



# Diaspora engagement mapping ERITREA

## Facts & figures

Terminology: The Eritrean government uses the term diaspora (Tigrigna ብድኻራ), which is an adoption of the English term, or 'Eritreans abroad'.

### Political rights



Dual citizenship



Right to vote in national elections for citizens residing abroad<sup>2</sup>

Voting from abroad<sup>3</sup>



### Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: -  
Remittances inflow (USD million): -

### Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from UNDESA (2024) and remittances from the World Bank (2023).

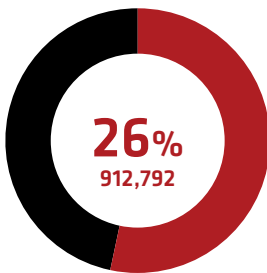
### Emigration



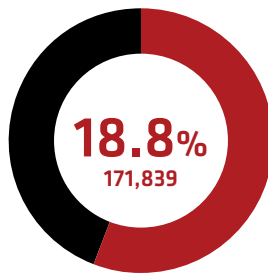
% of emigrants in total population<sup>1</sup>



% of which in the EU



♂ 52.3%  
♀ 47.7%



♂ 55.9%  
♀ 44.1%

### Top countries of destination



Sudan	384,053
Ethiopia	176,860
Sweden	59,751
Canada	42,246
Uganda	41,731

### Eritrea does not have a diaspora engagement policy.

Although Eritrea does not have a formal, overarching diaspora policy, it can be argued that there is nevertheless an (informal) diaspora engagement policy framework in support of the government's objectives.

1 From UNDESA Migration Stock Statistics for 2019.

2 However, permission from the government must be obtained <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/docs/OtherEntities/OSJI%20CitizenshipAfricaStudy.pdf>

3 According to the Eritrean constitution, Eritrean expatriates have the right to participate in elections and referenda, although this has not been enabled as there have been no national elections since independence. Diaspora voting was enabled for the 1993 referendum on independence, which saw high diaspora support for Eritrean independence from Ethiopia. See Mussie Tesfagiorgis G. (2010), Eritrea, ABC-CLIO. However, diaspora voting has not been enabled since in Eritrea.

## Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 1997** ● The **Eritrean constitution**<sup>4</sup> defines Eritrean citizenship as ‘any person born of an Eritrean father or mother by birth’. The diaspora contributed to drafting the constitution before its formal adoption.<sup>5</sup> It also gives members of the diaspora the right to take part in national elections and referenda, although no elections have been held in the country since 1993.
- 1991** ▼  
**1994** ● **Investment Proclamation No. 18/1991 and Investment Proclamation No. 59/1994.**<sup>6</sup> The 1991 proclamation encouraged both expatriate nationals and foreigners to invest in Eritrea. The 1994 Proclamation repealed the earlier one, and removed many of the restrictions and deficiencies of the former Proclamation. In the 1994 proclamation, the government reaffirms its determination to promote, encourage, safeguard, and protect investments by the private sector.
- 1991** ▼  
**1995** ● **Proclamation No. 17/1991: Proclamation to Provide for the Collection of Rehabilitation Tax (10 December 1991) and Proclamation No. 67/1995: Tax Payment Proclamation for Eritreans in Diaspora Who Have Income (10 February 1995).**<sup>7</sup> These two proclamations form the basis for Eritrea’s ‘Recovery and Rehabilitation Tax’, which charges Eritreans in the diaspora an income tax of 2%. The legality of this tax has been challenged in several European states, which characterise it as a ‘diaspora tax’, an allegation firmly denied by the Eritrean government.<sup>8</sup>

### » Trends

The Eritrean government has consistently acknowledged the importance of diaspora engagement for the country. Many diaspora groups have shown their commitment and dedication to bringing social, economic, and political change, and their support has proved vital in mobilising resources, technology, and skills. Over the years, there have been different patterns for diaspora engagement in Eritrea, ranging from individual diaspora engagement, taxes and donations, government bonds, as well as ownership of real estate. In 2005, it was estimated that the ‘diaspora tax’ levied on the Eritrean diaspora averaged an annual US \$5.9 million and other contributions US\$24 million/year since 1997, according to unpublished government figures.<sup>9,10</sup> There have been questions raised by diaspora and the leadership in the countries in which they reside in regards to the 2% tax Eritreans abroad are expected to pay. Concerns about the use and negative impact of the funds as well as the method of ensuring payment have raised tensions.<sup>11</sup>

