

# Eritrea

## Geography

Location: Eastern Africa, bordering the Red Sea, between Djibouti and Sudan

Area:

total area: 121,320 sq km

land area: 121,320 sq km

Land boundaries: total 1,630 km, Djibouti 113 km, Ethiopia 912 km, Sudan 605 km

Coastline: 1,151 km (land and island coastline is 2,234 km)

Climate: hot, dry desert strip along Red Sea coast; cooler and wetter in the central highlands (up to 61 cm of rainfall annually); semiarid in western hills and lowlands; rainfall heaviest during June-September except on coastal desert

Terrain: dominated by extension of Ethiopian north-south trending highlands, descending on the east to a coastal desert plain, on the northwest to hilly terrain and on the southwest to flat-to-rolling plains

Natural resources: gold, potash, zinc, copper, salt, probably oil (petroleum geologists are prospecting for it), fish

Land use:

arable land: 3%

permanent crops: 2% (coffee)

meadows and pastures: 40%

forest and woodland: 5%

other: 50%

Environment:

current issues: famine; deforestation; desertification; soil erosion; overgrazing; loss of infrastructure from civil warfare

natural hazards: frequent droughts

Note: strategic geopolitical position along world's busiest shipping lanes; Eritrea retained the entire coastline of Ethiopia along the Red Sea upon de jure independence from Ethiopia on 27 April 1993

# People

Population: 3,578,709 (July 1995 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 43% (female 763,416; male 774,922)

15-64 years: 54% (female 965,124; male 965,435)

65 years and over: 3% (female 52,950; male 56,862) (July 1995 est.)

Population growth rate: 9.04% (1995 est.)

Birth rate: 44.34 births/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Death rate: 15.67 deaths/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Net migration rate: NA migrant(s)/1,000 population (1995 est.)

note: repatriation of up to a half million Eritrean refugees in Sudan is now underway; 100,000 are expected to return during 1995

Infant mortality rate: 120.6 deaths/1,000 live births (1995 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:  
total population: 50 years  
male: 48.28 years  
female: 51.78 years (1995 est.)

Total fertility rate: 6.53 children born/woman (1995 est.)

Nationality:  
noun: Eritrean(s)  
adjective: Eritrean

Ethnic divisions: ethnic Tigrays 50%, Tigre and Kunama 40%, Afar 4%, Saho (Red Sea coast dwellers) 3%

Religions: Muslim, Coptic Christian, Roman Catholic, Protestant

Languages: Tigre and Kunama, Cushitic dialects, Tigre, Nora Bana, Arabic

## Government

Names:

conventional long form: State of Eritrea  
conventional short form: Eritrea  
local long form: none  
local short form: none  
former: Eritrea Autonomous Region in Ethiopia

Capital: Asmara (formerly Asmera)

Independence: 27 May 1993 (from Ethiopia; formerly the Eritrea Autonomous Region)

National holiday: National Day (independence from Ethiopia), 24 May (1993)

Constitution: transitional "constitution" decreed 19 May 1993

Flag: red isosceles triangle (based on the hoist side) dividing the flag into two right triangles; the upper triangle is green, the lower one is blue; a gold wreath encircling a gold olive branch is centered on the hoist side of the red triangle

## Economy

Overview: With independence from Ethiopia on 27 April 1993, Eritrea faces the bitter economic problems of a small, desperately poor African country. Most of the population will continue to depend on subsistence farming. Domestic output is substantially augmented by worker remittances from abroad. Government revenues come from custom duties and income and sales taxes. Eritrea has inherited the entire coastline of Ethiopia and has long-term prospects for revenues from the development of offshore oil, offshore fishing, and tourism. For the time being, Ethiopia will be largely dependent on Eritrean ports for its foreign trade.

Industries: food processing, beverages, clothing and textiles

Agriculture: products - sorghum, livestock (including goats), fish, lentils, vegetables, maize, cotton, tobacco, coffee, sisal (for making rope)

Transportation

Railroads:  
total: 307 km;

Highways:  
total: 3,845 km

Ports: Assab (Aseb), Massawa (Mits'iwa)

Airports:  
total: 20

Defence Forces

Branches: Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF)