



Eritrea

State of Eritrea

Africa

Geography

Area 121,100 sq km. Arid, temperate highland plateau and a strategic desert plain along the busy Red Sea Coast shipping lanes.

Population	Ann Gr	Density
2010	5,223,994	3.15%
2020	6,718,974	2.26%
2030	8,085,605	1.78%

Capital Asmara 683,000. **Urbanites** 21.6%. **Pop under 15 yrs** 42%. **Life expectancy** 59.2 yrs.

Peoples

Horn of Africa Peoples 87.1%.

Semitic 72.5%. Tigrinya 44.9%; Tigre 24.3%; Belin 2.3%. **Afar** 9.2%. Saho 4.9%; Afar 4.3%.

Other 5.4%. Beja 4.0%; Somali 1.4%.

Nilotic 5.1%. Kunama 2.9%; Nara 2.2%.

Arab 7.8%. 5 groups. Yemeni Arab 2.0%; Sudanese Arab 1.8%.

Literacy 56.7%. **Official language** Tigrinya. Tigre, Arabic and English (especially for secondary and tertiary education) also widely used. **All languages** 18. **Indigenous languages** 12. **Languages with Scriptures** 6Bi 2NT 4por.

Economy

Traditionally based on subsistence agriculture in a land where such is increasingly unfeasible due to war, drought, land destruction and degradation; food production amounts to a fraction of what is needed to feed the population. Government possession of nearly all land and enterprise has accelerated the exodus of most of the highly educated and skilled professionals. Over 50% of the population live on less than \$1US/day; around 30% of the GDP comes from diaspora remittances. Some development of infrastructure and of the

mining industry are among the few positives.

HDI Rank 165*/182. **Public debt** 58.4% of GDP. **Income/person** \$295 (1% of USA).

Politics

Italian colony 1890–1941. UN-arranged federation with Ethiopia in 1952. In 1963 the federation was terminated, and Eritrea became a province of Ethiopia. A guerrilla war for Eritrean independence led by Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) began in 1961 and culminated in 1991. The EPLF assumed control from then until 1993, when Eritreans voted for independence in a UN-sponsored referendum. Development of the country was seriously disrupted by the 1998–2000 border war with Ethiopia. A single president since 1993 who has espoused Marxist ideology, postponed elections several times, clamped down hard on freedoms and placed such restrictions on the UN and foreign NGOs that they left the country. Somewhat of an international pariah.

Religion

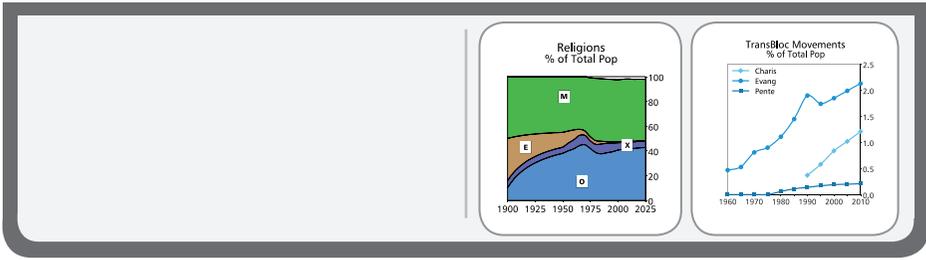
Recognition of four religious groups: Sunni Islam, Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran. All other religious groups have been persecuted with increasing intensity since 2002, and even these officially recognized groups must endure government appointments and interference.

Religions	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Muslim	50.26	2,625,579	3.1%
Christian	47.31	2,471,472	3.3%
Non-religious	1.87	97,689	1.3%
Ethnoreligionist	0.56	29,254	-1.4%

Christians	Denoms	Pop %	Affiliates	Ann Gr
Protestant	20	1.39	73,000	3.2%
Independent	6	0.31	16,000	9.9%
Catholic	2	3.43	179,000	2.7%
Orthodox	4	41.87	2,187,000	3.5%
Marginal	1	0.01	1,000	-8.6%
Unaffiliated		0.30	16,000	-12.4%

Churches	MegaBloc	Congs	Members	Affiliates
Eritrean Orthodox Ch	O	1,530	1,289,941	2,180,000
Catholic Latin&Coptic	C	139	104,070	179,000
Evang Luth Ch of E	P	98	14,336	41,000
Seventh-day Adventist	P	5	560	1,400
Other denominations[26]		196	21,606	54,325
Total Christians[33]		1,968	1,430,513	2,455,725

TransBloc	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Evangelicals			
Evangelicals	2.1	111,400	4.6%
Renewalists			
Charismatics	1.2	63,318	6.8%
Pentecostals	0.2	10,900	3.9%



Answers to Prayer

1 **The growth of the Church in Eritrea is strong**, despite steadily intensifying government oppression. Persecution and restraints on personal freedoms test believers sorely. But the closure of most denominations and ministries has prompted the flowering of a hard-pressed but growing house church movement. There are growing renewal movements in the mainline churches: *Medhaniel Alem* (Orthodox) and *Tebadasso* (Catholic). Many in prison or en route to refugee camps in another country have received the gospel of Jesus Christ in their time of trial, including some from the less-reached people groups of Eritrea.