One example of diaspora engagement approaches in Eritrea is demonstrated by the ‘culture of contributing’ that can be traced back to the struggle for independence from Ethiopia, when diaspora support (including collection and donations) played a significant role in

4 English version available at: <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/50149/90331/F-85322205/ERI50149%20Eng.pdf>. Original Tigrigna and Arabic versions available at: <https://www.eritreadaily.net/News2009/Qwam.pdf> and [https://snitna.com/docs/Eritrean\\_Constitution\\_Arabic\\_.pdf](https://snitna.com/docs/Eritrean_Constitution_Arabic_.pdf)

5 Bereket Selassie (2019), *Focus on the Eritrean Constitution: A Companion to Eritreans Engaged in the Struggle for Change*, AuthorHouse; see also Nicole Hirt, The Eritrean diaspora and its impact on regime stability: Responses to UN sanctions, *African Affairs*, Volume 114, Issue 454, January 2015, Pages 115–135, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adu061> and Rosen, R. A., ‘Constitutional Process, Constitutionalism, and the Eritrean Experience’, *North Carolina Journal of international Law and commercial Regulation*, Vol 24 No 2 1999

6 English version of Investment Proclamation No. 18/1991 is available here: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uva.x006071088&view=1up&seq=3>

English version of Investment Proclamation No. 59/1994 is available here: <https://investmentpolicy.unctad.org/investment-laws/laws/255/eritrea-investment-proclamation->. For more information, see Mengsteab Negash, ‘Investment Laws in Eritrea’, in *North Carolina Journal of international Law and commercial Regulation*, Vol 24 No 2 1999

7 The UK Home Office has published an official translation of these Proclamations, available here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/559482/Eritrea-Appendix-I-II-III-V-Dec-2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/559482/Eritrea-Appendix-I-II-III-V-Dec-2015.pdf)

8 For example, see *The Guardian*, QZ Africa

9 Fessehazion T (2005), *op. cit.*

10 There is little, if any, official information published by the Eritrean government on the volume of revenue inflows from the tax, although in 2017 this was conservatively estimated at \$100 million USD annually. See DSP-groep BV & Tilburg School of Humanities, Department of Culture studies (2017), ‘2% Tax for Eritreans in the diaspora’

11 <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2023/09/18/protests-by-the-eritrean-diaspora-have-highlighted-repression-at-home-and-dividing-lines-abroad/> <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/nov/04/stop-eritreas-war-funding-diaspora-tax-say-mps-and-lords> <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/2/20/eritreas-diaspora-tax-is-funding-violence-and-oppression>

supporting the struggle for independence from Ethiopia, and subsequently in post-conflict reconstruction.<sup>12 13</sup>

The Eritrean economy remains heavily reliant on remittances, as the country struggles to access other sources of capital.<sup>14</sup> In addition to official remittances, Eritreans abroad send remittances through informal channels, such as friends or family members travelling to Eritrea, or informal money transfer networks.<sup>15</sup> Donations are collected in at least three ways: on the occasion of festivals, through door-to-door collections, and through media appeals. Most recently, Eritrean diaspora members have donated several million dollars via teleconferences to support Eritrea's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>16</sup>



## Achievements

The Eritrean Ministry of Information website lists current appeals for diaspora contributions for specific development causes. Young people in the diaspora also volunteer on education and development projects when they return to Eritrea for the summer, which is seen as important both to build their connection to the country and as an additional human resource.

President Afwerki's annual keynote address in 2017 on short and medium term developmental programmes and priorities included a promise to review 'programmes and plans of action to encourage and ensure the participation and contribution of all Eritreans who reside abroad in all our developmental programmes' over the next three to five years.

