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## Refugees Country Briefing

# ERITREA

This document was developed in the framework of the EU-funded project “Refugees and Recognition – Toolkit for recognition of higher education for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation” by the ENIC-NARIC centres of France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom.



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This country briefing – especially developed to help with the evaluation of credentials of refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation – should give orientation on the education system in Eritrea in the light of recent political and economic developments in this country. It presents a systematised overview on its higher education system and links to the available information sources that are useful for the evaluation of qualifications of refugees coming from Eritrea, even in cases where candidates present insufficient or lack of documentation.

## Eritrea



Source: CIA World Factbook

**Location:** Eritrea is located in Eastern Africa in the Horn of Africa, to the North of Ethiopia and bordering the Red Sea in Northeast.

**Population:** 5.6 million

**Ethnic Groups:** Tigrinya people make up about 50% of the population; the Tigre, who also speak an Ethiopic language, constitute around 30% of residents. Most of the rest of the population belong to other Afro-Asiatic-speaking communities of the Cushitic branch. Additionally, there are a number of Arabic, Nilo-Saharan and Italian-speaking ethnic minorities.

**Languages:** Tigrinya, Tigre, Arabic, English, Italian



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## 1. Current situation

Eritrea is a small African country, which was an Italian colony from 1889 to 1945, and since 1952 a part of Ethiopia. After almost 30 years of war, Eritrea became independent in 1993. Since independence, it has been run by one party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), with Isaias Aferwerki as president of the country. The system of education is fully controlled by the state, and programmes of higher education are overall planned and developed to serve the needs of the country.

Eritrea has seen a change in its higher education system in the period 2004–2010. However, this reform is not a change in the system itself, but a change in the number of institutions offering higher education in the country. The system of diploma-, bachelor- (and master-) programmes has remained more or less the same, except for the fact that the number of programs has increased.

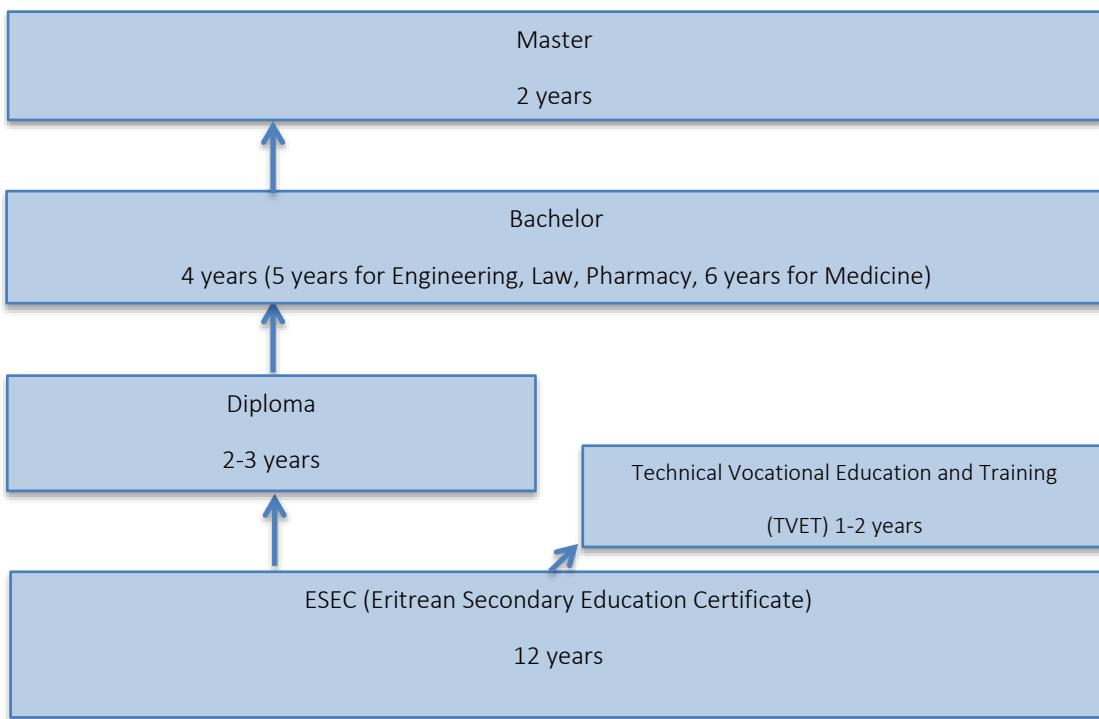
The University of Asmara was the only institution of higher education in the whole country in the period from 1958 to 2003. All issues related to higher education have been concentrated around the university. To be able to offer higher education to a larger number of students, the government decided to upgrade seven underlying colleges of the University of Asmara to independent institutions of higher education. Some of the new colleges have also been moved to other parts of the country. The University of Asmara was closed in 2004, with the last intake of students in 2003. The result of decentralisation is that Eritrea today has seven institutions offering higher education, and the number of students attending programs of higher education has risen from around 5000 students at the University of Asmara in 2004 to around 17 000 students attending programs at the new colleges of higher education in 2012.

