

---

# Human Trafficking and Trauma in the Digital Era: The Ongoing Tragedy of the Trade in Refugees from Eritrea

---

Edited by  
**Mirjam Van Reisen &  
Munyaradzi Mawere**



*Langa Research & Publishing CIG*  
Mankon, Bamenda

***Publisher***

Langaa RPCIG  
Langaa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group  
P.O. Box 902 Mankon  
Bamenda  
North West Region  
Cameroon  
[Langaagrp@gmail.com](mailto:Langaagrp@gmail.com)  
[www.langaa-rpcig.net](http://www.langaa-rpcig.net)

Distributed in and outside N. America by African Books Collective  
[orders@africanbookscollective.com](mailto:orders@africanbookscollective.com)  
[www.africanbookscollective.com](http://www.africanbookscollective.com)

ISBN-10:

ISBN-13:

© Mirjam Van Reisen and Munyaradzi Mawere 2017

*Contributing Editor*

*Meron Estefanos*

*Editorial Assistant*

*Lena Reim*

*Copyeditors*

*Susan Sellars-Shrestha and Anirudh Krishnan*

*Advisor (report content)*

*Zecarias Gerrima, Reem Abbas and Klara Smits*

*Translators*

*Medhanie Ghebregzabiber Paulos and Bealfan T Haile*

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, mechanical or electronic, including photocopying and recording, or be stored in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher



*This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of Tilburg University and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.*

# Table of Contents

---

Acknowledgements.....	xv
Justification.....	xvii
Acronyms.....	xix
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
The ongoing human trafficking crisis.....	1
Severe trauma.....	6
A crisis of accountability.....	7
Main conclusions.....	11
<b>Part 1: The Ongoing Human Trafficking Crisis.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Human Trafficking in the Sinai:</b>	
<b>Mapping the Routes and Facilitators.....</b>	<b>19</b>
Introduction.....	19
Deliberate impoverishment and control:	
Establishing human trafficking structures.....	21
Eritrea’s illicit cross-border trade in arms and people.....	31
Abduction and trafficking to the Sinai.....	39
Involvement of Eritrean officials.....	56
In the Sinai and beyond: A coordinated	
network of traffickers.....	65
On release: Imprisoned and deported.....	72
Towards Israel.....	76
Following the ransom back to Eritrea.....	82
Conclusion.....	88
<b>Chapter 3: The Exodus from Eritrea and</b>	
<b>Who is Benefiting.....</b>	<b>95</b>
Introduction.....	95
Eritrea’s policy to push out youth:	
The students arrests of 2001.....	98
Mass detentions of 2001.....	109

The consolidation of power: 2003–2007.....	116
The post-2008 economy: Sources of funds for the regime.....	117
Crisscrossing borders: No safe haven in Ethiopia or Sudan.....	130
Surveillance and deportation.....	139
Conclusion.....	147

<b>Chapter 4: Human Trafficking Connecting to Terrorism and Organ Trafficking: Libya and Egypt.....</b>	<b>159</b>
Introduction.....	159
New routes from Sudan to Egypt and Libya.....	161
Deportation from Egypt.....	163
Held by ISIS in Libya.....	167
Beheadings by ISIS.....	177
Women abductees held by ISIS.....	180
Organ trafficking in Egypt.....	183
Conclusion.....	186

<b>Chapter 5: Eritrean Unaccompanied Minors in Human Trafficking.....</b>	<b>193</b>
Introduction.....	193
Reasons for fleeing Eritrea.....	196
The exploitation and extortion of unaccompanied minors in human trafficking.....	201
When minors become torturers.....	212
The trauma of unaccompanied minors.....	215
Conclusion.....	217

<b>Chapter 6: The Fragmentation of Families: Eritrean Women in Exile in Uganda.....</b>	<b>221</b>
Introduction.....	221
Conditions in Eritrea and reasons for flight.....	224
Migration journeys.....	229
Life in Uganda.....	237
Beyond Uganda.....	255
Lifestory: Abrehet’s journey to Uganda.....	258
Conclusion.....	264

<b>Part 2: Severe Trauma.....</b>	<b>269</b>
<b>Chapter 7: The Trauma of Survivors of Sinai Trafficking.....</b>	<b>271</b>
Introduction.....	271
Methodology.....	275
The camps where Sinai survivors live.....	278
Theoretical framework.....	281
Overview of torture practices.....	285
Impact of events scale and trauma in Sinai victims.....	290
Physical examination.....	293
Interviews.....	300
Conclusion.....	311
<b>Chapter 8: Collective Trauma from Sinai Trafficking: A Blow to the Fabric of Eritrean Society.....</b>	<b>317</b>
Introduction.....	317
Deliberate traumatising of friends and family networks.....	319
Secondary trauma.....	320
Pain of multiple losses.....	325
Pain of being ignored.....	327
Pain of injustice.....	328
Impacts of collective trauma.....	330
In search of healing.....	333
Healing collective trauma.....	336
Conclusion.....	340
<b>Part 3: A Crisis of Accountability.....</b>	<b>347</b>
<b>Chapter 9: Crimes against Humanity: The Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea.....</b>	<b>349</b>
Introduction.....	349
First report: Systematic and widespread, gross human rights violations.....	350
Second report: Crimes against humanity.....	352
Methodology of the COIE.....	354

Response by Eritreans in the diaspora.....	355
Response by people inside Eritrea: Silence.....	359
Ongoing ‘shoot-to-kill’ policy and national service.....	361
Response by the Government of Eritrea.....	362
Conclusion.....	363

**Chapter 10: The Long Arm of the Eritrean**

<b>Regime in the Netherlands.....</b>	<b>369</b>
Introduction.....	369
Eritrean community in the Netherlands.....	373
Impact of the long arm on integration.....	381
Forms of intimidation.....	387
The 2% tax.....	397
Conclusion.....	400

**Chapter 11: Atlantic Council: The Eritrean**

<b>Regime's US Spin Doctors? .....</b>	<b>405</b>
Introduction.....	405
What we know about the human rights situation in Eritrea....	406
The Atlantic Council’s stance.....	410
The Nevsun case.....	419
Blurring the line between policy research and lobbying.....	423
Conclusion.....	424

**Chapter 12: The Policy Agenda in Europe and Africa.....**

<b>429</b>	
Introduction.....	429
The European Union.....	430
The African Union and IGAD.....	441
The African Union’s approach to trafficking.....	446
Addressing the causes of migration .....	453
Conclusion.....	454

**Chapter 13: Prosecuting Sinai Trafficking: An**

<b>Overview of Options.....</b>	<b>465</b>
Introduction.....	465
Prosecution: Essential in combating human trafficking.....	467
The international legal framework.....	468

Eritrea at the centre of Sinai trafficking..... 471  
Trafficking and the crime of enslavement..... 472  
Involvement of Eritrean officials.....474  
Trafficking as a lucrative business..... 476  
State responsibility.....479  
Individual criminal responsibility..... 481  
Prosecutorial forums..... 483  
Obligation of international community: R2P..... 488  
Conclusion..... 490

### The Long Arm of the Eritrean Regime in the Netherlands

*Klara Smits, DSP-Group & Tilburg University*

*I don't want to have anything to do with politics. I know people are watching you. When you share a message on Facebook, your family could be in trouble. That is why I don't do it. You never know.*

(Interview, third migration wave, man)

*The blackmail is a problem. If anyone is still in the country, you really have a problem.*

(Interview, first migration wave, woman)

#### Introduction

The Eritrean diaspora is under constant surveillance from the Eritrean regime, as reported by journalist Martin Plaut (2015). The Eritrean community outside Eritrea, especially opponents of the Eritrean regime, live under constant fear and pressure (consisting of threats, intimidation and even violence) from the long arm of the regime. In addition, Eritreans living in the diaspora have to pay a 'voluntary' 2% tax on all of their earnings, even those who are unemployed and receiving social benefit payments. Although referred to as 'voluntary', this tax is gathered with the use of pressure.