Challenges for Prayer

1 **Peace and national stability remain out of reach** for Eritrea, in and out of conflict with neighbouring countries for decades, most notably with Ethiopia. Pray for:

- The establishment of peace with Ethiopia.** Unresolved border disputes have led to mounting tensions and failed UN peacekeeping missions. Pray for humility, willingness to compromise on the parts of the leaders, just and wise actions by the international community and an end to the hostilities that neither country can afford.
- National economic recovery and progress are virtually impossible**, since the majority of the workforce are conscripted to military service for an indefinite period. Facing mandatory military careers, many young people flee Eritrea, seeking a brighter future elsewhere, an action that can bring reprisals against family members left behind.
- Adequate food and resources.** The ongoing threat of war, international relations and severe drought leave millions of Eritreans dependent on foreign assistance for food, whether through relatives abroad or the promise of humanitarian aid often not received. Many face extreme poverty with no relief in sight.

2 **Religious freedom remains a major issue.** A 2002 government ruling banned all religious groups from meeting together and practicing their faith without official recognition, and it granted recognition only to Sunni Islam, Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran groups. The effects of this on all Eritreans are significant, especially so on Christians within non-approved groups. Some posit this as a reaction against the evangelical growth within the Orthodox Church and during the long war with Ethiopia. Pray for government acceptance of religious groups and for restoration of basic human rights and religious freedom to all Eritreans.

3 **The Christian Church faces terrible ongoing persecution**, both outside the recognized churches and, to some degree, within. Many leaders and lay members are in prison, and more are under house arrest; the government has seized many church assets. Christians are largely Orthodox, mostly from among the Tigrinya, with some from among the Kunama, Bilen or other peoples. Evangelicals are fewer, but are present to varying degrees within most denominations. Christians of all denominations have been refined and drawn together in fellowship through recent decades due to war, drought and government oppression. But the intense suffering of the Church in Eritrea is one of the untold stories of the past decade – a story of tragedy and ultimately, we pray, great spiritual harvest. Pray that Christians may remain fervent for Jesus amid hardship and make a significant impact on their nation and beyond.

4 **Evangelicals are growing despite severe persecution.** Being officially banned, these groups now operate in underground networks based in homes. Around 20 or more networks are known,

but numbers are impossible to ascertain. Pray for these issues:

- a) **Imprisonment and torture are reality.** Key evangelical leaders were imprisoned following the ban on their churches. Since then, arrests have included pastors, prominent evangelicals in society and, more recently, those known to practice their faith. Prison conditions are harsh – beatings and agonizing torture techniques cripple many and even lead to death in some cases. Some estimate that over 3,000 Christians are currently in prison. Pray for those in prison, that they may be strengthened and enabled to endure suffering while radiating grace. Pray also for their families, who often find themselves bereft of not only loved ones but usually of the income earner as well.
- b) **Leadership for the churches.** With so many pastors, leaders and evangelists now living outside the country or in prisons, the Church moves forward under new leadership, often young men or new believers, some who encountered Jesus in prison. Pray for them to be full of God's wisdom as they learn to lead and grow.
- c) **Ongoing evangelistic outreach.** Amid such hardship, the Church has grown rapidly, often most among those fleeing the country, those living in camps in Ethiopia and elsewhere, those in prison and those living abroad. Witnessing Christians, though violently opposed by the authorities, have spread far and wide. Still, many villages and towns remain unimpacted by the gospel. Pray for continued commitment of believers to preach Christ whatever the cost and without compromise.
- d) **Harvest among the Eritrean diaspora,** both in the wider region in Africa and globally. Many suffer by proxy with their brethren back in Eritrea, but significant numbers of Eritreans outside the country are encountering the Lord Jesus in profound ways. Pray for this to continue and to multiply.

5 Missionaries, as such, are no longer welcome in Eritrea. Since 2002, almost all foreign aid workers, Christian or otherwise, have been expelled or forced to leave. Much work has largely been suspended or terminated as a result. The few that remain, along with the national workers, keep well under the radar and are confined in their activities. Pray for open doors for workers to return to Eritrea; pray that those who do have access will move quickly, taking advantage of every opportunity to demonstrate God's love.

6 Pray for the less reached, specifically for:

- a) **The Tigre,** mostly Muslim, and one of only a few Eritrean or Ethiopian Semitic peoples who are not Orthodox. They are related to the Tigrinya, but culturally distant from them. The Bible is available, but there are few Christians.
- b) **The Jabarti** – a Muslim minority among the Tigrinya. Pray that the unrest might create opportunities for Tigrinya Christians to engage this related but previously distant group.
- c) **The Afar and related Saho peoples,** largely nomadic pastoralists in the southeast with few Christians.
- d) **The Beja and Nara peoples** of the northwest with no known witness. Many are nomadic.
- e) **The Arab Rashiada,** who migrated from Saudi Arabia in the 19th Century. Recent work among these peoples has been reported, but there are still no known churches.

7 Christian support ministries have grown even more vital in recent years, since more conventional work has been shut down or suspended.

- a) **Students** still in Eritrea remain fervent in evangelizing and discipling their peers, and large numbers continue to come to faith. Many recent evangelical movements were started or fuelled by students committed to Jesus.
- b) **Radio and satellite TV** provide programming for Christians in Tigrinya and English, though some work has shut down in recent years, including an evangelistic work among the Tigre and Beja peoples. Christian radio is being broadcast into Eritrea from neighbouring countries. Pray for the gospel to go forth through these channels; shortwave radio Bible studies reach even into the military camps.
- c) **Other resources** include the JESUS film (six languages), GRN audio Scriptures/teachings (in eight languages) and a series of tracts as well as a Bible Correspondence Course developed by FFM. Pray for widespread and effective use of these; pray also for development of more materials that will bless Christians and more tools for use in reaching others.