The University of Asmara's main programmes were the diploma programmes and the bachelor degrees; the master degree programme was introduced for the first time in 2004, just before closing of the university. Today we see that most of the new colleges of higher education have already introduced many new master degree programmes or are planning to introduce master degree programmes in the near future.

*Approaches to evaluation of the qualifications from Eritrea can be different in different ENIC-NARIC countries depending on the mandate of the evaluation authorities. More information on assessment practices of documentation from Eritrea can be obtained from the E-learning modules to be developed within the framework of the EU-funded project "Refugees and Recognition – Toolkit for recognition of higher education for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation" by the ENIC-NARIC centres of France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom.*



## 2. Education chart



## 3. Education system

### Primary and Secondary Education

- Primary School grades 1-5, official starting age is seven years old
- Middle School grades 6-8, middle school is compulsory
- Secondary School grades 9-11
- The School of Sawa is the only institution which offers 12<sup>th</sup> year for students from all over the country

### University-preparatory qualifications

At the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> year the students sit for the Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate (ESEC) Examination. The Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate (ESEC) is issued by the Ministry of Education in Eritrea.

In order to be qualified for admission to higher education, graduates must pass five subjects in the Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate Examination. English and Mathematics are compulsory subjects. In addition, they must take at least three other subjects. Each subject is marked on a grading scale from A to D. F is fail, and a student cannot have an "F" in order to



graduate. The letter grades are converted to numerical grades in order to calculate the GPA. Conversion from letter grades to numerical grades:

A = 4
B = 3
C = 2
D = 1
F = 0

In order to be admitted to higher education applicants must have a General Point Average (GPA) of minimum 2.0. The GPA is calculated from five subjects: Mathematics, English and three other subjects with the highest grades. The best students are placed by the Ministry of Education in the most prestigious study programmes, like medicine and engineering. Students with lower grades are placed in diploma programmes (HE) or certificate and diploma programmes (TVET).

### Technical and vocational qualifications

- Post-Middle School (1-3 years) and Post-Secondary TVET (1-3 years)

### Higher Education

- Diploma programs (2-3 years)
- Most diploma programmes can be incorporated in a bachelor degree. It takes additional 2-2, 5 years to complete an ordinary 4-year bachelor's degree
- 4-year bachelor degree programmes
- 5-year bachelor programmes in engineering, law and pharmacy
- 6-year bachelor of medicine at the Orotta School of Medicine and Dental Medicine

## 4. Education Institutions

The University of Asmara was the only institution of higher education in Eritrea in the period from 1958 to 2003. As of today, there are seven new colleges of higher education:

- 1) Eritrea Institute of Technology, Mai Nefhi
- 2) Hamelmallo Agricultural College, Hamelmallo
- 3) College of Health Sciences, Asmara
- 4) Orotta School of Medicine and Dental Medicine, Asmara
- 5) College of Marine Sciences & Technology, Massawa
- 6) College of Business and Economics, Halhale
- 7) College of Arts and Social Sciences, Adi Keih



Each college covers a specific subject area. For example, engineering is only offered at Eritrean Institute of Technology and medicine is only offered at Orotta School of Medicine and Dental Medicine.