In the Netherlands, reports of such threats and intimidation began to spread after a major Dutch newspaper, *De Volkskrant*, published an article in January 2016 (Bolwijn & Modderkolk, 2016). The article reported on threats to the Eritrean community, but also to those outside, including the intimidation of Dutch Professor



Mirjam Van Reisen and Sheila Keetharuth, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Eritrea. The news article and the follow-up in the Dutch media elicited reactions from the public and Dutch politicians, who stated that the intimidation should be thoroughly investigated (Voorn, 2016).

Additional attention was generated by several court cases started in the Netherlands by Meseret Bahlbi, ex-chair of the youth organisation of the Eritrean government in the Netherlands – the Young People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (YFPDJ) – and an activist friend (Bruyne, 2016). The first court case was held against Professor Mirjam Van Reisen, who had indicated in a radio interview that two of Bahlbi’s family members who were interpreters had ties to the Eritrean regime, therein referring to the YFPDJ as the centre of Eritrean intelligence in the Netherlands. Mr Bahbli sued Professor Van Reisen for libel and slander. The judge ruled in favour of the Dutch Professor, stating in the ruling that the YFPDJ could indeed be referred to as the extended arm of the Eritrean regime. More court cases were started against various other parties, including Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, on account of an article published by the newspaper about the intimidation mentioned above. All of the cases thus far have been decided in favour of the defendants.

On 10 February 2016, the Dutch Parliament requested a letter from the minister of Foreign Affairs, the minister of Social Affairs and Employment, and the State Secretary for Security and Justice about Eritrea and the influence of the Eritrean regime in the Netherlands (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2016). This letter was sent in June 2016 and was followed by a debate between the Dutch Parliament and the two ministers and state secretary mentioned above. The Dutch Parliament called for strong action from the Dutch government and adopted several resolutions that called for, among other things, investigating the Eritrean Embassy for illegal practices, referring to the report of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea submitted to the UN Security Council, and investigating the taxation and intimidation of Eritreans

in the Netherlands (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2016).

In addition, the European Parliament also demanded firm action on Eritrea in its March 2016 debate and resolution on the situation in Eritrea (European Parliament, 2016). Besides its critical wording on the human rights situation in Eritrea, the resolution also addresses the long arm of the regime:

*16. Urges the EU Member States to investigate the role of the PFDJ and its various wings, including the youth wing, and to prohibit all forms of association and activity that directly support control and surveillance exercises in Europe, undermine democratic principles and the rule of law, and create patterns of intimidation and extortion; urges the Member States to act to end the diaspora tax [2% tax] and to investigate the financial transactions related to any other 'contributions' raised by Eritrean government-linked associations abroad, and to fully protect the asylum rights of all Eritrean refugees in Europe. (European Parliament, 2016, para. 16)*

Following the debates and the resolution, the Dutch government commissioned a study on the Eritrean community in the Netherlands, Eritrean organisations, and the influence of the Eritrean regime. This research resulted in a report, titled '*Niets is wat het lijkt: Eritrese organisaties en integratie*' (translated as: 'Nothing is what it seems: Eritrean organisations and integration' (DSP-Groep Amsterdam & Tilburg Universiteit, 2016). The research was based on a document and literature review and a total of 110 interviews conducted with: 22 international experts, 21 Dutch professionals in policy, welfare and support organisations, 6 lawyers specialised in migration law and personally involved in cases for Eritreans, and 61 people from the Eritrean community, of which 20 were representatives from Eritrean organisations (including board members and former board members). A broad range of people from the Eritrean community were interviewed, with the goal of incorporating the views of a diverse array of people (considering age, gender, religion, politics and the timing of emigration to the Netherlands). Both supporters and

opponents of the Eritrean regime were interviewed, including the Eritrean ambassador to the Netherlands and representatives of the embassy.

In the letter that accompanied the report, the research team stated that:

*...it does not happen often that we, as experienced researchers, encounter as much fear, mistrust, contradictions, trauma and profound misery as we have found in the accompanying research – based on thorough analysis of more than 100 interviews, literature/ document analysis and focus group discussions – within the community of Eritrean refugees in the Netherlands. At the same time, we have encountered plenty of positive input in the interviews and the desire to face the future with a clean slate.*  
(DSP-Groep Amsterdam, 2016)

The report confirms that the Eritrean community, including Eritrean organisations, experience pressure, influence, and intimidation from the Eritrean regime or its extended arm, including the youth movement of the government party, the YPFDJ. According to the researchers, this leads to fear within the community and negatively influences the integration of Eritreans into Dutch society.

The report was accepted by the Dutch government on 15 December 2016 and was sent to the Dutch Parliament accompanied by a letter from the government listing the actions it plans to take (Ministerie van Social Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2016). The letter indicates that the Dutch government adopted a regulation in October 2016 prohibiting the 2% diaspora income tax when it is paired with intimidation, threats, extortion or other illegal activities, or when it is to be spent on specific military goals. This regulation refers to UN General Assembly resolution 2023, adopted in 2011, which specifically asked member states to take such actions. The Dutch government will also commission an investigation into the 2% tax in the Netherlands and other European member states. The letter also indicates that the police will do more to action reports filed by Eritreans complaining of threats and intimidation and will investigate

the possibility of establishing a help desk specifically for members of the Eritrean community. The fear and mistrust in the Eritrean community, as well as the possible infiltration of organisations for asylum seekers by Eritrean government organisations such as the YPFDJ, is seen as a major issue by the Dutch government and the government deems it fundamental that Eritreans in the Netherlands are protected.

This chapter provides an English summary of the report ‘Nothing is what it seems: Eritrean organisations and integration’ and the letter that accompanied the report (DSP-Groep Amsterdam & Tilburg Universiteit, 2016). It presents the most important findings and conclusions of the report, especially in relation to the manifestation of the long arm of the Eritrean regime in the Netherlands. Some information, such as this introduction, has been added to contextualise the information.

## Eritrean community in the Netherlands

It is estimated that 20,000 people with an Eritrean background currently live in the Netherlands. Most of those, an estimated 14,000, are recent refugees from 2010 until now. However, the exact number is hard to pinpoint, because people who were born in Eritrea before its independence in 1993 were officially born in Ethiopia and are often registered as Ethiopian. The refugees from Eritrea came to the Netherlands in roughly three waves. In Table 10.1, the characteristics of these migration waves are summarised.

*Table 10.1. Characteristics of the three migration waves from Eritrea to the Netherlands*

Migration wave	Migration context
First wave (1980–1998) Approx. 1,500 refugees	A. 1980–1991 Fleeing the independence war (members of the Eritrean Liberation Front [ELF] and later the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front

	[EPLF]; the predecessor of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice [PFDJ], the party of the current regime) B. 1991–1998 Fleeing during the reconstruction of Eritrea, for various reasons
Second wave (1998–2010) Approx. 6,000 refugees	Since the border conflict with Ethiopia Fleeing the current regime
Third wave (2010–present) Approx. 14,000 refugees	Fleeing the current regime

The Eritrean community is diverse in its composition. There are various religious groups, differences between regions of origin (highlanders versus lowlanders, urban versus rural) and different views on the current regime. The impression is kaleidoscopic – due to the variety of people, but also because of the internal contradictions. While one respondent may emphasise opposing the regime in Eritrea and wanting to integrate in the Netherlands as quickly as possible, another may swear that the first respondent – or the organisation that they represent – is actually of an entirely different opinion. Or, it may be discovered that the respondent is in fact not representing the organisation that he or she claims to at all. The closer you look, the more it appears that, nothing is what it seems to be. What is clear is that the community is highly polarised: staying neutral or apolitical is difficult, if not impossible. A lot of mistrust exists among people and there is a lot of fear. Fear and mistrust form a toxic combination, which is hampering interactions within and outside the community.

