



Capital: Asmara

Languages: Tigrinya, Arabic, Tigre, English

Religion: Muslim, Coptic Christian, Roman Catholic, Protestant

Population: 5,792,984

Refugees: 209,168

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs): 10,000

The Northeast African country of Eritrea is bordered by Sudan, Ethiopia and Djibouti and is governed by an authoritarian regime that allows no free press and requires

prolonged military conscription. It also features an extensive coastline along the Red Sea that historically has allowed access to other countries in the region. The coastline made Eritrea vulnerable to invasion and colonization by the Ottoman Turks, the Italians and finally the British until 1952. At that time the United Nations awarded Eritrea to Ethiopia as part of a federation. Ethiopia annexed Eritrea as a province ten years later which initiated a thirty year war for Eritrean independence. This conflict did not end until 1991. Eritrea and Ethiopia were also involved in an extended border war that lasted from 1993 until 2000 and created 60,000 refugees who fled to Ethiopia. Currently, Eritrean refugees housed in several camps in Ethiopia have been granted the freedom to live outside the actual camps as long as they have some form of support to sustain themselves. Repatriation of these refugees has not been an option due to the possibility of severe punishment and torture upon their return, making the Eritrean situation one of the most protracted refugee struggles in the world.

Eritrean families are typically patriarchal, but the gender gap has decreased somewhat because of women's roles as soldiers in the war. They have a strong sense of family and show great respect to the elder members of their community, teaching their children this same respect. Eritrean children entering the United States public school system are at a severe disadvantage due to interrupted education or minimal schooling available in the refugee camps. They have also had to contend with the trauma and chronic stresses of war, displacement, drought and diminished access to food supplies. The public school system will most likely be their first opportunity to participate in easily available education.