The colleges offer 2–3 year diploma programs, 4-5(6) year bachelor degree programmes, and some are offering or planning to offer different programmes on a master degree level. The master degree is a 2-year program. As the master programme was only introduced in 2004, just before the closing of the University of Asmara, it is still a new degree in Eritrea. For this reason, just a few of the colleges have experience with master degrees and it takes time to develop these new degree programmes.

**The Eritrean Institute of Technology (EIT)** is the largest of the seven higher education institutions and had its first intake of students as an independent institution as early as 2004.

EIT is divided into three colleges:

### **College of Education**

The college offers 4-year bachelor degree programs in the following disciplines:

- Biology Education
- Chemistry Education
- Educational Administration
- Mathematical Education
- Physics Education

The college offers 2-year diploma programs in the following disciplines:

- Educational Administration
- Mathematical Education
- English Language Teaching
- English Language Training
- Physical Education
- Science Education
- Social Science Education

### **College of Engineering**

5-year bachelor degree programs offered at the College of Engineering:

- Aeronautical Engineering
- Chemical Engineering
- Civil Engineering
- Computer Engineering
- Electrical Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering
- Mining Engineering



- Process Engineering.

There are ten diploma programs within the same areas being offered at the College, and these are all 3-year programs.

### **College of Science**

4-year bachelor degree programs offered at the College of Science:

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Mathematics
- Physics
- Computer Science
- Geology
- Library Information Science

There are just two diploma programs in this college. These are in Computer Application and Archives & Record Management. The bachelor degree programs are 4-year programs, and the diploma programs are of 2-3 years of length.

The College of Science also has four different master degree programs in Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics. These are 2-year programs.

**The College of Health Sciences** is one of the largest institutions in Eritrea. It has been functioning as an independent higher education institution since 2008, and comprises the following four schools:

- School of Allied Health Professions
- School of Nursing
- School of Pharmacy
- School of Public Health

The College of Health Science offers diploma programmes, bachelor degree programmes and a few master degree programmes.

The School of Nursing used to be a vocational institution called the School of Nursing and Health Technology. The school was administered by the Ministry of Health and offered diploma programs and certificates. The diploma programmes offered at the school were vocational programmes and not a part of the higher education system. However, in 2008 the school was incorporated into the College of Health Science. The diploma programmes were upgraded by the College of Health Science and considered higher education. If the Final Diploma and the Transcript clearly indicate College of Health Science as “teaching institution” it is higher education. If it only says School of Nursing and Health Technology, then it is most likely an older diploma, which should not be regarded as higher education. After 2008, the



college does not offer certificates, as certificates are not part of the higher education system.

The School of Pharmacy offers a 5-year Bachelor degree program (Pharmacist) and a 2-year diploma program in the same field.

### Vocational institutions

There are a number of schools offering teacher training (for primary school teachers), nursing, accounting and some administrative subjects. All these schools are administered by the appropriate ministry, such as the Ministry of Health or Ministry of Education.

Schools offering vocational training have 1-2 year certificate- and 2-year diploma programmes. The certificate is never considered higher education. Neither is a diploma programme offered at these schools. These diplomas are vocational programmes for people planning to be employed by the ministries. The programmes are also offered as re-training of staff within the ministries. It can cause some confusion that the term “diploma programme” is used both for 2-year vocational programmes and 2-year higher education programmes. However the programmes that are considered higher education are only the ones provided by the higher education institutions.