The third wave of refugees, which has recently come to the Netherlands (since 2010), is creating changes in relations. A lot of movement can be seen within the community, partly as a result of the recent reports by the United Nations, the court cases in the Netherlands, and the recent coverage of Eritrea in the media.

There is a gap between the Eritrean culture and the Dutch culture: collectivistic versus individualistic. Refugees in all three migration waves encounter this gap. However, the gap is even more pronounced for refugees from the third wave. They often form an erroneous image of the Netherlands. Conversely, Dutch people often have trouble imagining what these refugees have been through.

In addition, a gap also exists between Eritrean refugees from the third migration wave and those from earlier waves. The refugees who are currently arriving in the Netherlands have a different culture, background and socio-economic status than previous waves; they often come from rural areas, have had little education and have often been confronted with the horrors of military service, detention, and fear in Eritrea as well as outside. The refugees from the first wave have a much more idealistic picture of Eritrea. Those from the third wave of refugees have lived in a completely different reality in Eritrea. They do not recognise the image of Eritrea held by the older generation of Eritreans in the Netherlands. This can lead to incomprehension on both sides, which leads to tension between the different migration waves.

The description of the Eritrean community given in this report is only a snapshot – and a principally Dutch snapshot at that – while the Eritrean community is essentially a transnational community. Refugees from Eritrea have spread across Europe, America, Africa and the Middle East in the last few decennia. Families are divided between the diaspora and Eritrea. At the same time, the world has quickly diminished in size in the past few years. Social media has played an important role in maintaining contact between Eritreans, both informal and political (among supporters and opposition alike). The situation in the Netherlands cannot be seen as separate from the other diasporas, or from the situation in Eritrea.

The influence of the Eritrean regime not only affects citizens in Eritrea, but also Eritreans in the diaspora. The mass organisations of the Eritrean regime consist of the government party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), and its sub-organisations, the YPFDJ, National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), National

Union of Eritrean Students (NUES), and National Union of Eritrean Youth (NUEY), which each have specific target groups. According to the former Deputy Minister of Finance of Eritrea, Kubrom Dafla Hosabay, who received asylum in the Netherlands, meetings were commonly organised in Asmara in which the organisations reported to Yemane Gebreab. Yemane Gebreab is the political leader of the PFDJ. In the reporting by these mass organisations to the PFDJ, no distinction is made between organisations in Eritrea and in the diaspora. All activities of mass organisations of the regime are reported on, including those abroad.

In addition, the long arm of the Eritrean regime manifests itself in the churches in the diaspora, particularly the Eritrean Orthodox Church. These are often controlled directly from Asmara and play a role in establishing the Eritrean government's influence over the Eritrean diaspora abroad.

### *PFDJ and YPFDJ*

Fear haunts the Eritrean community in the Netherlands. This fear is related to the awareness of surveillance and control. The PFDJ – the only political party in Eritrea with the president at its head – is operating in the Netherlands. According to many of the respondents, the Eritrean Embassy in the Netherlands is run by representatives of the PFDJ. Respondents explained that the Embassy functions under the direct control of the PFDJ, whose representatives are located in the Netherlands and in other European countries.

The PFDJ is the only party allowed in Eritrea. The refugees from the first migration wave are mainly supporters of this party. The Youth PFDJ (or YPFDJ) is the youth organisation of the government in the diaspora. The YPFDJ was founded in 2003 by the head of the PFDJ, Yemane Gebreab, and has divisions in many countries, including the Netherlands. The YPFDJ engages the second generation of Eritreans in the diaspora – the children of the refugees in the first migration wave. They do this by organising festivals, summer camps, and internships in Eritrea. The primary goal of the YPFDJ is to discourage animosity against the state of Eritrea. The

members of the YPFDJ are expected to make the PFDJ an effective and efficient political organisation and to put youth in the centre of the PFDJ. The members must do this by knowing their enemies, as well as their strategies and instruments. Thus, the members of the YPFDJ are ordered to keep an eye on the enemies of the state and to report their activities to the PFDJ. This was also confirmed by multiple respondents in our interviews.

The experts interviewed by us, as well as the respondents who are former members of the YPFDJ, indicate that the members of the YPFDJ often join as adolescents and young adults, an age where social identity is formed. These youths are searching for who they are, are proud of their Eritrean identity, and some have been confronted with racism and exclusion. According to multiple respondents, racism and the 'white' versus 'black' discussions are important issues that are being capitalised on by the YPFDJ.

The members of the YPFDJ regularly come together in cities across the world, paid for and organised by the Eritrean regime. These meetings are held annually in the Netherlands and are invariably attended by the political representatives of the PFDJ, ministers, ambassadors and other dignitaries of the Eritrean state. YPFDJ Holland is the Dutch branch of the YPFDJ. The YPFDJ launched the Bidho Tours initiative (a music festival) in the Netherlands. The Eritrean vigilante group Eri-Blood is present at these meetings. Social media (Facebook, chat groups, Paltalk, Twitter, YouTube, websites such as Shabait) and the only TV channel in Eritrea, Eri-TV, are used for global coordination and news reporting.

### ***NUEW and NUEYS***

The National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), the National Union of Eritrean Youth (NUEY), and the National Union of Eritrean Students (NUES) are mass movements that execute the policies of the PFDJ in Eritrea and outside, towards their specific target groups. They are organised up to local level and know everyone in their locale. The NUEY and NUES can be regarded as the youth



movement of the PFDJ in Eritrea, while the YPFDJ is the youth movement outside of Eritrea. The NUEW was already founded in 1979 in Eritrea during the armed conflict for Eritrean independence. The headquarters of the NUEW is in Asmara and it has divisions over the entire globe. The organisation strives to unite all Eritrean women in Eritrea and abroad for the goals of justice, equality, peace and development, and to improve the societal, political and socio-economic position of women, according to the board members of NUEW that were interviewed. The NUEW can be regarded as the women's movement of the PFDJ.

### ***Eritrean Orthodox Church***

The biggest religious organisation for Eritreans is the 'Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church'. The first Eritrean churches were founded in the Dutch cities of Rotterdam and Amstelveen. Besides the church in Amstelveen, the church in Rotterdam cooperates with the churches in Leiden, Alkmaar, Utrecht and Eindhoven (Nidos, 2016). Other locations are Assen, The Hague, Enschede, Kapelle, Leeuwarde, Nijmegen, Utrecht and Zwolle. Some of these establishments have existed for a long time, whereas others are relatively new and informal in character (*Ibid.*). These have not all been registered, as a 'Tabot'<sup>43</sup> is needed in order to register as an official Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

Multiple respondents from different migration waves particularly spoke out against the church of Rotterdam. They think the church is a part of the regime and spreads the propaganda of the regime: "I stopped going to the church in Rotterdam when I began to realise that it spreads propaganda about the Eritrean regime and has direct ties with the regime" (third migration wave, man). Dutch TV programme *EenVandaag* (2016) featured an Eritrean refugee (second migration wave) warning that highly religious minors were reportedly being brainwashed in the church of Rotterdam (*EenVandaag*, 2016).

---

<sup>43</sup> A Tabot is a sacred altar plate, made of wood or stone, which symbolizes the Ark of the Covenant (within it the Ten Commandments) and represents the presence of God in each Eritrean Tewahedo Orthodox Church.

The UN Commission of Inquiry (UN Human Rights Council, 2015) has pointed out the state control of religious institutions. The Patriarch, Abune Antonios, has been placed under house arrest and the Eritrean regime has appointed its own Patriarch, Abune Dioskoros, but his role as leader is contested. It seems likely that the Eritrean Orthodox Church in the Netherlands is directly supervised by the PFDJ in Asmara. This was also reported in the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* (2 July 2014).