According to the Eritrean government, 'social remittances' have the potential to inspire minds and perceptions of the Eritrean population and thus to transform everyday lives and the economy of entire regions, as well as to raise awareness about the country abroad.<sup>17</sup> Eritrean diaspora activists have also proved active in promoting Eritrea's image abroad more positively. For example, diaspora groups and individuals have organised campaigns and protests against misrepresentation of the 'diaspora tax' and sanctions on Eritrea that led the expulsion of Eritrean diplomats from some European countries.<sup>18</sup>

Eritrean diaspora activists are also active in demanding political change in the country. One significant example of Eritrean advocacy from the diaspora is the 2000 Berlin Manifesto, a letter composed by 13 diaspora scholars (later on called G-13), nationalist activists, and professionals, all long-time supporters of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF – a forerunner to the PFDJ).<sup>19 20</sup>

12 Fikrejesus Amahazion (2019), 'Understanding Remittances in Eritrea: An Exploratory Study'.

13 Hart, Nichole, 'The Eritrean Diaspora and its Impact on Regime Stability: Responses to UN Sanctions', *African Affairs*, 114/454, (2015) pp115–135.

14 Global Impact Investment Network (2015), 'The Landscape for Impact Investing In East Africa

15 Fikrejesus Amahazion (2019), *op. cit.* see also Styan, David (2007): Discussion Paper: The Evolution, Uses and Abuses of Remittances in the Eritrean Economy. Conference Proceedings, Eritrea's Economic Survival, London

16 <http://www.shabait.com/news/local-news/30462-contribution-by-nationals-in-diaspora->

17 Fikrejesus Amahazion (2019), *op. cit.*

18 See also Hirt, Nicole, The Eritrean Diaspora: Savior or Gravedigger of the Regime? Diaspora Responses to the Imposition of UN Sanctions (October 1, 2013). GIGA Working Paper No. 236.

19 See, inter alia, Koser, Khalid (2003): Mobilizing New African Diasporas: An Eritrean Case study. In: Khalid Koser (ed.): *New African Diasporas*. London: Routledge, pp. 111-123; Hepner Redeker (2009). *Soldiers, Martyrs, Traitors and Exiles: Political Conflict in Eritrea and the Diaspora*. Ethnography of Political Violence Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Full text of the 'Berlin Manifesto'

20 Although personally addressed to President Isayas Afwerki, the letter was soon disseminated in Eritrea and Eritrean communities abroad and initiated a transnational debate about human rights and civil society.

## Obstacles



- **Difficult economic situation:** The economic conditions in post-war Eritrea adversely affect the capability and willingness of diaspora members to engage in investment or trade activities.<sup>21</sup> A challenging economic outlook, exacerbated by deficits in the protection of property rights, discourages foreign direct investment, including potential diaspora investments.<sup>22,23</sup>
- **Polarised Diaspora:** The Eritrean diaspora is highly polarised politically and can be divided about engaging with the Eritrean government.<sup>24</sup> Some diaspora groups are supportive of the government and the People's Front for Democracy and Justice maintains chapters in most countries of residence.<sup>25</sup> Others are deeply opposed to the government and there have been examples of different factions seeking to disrupt public events concerning Eritrea.<sup>26</sup>
- **Lack of trust:** There is a deep lack of trust between some sections of the diaspora and the government, which acts as a major barrier to engagement. Thus far, state-diaspora relations have been confined predominantly to pro-government-organisations., and it can be difficult for diaspora groups or individuals who are not supportive of the government to operate in the country.

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### EUTF/IOM Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals (TRQN) for Eritrea 2020

This three-year TRQN programme seeks to facilitate the voluntary participation of Eritrean Diaspora to support institutional strengthening in key socio-economic sectors agreed with the Eritrean government, including education, health, water and sanitation, agriculture, energy, infrastructure, civil engineering, financial systems, and information technology. In addition, the programme will support the Department of Eritreans Abroad in playing a coordinating role for the diaspora engagement, through skills transfer, and strategy development.

### COVID-19 Response Fund 2020

The Covid-19 response fund is a government diaspora engagement initiative to support the Ministry of health in fighting against the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides an opportunity for citizens and the diaspora to contribute financially to respond to medical needs and procure equipment. The platform gives people the ability to make monetary contributions, share the website across their social networks, and to sign up to help if people in the medical field are interested.

### EriReader project 2012

A group of young diaspora Eritreans from the United States started the EriReader Project, with the aim of providing one tablet for each Eritrean student, as inspired by the demonstrated need and policies of the Commission of Higher Education of Eritrea. EriReader works in collaboration with the Eritrean Development Fund (EDF) in Washington DC and the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA-UK), in London, UK. So far, EriReader has sent 500 tablets.

21 Antony Otieno Ong'ayo (2015), 'Diaspora transnational activities and home country regime conditions - obstacles to Eritrean diaspora contribution to local development in Eritrea.'

22 Fikrejesus Amahazion (2019), *op. cit.*

23 Private business is discouraged by strict controls over money transfers as well as a highly regulated currency market, and anyone found in possession of undeclared foreign currency may be subject to a fine and/or prison sentence. See Hart (2015), *op. cit.*

24 Belloni, Milena. "Refugees and Citizens: Understanding Eritrean Refugees' Ambivalence towards Homeland Politics." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 60, no. 1-2 (February 2019): 55-73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020715218760382>.

25 YPFDJ is the youth wing of Eritrea's ruling PFDJ and its members in the diaspora run national country chapters which carry out lobbying and advocacy, fundraising, youth, and education programmes, as well as volunteering opportunities in Eritrea. It works to ensure that Eritrean youth around the world are empowered and mobilized to develop a viable and sustainable Eritrea. See <http://ypfdj.com/>

26 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/20/eritrea-diaspora-divided-your-stories>

## Annex:

# List of Actors

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 430+ institutions](#)

### Diaspora related institutions



- **At regional level**

#### **African Union Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (AU-CIDO)** 2001

AU-CIDO is responsible for implementing the AU's engagement with non-state actors through the involvement of the diaspora and civil society. Eritrea nominates a diaspora focal point to represent the country at AU-CIDO Continental Meetings.

#### **Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)** 1996

IGAD works to promote regional cooperation and integration to add value to Member States' efforts in achieving peace, security and prosperity. The 2012 IGAD Regional Migration Policy Framework prioritises collaboration with the diaspora for national development and to address brain-drain.<sup>27</sup> Eritrea suspended its membership in 2007, but reactivated it in 2011, although it has not attended meetings since then.

- **National institutions**

- At ministerial level

#### **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** 1993

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has overall responsibility for diaspora engagement through its overseas embassies and missions.

#### **Ministry of Information** 1993

The Ministry of Information is responsible for the communications of the Eritrean government, and its website provides information for its citizens and its diaspora.

- At sub-ministerial level

#### **Department of Eritreans Abroad**

The Department of Eritreans Abroad forms part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its mandate is to develop and coordinate policies and programmes targeting the diaspora.

<sup>27</sup> Available at: <http://migration.igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Regional-Migration-Policy-Framework1.pdf>

## Diaspora organisations in Europe

### **Agenzia Habeshia per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (AHCS)**

2006 Italy

Read more about diaspora organisations in "[Starting guide: What is a diaspora organisation](#)"



- ☑ **Integration activities**
- ☑ **Development activities**

AHCS (the Habeshia Agency for Cooperation and Development) was established as a volunteer organisation working in solidarity with asylum seekers, refugees and beneficiaries of humanitarian protection in Italy. The agency aims to promote the integration of immigrants in Italy, and delivers integration activities as well as projects for those returning to their country of origin. It also helps migrants and refugees to access to administrative, legal support and specialised training. [ f ]

### **Association solidarité des érythréens en France (ASDEF)** France

- ☑ **Integration activities**

ASDEF aims to help Eritreans in Nantes to integrate. It provides education for young children, teenagers and adults, and works to help those who are in difficulty.

### **Azmara** Denmark 2002

- ☑ **Integration activities**
- ☑ **Development activities**

Azmara is a Danish-Eritrean network association that works to develop the relationship between the Danish and Eritrean people. It organises cultural and social meetings together with the network of associations among Eritreans, primarily in Greater Copenhagen. These include the Eritrean Women's Organization, the Youth Association, the Eritrean Disability Association and the Eritrean Club, which is a social meeting place for Eritreans in Greater Copenhagen. It also runs projects in Eritrea, such as an IT recycling scheme that sends recycled ICT equipment to schools in Eritrea.

