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## The Long Arm of the Eritrean Government

**The Eritrean government has a grip on Eritrean refugees in the European Union.** Its 'long arm' spreads fear, hampering integration and causing division. **Through infiltrators, various forms of intimidation and the 2% diaspora tax, the Government of Eritrea aims to actively influence Eritreans in the diaspora.** The Netherlands, as well as other host communities, should be aware of this influence and protect members of the Eritrean diaspora from any harmful impacts that this influence might have on the asylum procedure, integration and personal wellbeing. This requires an understanding of the way this influence functions and its consequences. **This policy brief draws on research conducted in the Netherlands and the European Union to show how this system of control functions and what its impacts are.**

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### Intimidation and coercion

Intimidation and coercion by the Government of Eritrea in the Netherlands has received considerable media attention. Members of the only political party in Eritrea, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), and its youth arm, the Young People's Front for Democracy and Justice (YFPDJ), operate in the Netherlands through official institutions such as embassies, as well as unofficial offices and networks in the diaspora. Many of the churches of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church are operated by priests sent by the PFDJ. This makes it difficult for Dutch authorities and refugee workers to know which organisations can be trusted. Polarisation and surveillance cause fear and mistrust within the diaspora community.

Many Eritreans in the Netherlands feel pressured in subtle and less subtle ways,

including to attend political meetings, sign petitions, report on the opposition, or complete illegal tasks for the government. Refusing to participate in events or negative comments about the government can put their families in danger, especially if the family is still in Eritrea. This danger can consist of imprisonment or fines. In the case of non-compliance, opposition, or as punishment for fleeing National Service, the Government of Eritrea may take away privileges and deny services to a person or his/her family members within Eritrea. Intimidation is also used; people have reported receiving threatening phone calls, being threatened on social media, and violence has been documented. There is evidence of intimidation in the form of deportation, trolling, targeted threats, disappearances and murder attempts.

### Recommendations

- EU member states need to collaborate and take action against the intimidation of Eritrean migrants and refugees by the Eritrean government and the involvement of Eritrean embassies in such intimidation. This includes paying more attention to police reports of such practices reported by the Eritrean community.
- Intimidation practices need to be investigated proactively.
- There is a need for more clarity, less arbitrariness and more flexibility around the documentation required for Eritrean asylum seekers and those applying for family reunification, so that refugees do not have to visit Eritrean embassies.
- Customised support needs to be provided to Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers, which requires the following:
  - Local governments and concerned organisations should be more informed about the situation of Eritrean refugees.
  - A helpdesk should be set up to identify the problems facing the Eritrean community and communicate those to the institutions involved.
  - More female counsellors should be appointed to help refugees and asylum seekers, especially women and girls, to deal with issues around sexual violence.
  - Eritrean interpreters need to be registered in a unified, country-wide registration system.

## The 2% diaspora tax: Surveillance and intimidation

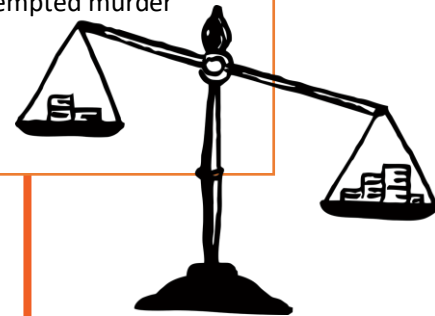
The different forms of intimidation described in the previous section are also used to collect the 2% tax and other financial contributions from the Eritrean diaspora. This is a 'voluntary' tax (2% of a person's income) that many members of the Eritrean diaspora pay to the Eritrean government. It provides a system through which the government keeps track of diaspora allegiance. The government says that the aim of the tax is to help the victims of the independence war. Both the goal of the tax and its voluntary nature have been questioned in various research, as has its legality (particularly as no budget is published by the Government of Eritrea, so its collection for legitimate government purposes is in doubt). Besides the 2% tax, other financial contributions are collected, during festivals, in church, and at other social events.

## Asylum requests

European member states ask for various documents from Eritrean asylum seekers, especially in relation to family reunification or when nationality is in doubt. As a result, some Eritrean refugees see no other option but to go to an Eritrean embassy or ask their family in Eritrea to obtain such documents. This may lead to repercussions, such as the requirement to pay the 2% tax, signing of a regret form, or other repercussions for the person or their family. Many are concerned that the information they give may find its way to the Eritrean government. This can form a barrier to integration, as Eritrean refugees may withhold information or reject the opportunity to make use of an interpreter, among other things.

## Documented forms of intimidation by the Eritrean government

- A system of repression and surveillance, code worded '03' and '09'
- Implicit and subtle pressure
- Intimidation, threats and warnings
- Vilification
- Informants in private sphere
- Triggering/causing divorce
- Taking away privileges and services from the subject, his/her family or friends
- Punishment of family and acquaintances (often in Eritrea)
- Disappearances, death threats and attempted murder
- Pressuring suicide
- Deportation (threats)
- Trolling



## The 2% diaspora tax

- This tax is perceived as mandatory by Eritreans in the diaspora.
- Non-payment may result in a range of consequences, such as denial of consular services and punishment of relatives in Eritrea.
- The government is not transparent about how the money is spent and does not keep a public record.
- The tax is potentially illegal in practice, as it is collected using coercion and intimidation.
- The UN Monitoring Group has concluded that it remains unclear to what extent the 2% tax might be used for military goals in the Horn of Africa.

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