The highest authority lies with the Eritrean Orthodox Church in Rotterdam, according to the respondents, who say that this is the base from where authority is exercised over the other official Eritrean Orthodox Churches in Amstelveen, Leiden, Utrecht and Zwolle. New priests and counsellors were recently sent from among the PFDJ's loyal ranks to Zeist and Nijmegen, says one respondent. The priests, always men, are trained in the Eritrean church and are sent by Eritrea, according to multiple respondents. Respondents indicated that there are too many members in the official PFDJ-allied churches – more specifically the church in Rotterdam (which is too large) – and, therefore, no personal attention can be given. Mainly the members of the second generation (children of the first wave of refugees) indicate that the services inadequately respond to the needs of Eritreans living in the Netherlands. In addition, the services in Ge'ez (an old Semetic language) are not understood by members of the second generation: “As much as 500 people attend the service. That is too much. There is no attention for you” (third migration wave).

According to multiple respondents, the Eritrean Orthodox Church tries to exert influence on the refugees of the third wave. So-called confessors visit reception locations and hold Bible studies and prayer services. The phenomenon of ‘boat priests’ and new priests is also ongoing in the third migration wave. The social workers interviewed said that they had noticed a lot of new priests in the groups of newcomers and that it is not always clear what their background or role is.

Multiple respondents indicate that there are tensions within the Eritrean Orthodox Church between the older generation from the first migration wave and the refugees from the third migration wave. Among the older generation are the supporters of the PFDJ, who view the ‘newcomers’ as traitors and would rather not have them in their church. Members of the older generation are in turn mistrusted by the third migration wave. Members of the third migration wave apply the rules of faith more strictly (too strictly according to some), say multiple respondents. Their attitude is strengthening the mistrust between members of the Eritrean diaspora.

In multiple cities, initiatives are taken to seek alternative locations for services and profession of faith. For example, in Rotterdam, a new church was started under the leadership of an excommunicated priest: “I am now going to the church of a priest that was sent away from the church at Rotterdam. There are much fewer people and now we really receive attention. The focus is on the Bible and not on politics” (third migration wave, man).

These alternative initiatives are largely informal in nature and are often not officially registered (yet). Some are seeking to join the Ethiopian or Syrian Orthodox churches. Other respondents indicate that they go to Dutch churches (Christian or Catholic) or to ecumenical services. A recent example is the establishment of an ‘underground’ orthodox church that is loyal to Patriarch Abune Antonios, the Orthodox Tewahedo Saint Michael Church. This church gathers in Utrecht and has no permanent accommodation yet, but, according to respondents, many people attend. One highly traumatised respondent who visits this church said: “On Sundays, I go to the church in Utrecht. I do not like politics. I do not want anything to do with it” (third migration wave, man). Supporters of the regime spread a lot of negative information about this church and members are frightened.

## **Impact of the long arm on integration**

The interviews and documents point to a seemingly unavoidable conclusion: the organisations allied with the PFDJ, the YPFDJ, NUEW and others are reporting to the embassy and to the political head of the PFDJ in Asmara. The vigilante group Eri-Blood, operating in European countries, is seen at gatherings and festivals. In the interviews, respondents said that they fear that small groups of infiltrators are travelling along with groups of new refugees: infiltrators with assignments from the PFDJ in Asmara. Beside this, local organisations play a role in the surveillance.

The long arm of the Eritrean regime operates via the mass organisations described above, the embassy and the churches. Many members of the Eritrean community deem it of utmost importance to not be excluded by the Eritrean regime, in order to avoid issues (this will be elaborated on further in the next subheading on intimidation). The long arm of the Eritrean regime is also active through (local) organisations in the Netherlands.

### ***Informants***

The systems of informants in Eritrea and in the Netherlands are linked. In a statement to the Dutch court, a refugee who arrived in the Netherlands recently explained how the information system in Eritrea works. He stated this on the basis of his own experience as leader of a district. He explained how he received training with other YPFDJ members to collect information and provide it to superiors. If someone speaks badly of the leaders or political situation in Eritrea, this information is communicated so that the person in question can be dealt with. He states that YPFDJ people go to Eritrea and that they know all the information from people in Europe, which they take back with them to Eritrea. Therefore, there is no political freedom among the diaspora in the Netherlands; everyone is being watched. Some of the interpreters at the asylum organisations in the Netherlands are also connected to the Eritrean intelligence. The information provided by the YPFDJ links directly to the intelligence

system of the Eritrean regime in the diaspora. The information that is leaked back to Eritrea will affect the person's family. Anyone is a suspect, according to this statement.<sup>44</sup>

Eritreans in the Netherlands who have any business related to Eritrea are confronted with the authority of the PFDJ in the Netherlands. The first fear of many refugees revolves around information in the asylum procedure, which may end up reported back to the regime. Many do not trust interpreters, as they are often associated with attempts by regime supporters to get in contact with refugees. For this reason, Eritrean people in the Netherlands use the option of an interpreter's assistance less often, which hampers integration. There is a demand for a unified country-wide registration for Eritrean interpreters who work for the government and commercial translation services that can be used by public organisations and authorities. For this, it is useful to make a distinction between the different purposes for which the interpreters can be deployed (for example: commercially, as cultural mediators, etc.). Concerns expressed by refugees about interpreters reporting back to the PFDJ reached the authors who received messages from Eritrean refugees about problems with interpreters in Italy, Switzerland and Germany. Police investigations are regularly delayed because of the mistrust that victims have of interpreters. Informants and PFDJ supporters film demonstrations so that they can record exactly who was there. This, again, can result in repercussions for family members in Eritrea. The question of who is an informant leads to much mistrust among members of the Eritrean community.

### *Eritrean organisations*

The Eritrean organisations in the diaspora are strongly divided along political and religious lines and there are hardly any organisations in which polarised groups overlap or meet. In the political sense, the members of the Eritrean community are divided between supporters and opponents of the regime. They are also

---

<sup>44</sup> The full statement can be read in English in the report, p. 80 (DSP-Groep & Tilburg Universiteit, 2016).

strongly divided along religious and ethno-religious lines. Supporters of the Eritrean regime associate themselves with the Dutch branch of the PFDJ, the governing party of Eritrea, and with the YPFDJ. The various organisations do not cooperate together. Cooperation is hampered by the strong mistrust within the community. People always fear possible affinity with the regime and potential infiltration of supporters.

The first local organisations were founded by refugees from the first migration wave, who asked for support for the independence struggle. After independence, these refugees stayed – especially in the beginning – loyal to the PFDJ and the current regime. The majority of local organisations officially claim to be neutral and apolitical, to be open to all Eritreans, to not take part in politics, and to not have contact with the embassy or the regime. However, many respondents strongly doubt these claims. The supporters of the regime are well organised within the diaspora and try to exert influence over local Eritrean communities. The (Y)PFDJ plays an important role in this. The supporters of the regime respond quickly, explicitly, and fiercely to any criticism and opposition.

The opposition is more fragmented in its organisation than the supporters of the regime. However, the various opposition movements do work together, for example, in the organisation of demonstrations. Recently, the opposition in the Netherlands has started to form a collective organisation in order to form a platform and a central contact point. Beyond its political goals, this platform wants to establish the opportunity for members of the opposition to meet through socio-cultural activities (as a counterpart to the gatherings of the YPFDJ) and to support newcomers. Individuals who form initiatives specifically aimed at supporting and providing assistance to the third migration wave, without a political message, experience disruption by strong politicisation.

There are strong indications that a large number of the local organisations have been infiltrated or taken over by the PFDJ in the past years. Many board members or active members of these organisations profile themselves as active PFDJ or YPFDJ members

and/or openly pursue the goals of the PFDJ. The embassy and the PFDJ, which operates from within the embassy, play an important role in the monitoring and direct management of these organisations, according to many respondents. The embassy itself denies this and argues that it only offers support.

New organisations have all experienced, to a certain extent, warnings, threats, intimidation and attempts to infiltrate or take over these initiatives. In some organisations, these attempts have succeeded, while other organisations have ceased to exist or stayed neutral. Some have actively joined the opposition and broken all ties with the regime.