### **Club Érythréen** Switzerland


- ☑ **Integration activities**

Club érythréen provides a space for the Eritrean community in Lausanne to come together and discuss daily problems and to better understand life in Switzerland

### **Den Eritreanske Støtteforening (The Eritrean Support Group of Denmark)** 2014 Denmark

- ☑ **Integration activities**
- ☑ **Development activities**

Den Eritreanske Støtteforening conducts cultural and awareness-raising sessions on Eritrea for the Eritrean diaspora and Danish friends of Eritrea as well as supporting education projects in the southern Dehub region of Eritrea with educational materials donated from Danish schools.



### **Eritro-German Association (ERG)** 1996 Eritrea/Germany

#### **☑ Development activities**

ERG is a non-profit organisation whose main aim is to provide and promote cultural activities between German and Eritrea. Cultural activities, German language courses and kindergarten are among the services provide by ERG. ERG works with-Eritreans who returned from Germany, Germans living in Eritrea, and Eritreans still living in Germany for at least the past 5 years.

### **Eritrean Elder's Welfare Association (EEWA)** 2002 United Kingdom

#### **☑ Integration activities**

EEWA provides befriending and advice services to the elderly in the Eritrean community in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in London.

### **Eritrean Parent's and Children's Association (EPCA)** United Kingdom

#### **☑ Integration activities**

EPCA was initially set up with the aim to help community members meet and break social isolation and to help children learn the English language. It also provides mother-tongue classes in Tigrigna and Arabic for young Eritreans, and delivers services to address needs including immigration and accommodation problems. EPCA serves a diverse range of local communities, including Eritrean, Somali, Algerian, Libyan, Sudanese, Ethiopian and Moroccan groups).

### **Eritrean Relief Association (ERA-UK)** 1976 United Kingdom

#### **☑ Integration activities**

#### **☑ Development activities**

ERA-UK was set up in 1976 by a group of Eritrean refugees together with British supporters of the Eritrean struggle for independence. The work of ERA-UK now includes long-term development programmes in primary health care, education, training and employment and rehabilitation of refugees and internally displaced people. It is currently collaborating with the Eritrean Women's Agribusiness Association in building food production capacity – from small-scale farming through to large-scale food processing.

### **Foundation Human Rights for Eritrean** (FHRE) 2019 Netherlands

#### **☑ Integration activities**

#### **☑ Development activities**

FHRE campaigns for increased rights and freedoms of Eritreans in Eritrea, Eritrean refugees, and Eritreans in the diaspora and provides assistance to these groups in case of need.

## Gezana Switzerland

### Integration activities

Gezana is an Eritrean association supporting the integration of Eritrean refugees and migrants in the canton of Vaud in Switzerland. The association is committed to helping Eritrean communities through various actions related to integration. Gezana is working to become a resource and a point of representation for the Eritrean community.

## International Centre for Eritrean Refugees (ICERAS) 2011 United Kingdom

### Integration activities

### Development activities

ICERAS was created as an advocacy group with the primary purpose of empowering Eritreans fleeing from persecution. The organisation focuses on facilitating asylum seekers and refugees internationally with the access to resources, and educating them about their legal rights and the social assistance and available training opportunities in the UK. In Eritrea, ICERAS seeks to establish working relationships with international emergency aid organisations able to provide humanitarian assistance to newly arrived and transient refugees.

## Swedish Eritrean Forum for Development Cooperation (S-ERI Forum) 2000 Sweden

### Integration activities

### Development activities

S-ERI Forum decided to revive the humanitarian work that the Eritrea Support Association (ERA) did in Sweden from the mid-1970s until , 1990.

S-ERI Forum is a party-political and religiously unrelated forum that works to mobilise and channel aid and development assistance to Eritrea, including support for local electrification projects in Eritrea

## Uniting Eritrean Voices in Germany e.V. (UEVG) 2019 Germany

### Integration activities

UEVG works to strengthen and promote relations between the Eritrean diaspora and public and private institutions of the Federal Republic of Germany in the spirit of peaceful cooperation, while acting as the representative body of the Eritrean Diaspora in Germany for cooperation with German politics and the public.

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