### Quality Assurance

- Higher education is being accredited by the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE)
- The Ministry of Education is responsible for the accreditation of primary and secondary institutions, including TVET

## 5. Certification / Documentation

- Diplomas and transcripts are issued in English
- Transcripts are not considered official without seal and signatures
- Date of issue may vary on the different documents since National Service has to be completed upon receiving the Temporary/Final Diploma

A Temporary Diploma is given to the student after graduation. However, in order to graduate the student has to finish the obligatory national service. A Temporary Diploma has the same value as a Final Diploma when it comes to employment issues and further education. This is the same procedure for both the University of Asmara period and after the reform.

The new colleges have so far (October 2012) only issued Temporary Diplomas, and no Final Diplomas. According to The National Board of Higher Education(NHBE) it has not yet been decided how the Final Diplomas for the new higher education institutions will look like. For this reason, all students graduating after the reform only have a Temporary Diploma.



The Final Diploma from the University of Asmara was usually issued 1-2 years after graduation. The diploma was produced on a very special paper, and a professional artist filled in the name of the graduate. It was a thorough and unique process, which took time and the Final Diploma was difficult to falsify. In the last few years it has not been possible to buy this special paper which is used for the diplomas. This is supposedly why the last students graduating from the University of Asmara have not yet received their final diploma.

### National Service

National Service is compulsory for all Eritrean citizens. University graduates are not given their diplomas (Bachelor Degree Diploma) before they have completed their national service. The total duration of the national service (Hagerawi Agelglot) in Eritrea is 18 months; this is inclusive of six months military training plus one year of community service (in civilian/military capacity).

Most young people complete these 18 months right after graduating from Sawa. The main difference for university students is that they sometimes complete their six months of military training before they enter university and then complete the remaining 12 months of national service during or they have completed all academic courses at the university. However, the six months of military training can also be taken during university or after they have completed all academic courses. If a student does not complete the national service, he or she will only receive a transcript from the university with a note saying that the “The student has completed all the academic requirements, but could not graduate because he has failed to do his university service, which is one of the requirements for graduation” (example from a transcript from the University of Asmara).

## 6. Useful sources and links

Report on recognition of higher education in Eritrea and Ethiopia (Gulliksen, A.K. and Audensen, E., NOKUT, 2013) (pdf):

[http://www.nokut.no/Documents/NOKUT/Artikkelsamling/Kunnskapsbasen/Rapporter/UA/2013/Gulliksen\\_Anne-](http://www.nokut.no/Documents/NOKUT/Artikkelsamling/Kunnskapsbasen/Rapporter/UA/2013/Gulliksen_Anne-)

[Kari Audensen Erik Report on recognition of higher education in Eritrea and Ethiopia 2013-1.pdf](http://www.nokut.no/Documents/NOKUT/Artikkelsamling/Kunnskapsbasen/Rapporter/UA/2013/Gulliksen_Anne-1.pdf)

World data on Education – Eritrea (UNESCO 2010/11):

[http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Eritrea.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Eritrea.pdf)

World Higher Education Database – WHED: <http://whed.net/home.php>

Eritrea: Reactions towards returned asylum seekers (2016) Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo): [http://landinfo.no/asset/3383/1/3383\\_1.pdf](http://landinfo.no/asset/3383/1/3383_1.pdf)



Ministry of Information, Eritrea: [www.shabait.com](http://www.shabait.com)

The National Board of Higher Education: [www.nbhe.org.er](http://www.nbhe.org.er) (currently not functioning)

## 7. Evaluation tips and recommendations

- The Eritrean authorities distinguishes between official copies and student copies. The transcripts or official student record bears the annotation "Not valid if transcript is handled by applicant". A document stamped "Student copy" is not an official copy, and has not been sent directly from the institution.
- Eritreans in the diaspora are required by the Eritrean authorities to pay a two percent tax on their gross salary if they need consular assistance. This tax, which in tigrinya is called "Gibri Mehwey" (Rehabilitation and development), was introduced in 1994. In order to ask for their university to send their transcript directly to an institution abroad, they will have to pay this tax. Many Eritreans do not wish to pay this tax due to political reasons, and can not provide the necessary documents.

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