### *Divisions in the Eritrean diaspora community*

The entire network of Eritrean organisations is in constant motion. Refugees from the third migration wave have founded their own organisations, partly because they fear the influence of the regime within existing organisations. Within the Eritrean Orthodox Church, groups have split off to start their own churches, independent from the regime. Groups that fear interference by the regime are also reaching out to other churches within the Netherlands. Many of our respondents are under the impression that the influence of the PFDJ and YPFDJ is somewhat reduced by the large number of Eritrean refugees who have recently come to the Netherlands in the third migration wave. Nevertheless, the entire situation in the Eritrean community remains strongly politicised: 'neutral' does not exist. According to the regime and its supporters, neutral means 'against Eritrea' and according to the opposition, neutral means 'pro-PFDJ'. There is, however, a large silent group who are afraid, keep their mouths shut, and do not want to stand out. The refugees from the third migration wave often feel misunderstood by the refugees from the first wave. They often mistrust those from the first migration wave. Part of the third migration wave has the tendency, for various reasons, to withdraw within their own group. However, initiatives in which Dutch volunteers and care workers cooperate with refugees and with community counsellors who have

lived in the Netherlands for a long time, such as cultural mediators, show positive developments.

### *Concerns around integration*

All organisations and respondents view education and learning the Dutch language as a precondition for integration. Additionally, the supporters of the regime see maintaining good ties with Eritrea as important. As a refugee, you are responsible for contributing to Eritrea. This also explains why supporters are not involved much with newcomers (as newcomers are seen as traitors to Eritrea). Fear and mistrust negatively affect the integration of Eritreans into Dutch society. More on intimidation will be described below.

With regard to the first migration wave, the responses of the interviewees mainly point at concerns about women and the less educated, whose command of the Dutch language is often poor and who are often dependent on social welfare payments. The members of this group are sensitive to pressure and intimidation, and stay silent due to fear and mistrust.

The children of the first wave of refugees (the second generation) often do well in the area of integration. There is a group, however, who, despite good education, are experiencing problems on the job market and dealing with racism and discrimination. These are the people who are receptive to recruitment by the YPFDJ.

The situation of the second migration wave is comparable to the first. It is the third migration wave that is the main source of concern for everyone. The main concerns relate to mistrust, the enormous cultural gap, the low level of education, and the immense trauma experienced by these refugees (trauma sustained in Eritrea, en route and related to family left behind). Furthermore, there is a lot of pressure from financial burdens borne by this group. There is also pressure from Dutch society, for example, to obtain the correct papers, but also financial pressure to somehow pay for one's own escape journey and/or those of others. This group has been confronted with human trafficking (of themselves or of near



relatives, spouses and children), including the extortion that follows and the insecurity that these situations cause.

Severe forms of trauma (including sexual trauma) form a serious obstacle to integration and participation in Dutch society. The symptoms of trauma can manifest in many different ways. Sometimes, this can lead to the use of extremely traditional religious customs that are poorly understood and recognised in the Netherlands. The refugees have little faith in discussing trauma, due to, among other things, mistrust and the fact that such topics are usually not discussed in Eritrea. They, therefore, rely on the comfort offered by traditional structures such as the Eritrean Orthodox Church.

On the other hand, this group is also characterised by a strong motivation to learn the Dutch language and start working. This differs from the first migration wave, in which most refugees invested little time in integration and participation early on, as they assumed that they would be going back to Eritrea soon.

Learning the Dutch language alone is not enough to integrate into Dutch society. The entire manner of communication has to be adjusted. The manner of communication and learning to build a network are skills that require training. In the case of the third migration wave, the low level of education should be taken into account. Integration is not just about social variables, but also about spatial planning and housing: does an Eritrean person live in isolation with a group of other Eritreans at the edge of a city, or does an individual Eritrean live in a neighbourhood or village? In the latter situation integration is easier, according to research in Nijmegen conducted by Ezli Suitela. The explanation for this seems to be that contact with Dutch people and Dutch organisations is easier in such situations. Via informal contacts the refugees can improve their Dutch and build a network. Through coaching and support from a 'buddy', the gap can be closed as quickly as possible, in the area of language as well as culture. Living in a neighbourhood or village also helps to reduce loneliness and timidity.

### *Asylum applications*

The policies of European member states with regard to documents needed for asylum applications for Eritrean refugees are considerably divergent. Several countries no longer accept documents issued by the Eritrean embassies, consulates and churches because of the impression that such documents are issued in an arbitrary way. Lawyers and social workers do not feel that there is a uniform policy approach in the Netherlands in relation to documents from the embassy and the church. As a result, some lawyers and social workers send their clients to the embassy or church to obtain documents, while others see this as undesirable (due to the possible repercussions or reprisals for family members in Eritrea) and unreliable or arbitrary in nature. Some feel forced to send clients to the embassy or the church despite the objections mentioned, due to lack of alternative procedures. There is a need for more clarity on the legal framework of the Dutch Integration and Naturalisation Service (IND). Lawyers and legal experts require a clear position stating that documents from the embassy are a negative indication for asylum procedures and family reunion procedures. Clear guidelines for alternative procedures are needed in order to legally demonstrate matters.

### **Forms of intimidation**

The interviews show that fear, and the resulting pressure, is occurring on a sliding scale from subtle and implicit to explicit to threats and violence. Members of the Eritrean community are afraid to ‘overstep the mark’ and cross the invisible red line drawn by the regime. When questioned what their fear is based on, it becomes apparent that people fear that threats will not be the end of it. In the interviews, several examples were mentioned which illustrate the manner in which fear is created within the Eritrean community. The examples demonstrate that fears seems justified in many cases, but whether this fear is founded or unfounded actually does not matter. As the Thomas theorem states: “If men define situations as real, they

are real in their consequences”. The pressure is not only determined by personal experiences, but also by the information circulating in the community about intimidation. Trust in the rule of law, as we know it in the Netherlands, is being undermined by fear of reprisals, even if one has not experienced such reprisals directly.

According to respondents, most of the members of the Eritrean community have encountered the forms of intimidation that will be described below, to a greater or lesser extent. The largest group of respondents reported having encountered implicit or subtle pressure. Only a small proportion of the active supporters of the regime indicated feeling no pressure.

The integration of members of the Eritrean community is hampered by a constant stream of information and rumours within the community with regard to matters such as safety and violence. A factor in this is the lack of trust in authorities and the government, partly due to their experiences with government institutions in Eritrea, as well as experiences during their migration journeys and with human smuggling and trafficking. This research shows that, despite the barriers caused by fear, notifications and reports of crimes are being filed. Notifications and police reports relate to: assault, rape, disappearances, (reported) suicide, extortion in relation to human smuggling and trafficking, extortion in relation to payment of the 2% tax and other ‘voluntary’ contributions, and intimidation.

Below, the varying ways of intimidation and exerting pressure are described, from subtle forms to grave threats.

### *‘03’ & ‘09’*

There are two mechanisms central to the way in which the Eritrean community is connected with Eritrea. These mechanisms form the basis of the fear that is created and the pressure experienced. Members of the Eritrean community all over the world know them by their code names: ‘03’ (‘bado seleste’) and ‘09’ (‘bado tisha’ate’). ‘03’ refers to the mechanism of ‘being talked about’, ‘gossiped about’, or ‘slandered’; some refer to it as ‘propaganda’. It means that you are being talked about by supporters of the regime. The manner in which

you are spoken about gives an indication of what the regime (the PFDJ, the system) thinks about you: whether you are a loyal pro-government supporter, a ‘real Eritrean’, or have placed yourself outside the community. In the latter case, you will be warned and this causes insecurity and fear: “That is more the insecurity, fear – you do not know what is being said about you and by whom and what happens with it, it is called 03 and 09” (first migration wave, man).

‘03’ refers to the extent to which you are in favour. ‘09’ refers to the entirety of financial transactions to the Eritrean regime, which are the foundation of all relations and which has its own set of rules. ‘03’ and ‘09’ are closely interrelated. Repercussions by the authorities fall under ‘03’, ‘09’ or both. These were some of the number codes given to the various departments of the liberation movement during the liberation struggle.

