499/100,000).
- HIV - The rate of HIV in this country is low at $\leq 1\%$.
 - Comprehensive knowledge of HIV by 15-24 year olds: male 31.9% ; females 22.3% (2009-2013).
 - Estimate of the number of children living with HIV in 2013 : 3300
- Hepatitis B - Eritrea has an intermediate prevalence of hepatitis B.
- Hepatitis C - Eritrea has a higher prevalence of hepatitis C than the UK.
- Malaria - Eritrea has a high risk of malaria due to *P. falciparum* and *P. vivax*.
- Enteric fever - There is risk of typhoid infection in Eritrea.
- Helminths - There is a risk of helminth infections including schistosomiasis, lymphatic filariasis and soil transmitted helminthiasis in Eritrea.



Immunisations

Percentage coverage in under 1s:

DPT3/pentavalant	94%	combination vaccine: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B and Hib
Measles	96%	
BCG	97%	
PCV3	0%	
HBV3 (hepatitis B)	94%	
Rotavirus	0%	
Hib	94%	
Polio	94%	
Newborns protected against tetanus	94%	

Nutrition

Percentage of babies exclusively breastfed for 6 months: 68.7% (2009-2013)

Introduction to solid, semi-solid or soft foods 6-8 months: 39.9% (2009-2013)

Breastfeeding at age 2: 72.8%

Percentage of whose growth was stunted: 38.8%

Percentage whose growth was wasted: 50.3%

- Anaemia - There is a high risk of anaemia with an estimated prevalence in pre-school children of >40%.
- Vitamin A deficiency - There is a high risk of vitamin A deficiency in Eritrea.
- Vitamin D deficiency - There is a risk of vitamin D deficiency in Eritrea.

Health Beliefs

Traditional medicine practice exists in Eritrea. However in most cases they consult a medical doctor before they use traditional medicines. Traditional healers use medicinal herbs and other local ingredients to treat both diseases and common sicknesses. Eritreans additionally use home remedies. For example, eucalyptus leaves are boiled in water and the steam inhaled to help fight congestion, while for children the herb rue is ground with warm oil and rubbed on the chest. Onion and garlic fermentations are used as antibiotics. Another traditional practice in Eritrea is therapeutic burning, which is now illegal but may be evident in older generations.

Religion plays a significant role in the health and well-being of Eritreans. When an individual is sick it is a common practice for parents or seniors to take them to church for a 'holy-water' shower and prayer of a priest. This is especially true if the type of disease is related to epilepsy or hallucination.

