



**Fact Finding Mission Report of the Danish Immigration Service,
“Eritrea – Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the
Possibility of Return. Country of Origin Information for Use in the Asylum
Determination Process”, UNHCR’s perspective**

1. In November 2014 the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) published a fact finding mission (FFM) report on its website, entitled “*Eritrea – Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return. Country of Origin Information for Use in the Asylum Determination Process*” (hereafter: “the report”).¹ The report summarizes information gathered by the FFM delegation in Ethiopia (20-27 August 2014), London (September 2014) and Eritrea (1-17 October 2014).
2. UNHCR welcomes efforts by State asylum services and others to ensure that States and other stakeholders in asylum procedures have access to high quality country-of-origin information (COI). Accurate, reliable COI that is also detailed and balanced is a precondition for high-quality decision-making on applications for international protection. In addition, quality COI, available and accessible to all decision-makers, legal aid providers and others, has the potential to contribute to more harmonized adjudication of asylum claims.
3. Against this background, UNHCR welcomes the decision of DIS to produce a COI report in English on Eritrea, in light of the fact that asylum-seekers from Eritrea are amongst the top nationalities of asylum-seekers in Europe and elsewhere.² UNHCR does, however, have a number of concerns as regards the methodology used by DIS in the report. These concerns are outlined below.
4. The report contains references to “a UN agency” in Asmara, and meeting notes with a “UN Agency” are included in pp. 31-33 of the Annex to the report. For the sake of clarity and to avoid any confusion amongst readers of the FFM report, UNHCR wishes to emphasize that the information ascribed to a “UN Agency” is not information provided by UNHCR (despite the fact that the notes of the meeting with a “UN Agency” contain references to “UNHCR registered” refugees in Shire). UNHCR is not the (Asmara-based) “UN Agency” referred to throughout the report.
5. At the same time, notes of meetings between UNHCR in Addis Ababa and in Shire, Ethiopia, are contained in the Annex of the report (pp. 69-73). However, in the main text of the report (pp. 1-20 pages), the information provided by UNHCR in Addis Ababa is not used or referred to, and there is only one general reference to UNHCR Shire as a source of information. In UNHCR’s view, the main text of the report (pp. 1-20) could have benefited from inclusion of UNHCR’s Shire’s description of the procedures for Eritrean arrivals. This information is however not referred to in the report. Instead, the report relies on speculative statements of

¹ Danish Immigration Service, *Eritrea – Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return Country of Origin Information for Use in the Asylum Determination Process Report*, 5/2014 ENG, November 2014, <http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/B28905F5-5C3F-409B-8A22-0DF0DACBDAEF/0/EritreareportEndeligversion.pdf>.

² See e.g. UNHCR, *Sharp increase in number of Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers in Europe, Ethiopia and Sudan*, 14 November 2014, <http://www.unhcr.org/5465fea1381.html>.

another interlocutor as regards nationality identification of UNHCR registered refugees in Shire.³

6. The main text of the report (pp. 1-20) makes frequent use of brief summaries of information provided by informants. Direct quotes are used only rarely. Moreover, on numerous occasions in the report, viewpoints of different interlocutors are grouped together in one summary paragraph. As a result, actual statements of, and nuances provided by, interlocutors are not reflected in the 20-page report.
7. A comparison between the main text of the report and the records of the meeting notes (which all interlocutors had an opportunity to review and clear; see Methodology Section 1.2) demonstrates that information provided by interlocutors has often been used selectively in the report. In other instances, the report ascribes statements to interlocutors that cannot, however, be traced to these interlocutors' statements as reviewed and cleared by them and contained in the annexed meeting notes. The following examples refer:
 - i. The report includes the following sentence (or variations of it), attributed to Prof. Kibreab, no less than three times: *"It is now possible for evaders and deserters who have left Eritrea illegally to return if they pay the two percent tax and sign the apology letter at an Eritrean embassy. Kibreab was aware of a few deserters from the National Service who have visited Eritrea and safely left the country again."* However, the record of the conversation with Prof. Kibreab provided in the annex of the Danish report show that Prof. Kibreab followed this sentence with the qualification: *"These are invariably people who have been naturalized in their countries of asylum."* This qualification is not included in the main text of the report on any of the three occasions that Prof. Kibreab's statement is quoted.
 - ii. In another example (page 15), "International Organisation (B)" is said to have emphasized that *"although it might be possible to return by paying the two percent tax and signing the apology letter, there is no information available on the specific profile of persons who are able to benefit from this practice"*. According to the meeting notes, "International Organisation (B)" indicated also that *"It was deemed very unlikely that those who have a fear of persecution would be approaching Eritrean Embassies to acquire a passport and consequently try to re-enter the country"*. This second statement which qualifies the previous statement has, however, not been incorporated in the main text of the report.
 - iii. In a third example, "International Organisation (B)" is said (on page 19) to have considered that *"the reasons for this shift in attitude was the government's desire to encourage Eritreans to return to Eritrea"*. It should be noted, however, that this statement cannot be traced to the meeting notes. What "International Organisation (B)" did consider (according to the meeting note and as referenced on page 19 of the report) is that *"the Eritrean government is increasingly realizing that the exodus of mainly young men and women has*

³ The notes of the meeting with the "UN Agency" in Asmara on page 31 indicate that "It was acknowledged by a UN agency that **there is a possibility** that **maybe** one out of ten UNHCR registered refugees in the Shire camps in northern Ethiopia **could** be from other nationalities, including Somalis, Sudanese or any other tribes with similar features. (...)". [Emphasis added].

reached a scale that threatens the development of Eritrea, as well as that the government is in the process of leaving its position of isolation and gradually opening up to the international community”.

- iv. On pp. 19-20, the report states: “Many of the sources consulted in Eritrea (Western embassies A, B, E; a Western embassy based in Khartoum (met in Asmara); a UN agency; an International organization (A); a regional NGO based in Asmara; a well-known Eritrean intellectual) as well as a Western embassy (F) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, stated that most of the available reports on the human rights situation in Eritrea do not reflect the recent changes in Eritrea. *According to these sources, such reports should therefore not be considered representative of an accurate image of the current situation in Eritrea regarding issues such as National Service, illegal exit and the general human rights situation.*” This is the closing statement of the 20-page report and thus carries considerable weight. However, the part of the above statement reflected here in italics, cannot be traced back to any of the meeting notes with the interlocutors listed at the start of the quoted paragraph.
8. The report does not include any reflections on the reliability of specific sources of information. No information is provided in the report about the regulatory framework for the media, NGOs, research institutes and other actors in Eritrea, nor does the report contain an assessment of the impact of these regulatory frameworks on the independence of certain sources and the reliability of information provided by these sources.

**UNHCR
December 2014**