### *Implicit and subtle pressure*

The largest proportion of the community suffers from implicit pressure – ‘I will participate with everything, because what if something happens to my family if I do not?’ – and subtle forms of pressure, like being told that you are being watched. The group that deals with this makes sure that they do not stand out. These individuals form the ‘silent’ mass and ‘simply’ pay the 2% tax for Eritrea: “Most people pay the tax and go to gatherings: not because they are staunch supporters, but because they think ‘if I do not go, then my family may experience trouble’. Say I want to go to Eritrea for my sister’s funeral, if I do not go... they will gossip about me” (first migration wave, woman).

Some respondents say that the supporters of the PFDJ and YPFDJ experience pressure too: “They have much to lose. They probably have more to lose than I do. I am blacklisted so I cannot go to Eritrea anyway. They have more to be afraid of” (Interview, first migration wave, second generation, woman).

### *Notification and warning*

The next step is receipt of a notification or warning, in which it is indicated that one has crossed the line (drawn by the regime). A respondent from the first migration wave explains what happened to her and how she responded:

*There was an Eritrean who did something at a Dutch organisation. He had invited me as guest speaker, I was considering this. Then I received a phone call from the party in the embassy and he asked me: 'Have you seen the invitation, are you planning to go? You must think carefully; you often travel to Eritrea and your connection with these people is causing you to come under the special attention of the Eritrean government'. So I said – "I know that everything I do is transferred to the Eritrean government. I then decided not to do it. I certainly experienced it as pressure." (Interview, first migration wave, first generation, woman)*

This statement got to the core of the matter: the suspicion or the knowledge that you are being watched and knowing or fearing that there are, or could be, consequences if you do not behave according to the guidelines of the authorities, the PFDJ, the embassy and the churches loyal to the PFDJ in the Netherlands. You could be discussed here or in Eritrea, with all the consequences this brings. This mechanism is referred to as '03'. Respondents say that there is an invisible line – including for Eritreans in the Netherlands – that was better not to cross.

*I have been pressured too at some points. I was invited for a lecture, by someone who was seen as pro-Ethiopian. After I had done this, a lot of animosity grew – and people spoke of treason. There is a red line. Because I do not have a clear political colour (I am not a member of the party but also not a member of the opposition), I am warned sometimes. But the key is the red line. The red line is, for example, if I attend a conference by the opposition and I give them recognition and I speak there; then I have crossed the red line. If I am on the list of invitations, then I come close to the red line. (Interview, first generation, woman)*

These consequences are of importance to the wellbeing and life in the Netherlands, but also for the situation of family members in Eritrea and the extent to which Eritreans can help them and take care of them: “My family in Eritrea received phone calls asking if they knew what I was doing. [Respondent took the initiative of forming an organisation]. They were being pressured to talk to me” (Interview, first migration wave, first generation, man).

Many feel it is of key importance not to be excluded from the goodwill of the regime. That is certainly the case for people from the first migration wave to the Netherlands. It is better to conform, to stay within the red lines and to pay the financial contributions asked for, including the 2% tax.

### ***Vilification***

Several respondents say that they or other people are vilified in the community, i.e., referred to in a negative way or excluded socially:

*I refused to pay [the tax] and openly criticised the regime. People gossiped about me. People were warned about me. They say that I am not a real Eritrean, but an Ethiopian – that is an insult for us. I say that I am [the] son of [names his family tree] from ...[names place]. But sometimes it works. I am no longer welcome at some parties. I am no longer being invited by people from the community.* (Interview, second migration wave, man)

When family members or acquaintances are vilified, this causes fear too: “I hear all the stories. Things are being twisted. People will believe anything. I am afraid they will do something to him. I often say: watch out. People talk about you. Think of your children” (Interview, first migration wave, woman).

### ***Placing informants in the private sphere***

Another way of exerting pressure is to place informants in the private sphere. This is experienced as a great violation. In one statement to a Dutch judge, a human rights activist from Eritrea living in the United Kingdom said that a nanny who had taken care

of her children for years turned out to be reporting to the Eritrean Embassy in London. We have not encountered any substantiated examples in the Netherlands, but in the internationally connected Eritrean community, this example left an impression.

### ***Triggering divorce***

Some respondents indicated that family members were, or are, being approached. They are being pressured and misinformed. Some of the respondents who are openly in opposition to the regime indicated that their marriage had ended due to the consequences of interventions by pro-regime supporters: “They were telling my wife all kinds of things about me. They were not true. But finally, she could not stand the pressure. We got a divorce. She has taken the kids” (Interview, first migration wave, first generation, man).

### ***Intimidation***

Multiple respondents indicate that there are cases where physical action was taken. People are being threatened in phone calls and visits. There are examples of beatings, which are mostly executed – as far as known – by Eri-Blood. “I have been beaten on the streets by three men. Ever since then, I am cautious whenever I see a group of Eritrean men” (Interview, second migration wave, man). The media have already published on this topic (Freidel, 2016; Plaut, 2015). Sexual violence or threats of sexual violence may also occur, but not enough is known to determine this.

### ***Taking away privileges and services***

The vast majority of the open opposition members state that their privileges have been taken away and that they can certainly no longer use the services of the Eritrean Embassy or other institutions. They can no longer pay the 2% tax or make other contributions (unless expressing that they repent their decision and sign a written apology). They are no longer welcome at gatherings in the community (although exceptions have been mentioned). In general, it seems that those who do not toe the line are in danger of becoming

a victim of social exclusion and isolation (weddings and funerals can form an exception, where one may be able to attend).

### ***Taking away privileges and services of family members and acquaintances***

According to respondents, there is a great fear that the privileges of family and friends will be taken away by the regime. This was often discussed by respondents. In this way, social pressure is orchestrated and attempts are made to turn the person in question ‘around’ by showing them what the consequences will be for those around them. Referring to the pressure as ‘blackmail’, one respondent said that the pressure is especially problematic when you still have family in Eritrea, due to the possible repercussions for your family: “The blackmail is a problem. If anyone is still in the country, you really have a problem. It depends on the situation” (Interview, first migration wave, woman).

### ***Punishment of family and acquaintances***

The still greater fear is the possibility of family members or acquaintances in Eritrea being punished. Family left behind in Eritrea are often already in very difficult circumstances. Punishments can include fines, their food coupons being taken away, or imprisonment. Family members and acquaintances may also disappear without a word. These situations happen and these stories are known in the Eritrean community, so it is not only fear, but also a concrete experience that guides their behaviour. What makes the pressure particularly oppressive is the randomness of the rules, demands, fines and punishments in Eritrea. The lack of a justice system in Eritrea means that people are at the mercy of arbitrary circumstances:

*The son of my sister had epilepsy, and therefore she had a medical reason for why he could not go into the military service. But she did have to pay a deposit. We monitored the situation. When they came to pressure her, he went underground. She was told that if he would not come, she would get a fine of 15,000 nakfa [around 1,000 US dollars]. Then soldiers came and he suffered a heart attack because of*



*the stress. A mourning ceremony followed and during that service, the rumour that he had not died but that he had gone underground was circulated and then my sister had to pay 15,000 nakfa anyway. You can't make that up! Everything is totally random, nobody can tell you who gave what orders.* (Interview, first migration wave, man)

The repercussions lead to a feeling of pressure. The randomness of the measures causes further tension. Fear of using social media also exists, because people are afraid of being spotted, as it can lead to repercussions for family members:

*I don't want to have anything to do with politics. I know people are watching you. When you share a message on Facebook, your family could be in trouble. That is why I don't do it. You never know.* (Interview, third migration wave, man)

*I follow everything on Facebook, but I never respond to anything. When I want to respond, I do so via a message. I know people follow everything.* (Interview, third migration wave, woman)

In another interview carried out for this research the respondent, who was imprisoned and tortured in Eritrea, stated: “When I escaped my wife was put in prison. She was put in prison for two weeks when I escaped” (Interview, third migration wave, man). The wife later disappeared and he has not heard of her since.

### ***Deportation***

Eritrea operates in surrounding countries and there are stories about refugees (family members, acquaintances) being kidnapped and deported by the regime, after which they disappear in Eritrea, are sent to prison, or return to military service. The fear of being threatened with this or it actually happening is also a means of blackmail for Eritrean refugees in the Netherlands, as many of them have experienced this themselves and/or know people who have.

### ***Trolling, public media and death threats***

The interviews also found that people are being watched and vilified on social media. Instances of ‘trolling’ (where people are being watched and receive death threats) have been reported in the media:

*Mekonnen says the threats against him intensified when he openly called for the international criminal court to investigate the regime, led by president Isaias Afwerki.*

*A Twitter account called @HagerEritrea, meaning the ‘state of Eritrea’ in Tigrinya, denounced Mekonnen and called on him ‘to be hunted for justice’. A few days later he was called a ‘criminal’ who would ‘heave [sic] price for the crimes he committed against humanity.’ The account’s bio claims that ‘Eritrean policies are the best in Africa’. (Shearlaw, 2015)*

Obscene pictures are posted on social media of persons who are being watched. In a court case against the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, the way in which people are being followed and attacked on social media came up; it was reported that specific journalists and politicians had been targeted in order to cause a maximum amount of reputation loss for those involved.

### ***Targeted threats***

When a person is targeted, he or she usually hears about it, which creates a lot of distress and fear. Speaking about the way these threats are concretely executed, one respondent indicated that she feared for her life. Another respondent interviewed said that he has gone underground and uses pseudonyms due to attempts on his life. Other respondents who are actively being threatened choose to embrace publicity and accept the possible consequences for them and their family members.

The threats cut deeply into the lives of people. This respondent describes how the looming threats control her life completely:

*For example, me. I am always at home. When I go out the door, I always take care to be together with others. I know how much danger I am in. The problem with these people is, they don't do it out of conviction, but in order to please someone else. That makes it much more dangerous. [...] I won't go out the door without other people. I am one of those who is being searched for. At the embassy as well, there are some people who have been trained to kill people and those have now been placed back here – these kinds of people are specially trained. Intimidation is very much alive here in the Netherlands and in Europe. (Interview, first migration wave, woman)*

### ***Suicide***

Several respondents interviewed expressed their concerns about suicide, or deaths ruled as suicide but where the cause or circumstances of death are being questioned.

### ***Disappearances***

There is concern within the community about mysterious disappearances that were never solved. This concerns multiple disappearances in different locations in the Netherlands. The total number of these is unknown. It is unknown whether these disappearances are 'criminal liquidations' or have another background.

### ***Murder attempts***

Some respondents reported a number of murder attempts, including, among other things, physical threats and poisoning. It is assumed that the order for a murder attempt is not necessarily executed by members of the Eritrean community.

Intimidation starts with fear. The fear that is described above forms a real barrier to the participation and integration of Eritreans in the Netherlands.

## The 2% tax

Many of the refugees and Eritrean-Dutch citizens pay the 2% tax levied by the Eritrean government (which is 2% of their income, including for those who are unemployed and on social welfare benefits). An important task of the PFDJ (and the organisations, movements, and churches allied to the PFDJ) is the collection of revenue in the form of the 2% tax, donations, and other contributions. The 2% tax should not be seen in isolation, but is part of a system with all kinds of formal and informal contributions. The gathering of taxes and contributions is combined with the previously mentioned forms of intimidation. Although it is stated by the Eritrean government to be a voluntary contribution, very few people truly pay the 2% tax of their own volition. The main goal of paying the tax is to access privileges and services that are supposed to be separate from such payments – alongside the goals of being left alone and protecting their family. Therefore, it is no wonder that Dutch authorities say that few police reports are filed in relation to this.

The collection of taxes and contributions is organised mainly through gatherings, large parties, festivals and concerts. Very large amounts are involved and the pressure to meet these large amounts has been increased substantially. A former Deputy Minister of Finance for Eritrea, Kubrom Dafla Hosabay, and former leaders of the YPFDJ in Europe and the Netherlands assert that the collection of revenue is one of the most important goals of organisations in the diaspora. The sources of revenue include, in addition to contributions from members, subsidies received by the organisations in question. The management of the revenue of the YPFDJ is handled by the Eritrean Embassy, led by the head of the political department of the PFDJ in Eritrea.

The embassy describes the tax as a voluntary contribution of 2%, which is sought without any pressure or coercion in order to support the needs of the victims of the 30-year long struggle for

independence (widows, orphans and war invalids). However, question marks surround the voluntary nature of this tax.

- Firstly, the tax must be paid if one wants to make use of consular services.
- Secondly, the payments must be made for a variety of reasons related to the affairs of family in Eritrea (for example, a funeral of close relatives).
- Thirdly, ‘voluntary’ is a relative term within a climate of fear, mistrust and intimidation.

The 2% tax and financial contributions seem to be part of the system of fear and intimidation. The question can also be asked if a ‘voluntary’ tax is not a contradiction. A ‘tax’ is per definition obligatory.

It is notable that the tax plays a lesser role for Eritrean refugees in the third migration wave in the Netherlands, because this group is usually not required to use the services of the Embassy for their asylum procedure in the Netherlands. However, many problems do arise in situations of family reunion, when the Embassy may be required to provide crucial information.

The following criteria may deserve further consideration regarding the 2% tax and other contributions:

- There may be abuse of power by way of extortion, because the provision of consular services is being made contingent on payment of the tax for other purposes; this is in contravention of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.
- The purpose of the collection of revenue – even if it is marked as a voluntary contribution – may not be specific and the realisation of the goals is unknowable.
- Some collections may be aimed at specific services (e.g., one goal is to build houses, but there might be no indication that

houses have been built with the money collected), and possibly the money is used for completely different unknown goals.

- There may be no information as to what extent the reconstruction of Eritrea is being achieved through the use of the collected money, due to the lack of public financial management in Eritrea (which has no budget, no treasury, and no independent central bank).

For these same reasons, it may not be known if, and how, these contributions are being used for possible military goals in the region, nor can the use of contributions for military goals be prevented. This conclusion was recently drawn by the UN Monitoring Group (UNSC, 2016) and is in contravention of the weapons embargo placed on Eritrea by the UN Security Council.

Further investigation of the contributions can show if – and under which circumstances – these contributions can be viewed as legal. The following aspects can be used as criteria for further investigation into the nature and scope of these financial contributions:

- Information on the reason behind the contribution (was sufficiently insightful and clear information available?)
- The manner of obtaining the contribution (was improper pressure used?)
- The extent of voluntariness or extortion (were the purposes improper?)
- The relationship between the stated objectives of the contributions and the delivery of these (have any false pretences been made?)
- The transparency of the spending of the contribution (is there any public information available about how the contribution has been spent?)

- The connection with illegal transactions (in which financial flow did the contribution end up and was this transaction legal?)

## Conclusion

Eritrean refugees from the different migration waves have specific characteristics that offer points of departure for integration and participation. This calls for customized solutions, especially at the level of local communities. Customization should be supported by the transfer of knowledge. This could, for example, take the shape of assistance for local government and welfare organisations in determining focus points for the support of Eritrean refugees from the different waves. Some examples of such focus points are the role of fear and intimidation in the community, differences in culture between the different waves (and with host communities), the recruitment and deployment of interpreters, the recruitment and selection of Eritrean volunteers, the 2% tax and other payments to the Eritrean government, and problems related to debts, trauma, sexuality and religion. In addition, a clearer image of which specific organisations are linked to the Eritrean regime would be of benefit at the local level.

The members of the third wave of refugees are young and highly motivated to quickly start working. Looking for a goal and fulfilment of a duty are important motivators for many of the refugees in the third wave. They are motivated to build future perspectives and they are of an age where integration can be very successful. Initiatives in the area of (elderly) care and wellbeing exist and have shown to be successful (see (DSP-Groep Amsterdam & Tilburg Universiteit, 2016).

However, the integration of Eritrean refugees in Dutch society is hampered by fear of the long arm of the Eritrean regime, which manifests itself in the Netherlands in various ways. The mass organisations under the authority of the PFDJ, mainly the YPFDJ, the Eritrean Embassy and some of the Eritrean Orthodox Churches,

play the role of executing PFDJ policies in the diaspora. The same system of collecting information about people that exists in Eritrea is linked directly with the system in the diaspora. The fear of being watched leads to suspicion and divisions in the Eritrean community in the diaspora.

For Eritrean organisations, staying neutral is difficult in the highly politicised diaspora society. New organisations are under threat of being pressured or taken over by government supporters. When people in the Eritrean diaspora do not cooperate with the Eritrean government or speak out against it, intimidation and threats follow. These range from subtle and implicit to explicit and violent threats and deeds. Those with family in Eritrea fear repercussions against them.

Pressure and intimidation by the Eritrean regime are considered a proven and established fact by the researchers of the report. The report concludes that this pressure leads to serious integration issues for Eritreans in the Netherlands. This is compounded by (i) in combination with normal migration and integration issues (different language, culture, climate, surroundings), (ii) the grave nature of trauma experienced by many (if not most) migrants from the third wave, (iii) the lack of understanding and mistrust between the Eritrean members of different migration waves and (iv) between generations of Eritreans, and the level of intimidation.

Overt intimidation and humiliation contribute to the fear. The research shows that despite these obstacles, members from the Eritrean community in the Netherlands file police reports. A thorough analysis of the existing police reports can give a better overview of the problems and underlying patterns of intimidation.

In order to guarantee good integration of Eritrean refugees in the Netherlands, it is essential that the fundamental values of the rule of law are protected and that all citizens know that they are protected from fear, intimidation or worse. Fear of violence and intimidation contributes to a climate of isolation and mistrust. Specialised investigation work and specialised judicial work from the Public Prosecutor is required in order to investigate these matters



thoroughly. European cooperation in this area is recommended.

The Dutch government has already undertaken steps to prohibit the 2% tax on the diaspora in the Netherlands, based on the UN Security Council Resolution 2023, when this is collected by use of threat, intimidation or fraud, or when the tax is used for military goals in contravention with the weapons embargo (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2016). In addition, the Dutch government has promised to investigate the tax in other European Union member states and to investigate and promote police reports by Eritreans in the Netherlands. Other issues relate to the deep divisions in the Eritrean community, which negatively influence integration.

The problems for women and girls among the refugees of the third wave require special attention. Many of them have been, and are being, abused. The situation of women and girls is often experienced as uncomfortable – with feelings of unease, lack of self-confidence and guilt. The intimacy of the matters, the need for protection and the possibility of extortion can further increase the vulnerability of these women and girls. The researchers received reports of prostitution, which is reportedly happening on a large scale (including among minors). Therefore, there is a need for female counsellors within the Dutch organisations supporting asylum seekers and for efforts to help women and girls to make decisions around sexuality and relations in order to build trust and aid integration in the Netherlands. The first step is enabling caretakers to speak about this with their pupils. The help desk that was mentioned earlier can play an important role in the issues of possible abuse and prostitution of female minors.

Due to the particular situation of Eritrea and Eritrean refugees, and the high apprehension of authorities, the report recommends a low-threshold help desk where members of the Eritrean community can speak about their concerns. In particular, a thorough understanding of the issues is crucial to win the trust of the community. Such a help desk could pick up signals from the Eritrean community about problems that occur, such as pressure and

intimidation, as well as other issues that form barriers to integration. This would ensure that problems and misconduct are identified and communicated in a timely fashion to the institutions involved.

## References

- Bolwijn, M. (2 July 2014). Eritreeërs in Nederland: Vastgetend aan Eritrea. *de Volkskrant*. Retrieved from <http://www.volkskrant.nl/binnenland/eritreers-in-nederland~a3682391/> (accessed 20 January 2017).
- Bolwijn, M., & Modderkolk, H. (27 January 2016). Eritrese intimidatie in Nederland breidt zich uit. *de Volkskrant*. Online version Retrieved from <http://www.volkskrant.nl/buitenland/eritrese-intimidatie-in-nederland-breidt-zich-uit~a4232786/> (accessed 20 January 2017).
- De Bruyne, M. (6 July 2016). Rechtszaken en 'twittertrollen' moeten critici Eritrea afschrikken. Amnesty International: *Wordt Vervolgt Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.nl/over-amnesty/bladen/wordt-vervolgd/rechtszaken-en-twittertrollen-moeten-critici-eritrea-afschrikken> (accessed 20 January 2017).
- DSP-Groep Amsterdam. (2016). Aanbiedingsbrief 'onderzoek Eritrese organisaties'. Retrieved from <https://www.dsp-groep.nl/wp-content/uploads/Aanbiedingsbrief.pdf> (accessed 20 January 2017).
- DSP-Groep Amsterdam, Tilburg Universiteit. (2016b). *Niets is wat het lijkt: Eritrese organisaties en integratie*. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: DSP-Groep bv.
- EenVandaag. (29 January 2016). *Wat is de rol van de kerk in de Eritrese gemeenschap?* [Video]. Hilversum, the Netherlands: NPO1. Retrieved from [http://binnenland.eenvandaag.nl/tvitems/64501/wat\\_is\\_de\\_rol\\_van\\_de\\_kerk\\_in\\_de\\_eritese\\_gemeenschap\\_](http://binnenland.eenvandaag.nl/tvitems/64501/wat_is_de_rol_van_de_kerk_in_de_eritese_gemeenschap_) (accessed 20 January 2017).
- Freidel, M. (12 May 2016). Eritreer in Deutschland: Von wegen Freiheit. *Frankfurter Allgemeine*. Retrieved from <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/eritreer-in-deutschland-von-wegen-freiheit-14220957.html> (accessed 20 January 2017).

- European Parliament. (10 March 2016). European Parliament resolution of 10 March 2016 on the situation in Eritrea (2016/2568(RSP)).
- Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. (30 June 2016). *Betreft: Eritrea en de invloed van Eritrea in Nederland*. Reference: DAF-2016.360047.
- Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid. (15 December 2016). *Betreft: Integrale aanpak Eritrea en de invloed van Eritrea in Nederland*. Reference: 2016-0000263584.
- Nidos. (2016). *De Eritrees- orthodoxe Tewadeho Kerk en Religie*. Utrecht, the Netherlands: Nidos Kenniscentrum Etrise Alleenstaande Minderjarige Vreemdelingen.
- Plaut, M. (2 February 2015). Eritrea's sinister international network of spies and thugs. *MartinPlaut*. Retrieved from <https://martinplaut.wordpress.com/2015/09/02/eritreas-sinister-international-network-of-spies-and-thugs/> (accessed 20 January 2017).
- Shearlaw, M. (18 August 2015). From online trolling to death threats – the war to defend Eritrea's reputation. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/18/eritrea-death-threats-tolls-united-nations-social-media> (accessed 20 January 2017).
- UNHRC. (2015). Report of the detailed findings of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea. (A/HRC/29/CRP.1). Geneva, Switzerland: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoIEritrea/A\\_HRC\\_29\\_CRP-1.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoIEritrea/A_HRC_29_CRP-1.pdf) (accessed 20 January 2017).
- UNSC. (2016). *Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 2244 (2015): Eritrea* (S/2016/920). New York, US: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/920](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/920) (accessed 20 January 2017).
- Voorn, C. (27 January 2016). 'Grondig onderzoek naar intimidatie door regime Eritrea'. *NOS Nieuwsuur*. Retrieved from <http://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2083224-grondig-onderzoek-naar-intimidatie-door-regime-eritrea.html> (accessed 20 January 2017).