



# OSAC Country Security Report

## Eritrea

Published: June 23, 2025

*This report is intended to supplement the U.S. Department of State Eritrea Travel Advisory and [Eritrea Country Information Page](#).*

### Embassy & Consulate Contact Information

#### U.S. Embassy Asmara:

179 Alaa Street, Asmara.

Tel: +291-1-120-004.

Hours of Operation: Monday-Thursday 0730-1700, Friday 0730-1330.

### OSAC Country Chapter(s)

Asmara does not have an active Country Chapter. Contact [OSAC's Africa team](#) with any questions.

### Eritrea Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses that travelers should exercise increased caution in Eritrea due to travel restrictions, limited consular assistance, landmines, and wrongful detentions.

### Crime

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Asmara as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Crime "C" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Eritrea.

Obtaining official crime statistics for Eritrea is difficult. Most of the U.S. Embassy's reports regarding specific crimes originate from other diplomatic missions, international organizations, and foreign business expatriates with whom U.S. diplomats share a cordial relationship.

Walking the streets of Asmara during the daytime hours is generally safe. Although crime is present, particularly at certain hours and in certain locations, Asmara is generally safer than many capital cities in the region. There are dozens of neighborhoods and shopping areas throughout Asmara that attract residents and visitors alike and, therefore, petty criminals. Pickpockets and purse/bag snatchers are a cause of concern. Although previously rare, women are increasingly involved in such thefts, which usually occur in crowded areas such

as bus stops, stadiums, movie theatres, marketplaces, and even places of worship. The Embassy has received reports of Eritreans and Westerners assaulted and robbed while walking late at night. Additionally, there has been an increase in reported assaults on the diplomatic community by emotionally disturbed individuals.

Crime is generally higher in the early morning hours near area bus stations, and in areas with high bar/club concentrations (i.e., the Expo Center and downtown area). Some bars stay open overnight until 0500. Disturbances and fights are not uncommon on weekends; youth gangs are indiscriminate in who they target. Women walking alone during these hours are particularly vulnerable. Crime risks may be higher during electricity blackouts that leave large areas in darkness. Reported assaults on Westerners dropped during Covid given the country's tight lockdown, but it is expected this will increase again with activities returned to normal. In the most severe case, a Western female was returning to her home at night when two men violently attacked her, kicking and punching her repeatedly, demanding she hand over her phone and money.

Crime also tends to be higher during the summer, when Eritreans from the diaspora visit, and during the Christmas and New Year holiday season. In June, when schools are about to close for the summer, instances of group fighting, bar brawls, and hooliganism tend to rise. Crime tends to be lower from April to June. Crime peaks again during Eritrea's National Festival in August.

While homicides do occur, they often involve perpetrators known to the victim (e.g., land disputes, crimes of passion, domestic issues). Sexual assaults usually involve individuals known to the victim or situations where the use of drugs or alcohol plays a factor. However, the occasional homicide has occurred as the result of an assault or robbery against strangers; these incidents are generally opportunistic and typically occur in the early morning hours. The Embassy has no specific knowledge of homicide or sexual assault committed against persons in the expatriate or diplomatic community.

Financial scams are rare. Eritrea has no ATMs and is a cash-only economy. You cannot use credit or debit cards in Eritrea for any purpose, as there are no credit card processing services operating in the country.

Vehicle break-ins are common, and vehicle theft is on the rise. Incidents of stolen vehicles are usually isolated to joyriding. The Embassy recommends parking in well-lighted areas, and whenever possible to park in secure parking areas. However, vehicle theft can occur at any time of day.

Residential crime ebbs and flows. Over the past few years, there have been reported break-ins and burglaries of expatriate residences. In one case, a suspect broke into a home, held a female expatriate at knifepoint, and stole personal belongings. Common items of interest reported taken from residences include propane gas cylinders, money, jewelry, and electronics.

The Eritrean government restricts the travel of foreigners outside of Asmara via a 2006 decree. While it has granted requests for travel to Keren, Mendefera, and Massawa, access is not guaranteed. Travel permits are very specific, and do not allow for side trips/deviations. Would-be travelers must request and receive specific approval to access religious and other significant sites.

The Filfil Road from Asmara to Massawa has a large amount of mountain debris and has washed away in parts. You may see wild baboons on mountain roads. They are not safe to approach. Keep vehicle windows and doors closed.

## Kidnapping Threat

Kidnapping rarely occurs; expatriates and most locals can freely walk throughout the city, day or night.

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Kidnapping “K” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Eritrea.

## Terrorism

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Asmara as being a **LOW**-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Terrorism “T” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Eritrea.

There have been no known acts of terrorism in Asmara in recent years. The government maintains a particularly tight hold on security in Massawa, Keren, and Asmara, the most densely populated cities.

A limited number of sub-state militant groups claim to still operate within Eritrea; these groups have limited operational capacity. The Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO), an Afar militant group, last conducted an attack in 2018. In January 2018, RSADO militants claimed an attack on an Eritrean military intelligence center near Asab.

Ethiopia and Eritrea signed a peace agreement in 2018. The four border crossings reopened for a short period of time before closing again until proper border regulations and infrastructure are in place to address cross-border trade and security concerns. In 2020, the Eritrean Military intervened in support of the Ethiopian federal forces in the northern Ethiopia conflict between the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF).

Since the outbreak of fighting in the border region of Tigray, Ethiopia, in November 2020, the border region has become less secure. A ceasefire deal signed in November 2022 ended direct fighting between TPLF and Ethiopian forces, however Eritrea has reportedly not withdrawn all of its forces from the Tigray region.

## Political Violence and Civil Unrest

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Asmara as being a **HIGH**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Civil Unrest “U” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Eritrea. Civil unrest can develop quickly without prior notice, often interrupting logistics and services. Avoid demonstration activity, as even those planned to remain peaceful have the potential to turn violent.

## Elections/Political Stability

The government came to power in a 1993 popular referendum, in which voters chose to have an independent country managed by a transitional government. This government did not permit the formation of a democratic system. The government twice scheduled elections in accordance with the unimplemented constitution but canceled them without explanation. Eritrea is a one-party state. Political power rests with the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and its institutions. At times the government has coerced persons to join the PFDJ.

## Protests & Demonstrations

There is a modest risk from civil unrest in Asmara. Demonstrations are rare. The last major protest occurred in 2017 during student demonstrations.

## Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

There is an undercurrent of anti-U.S. and anti-Western sentiment propagated by the Eritrean government among some Eritreans, mostly related to economic issues. Most incidents have not escalated above a verbal altercation.

## Law Enforcement

The emergency line in Eritrea is **113**. The Maekel Police District encompasses Asmara and the surrounding areas. The Maekel District has seven police stations:

- Crime Prevention Unit: **+291-1-125-229**
- Investigations Unit: **+291-1-115-402**
- Airport Security: **+291-1-186-604**
- 1st police station: **+291-1-127-799**
- 2nd police station: **+291-1-116-219**
- 3rd police station: **+291-1-114-942**
- 4th police station: **+291-08-373-068**
- 5th police station: **+291-1-151-118**

- 6th police station: **+291-1-115-551**
- 7th police station: **+291-1-186-743**

Police are responsible for maintaining internal security, and the armed forces are responsible for external security, but the government sometimes uses the armed forces, reserves, demobilized soldiers, or civilian militia to meet domestic as well as external security requirements. Agents of the national security service, a separate agency that reports to the Office of the President, are responsible for detaining persons suspected of threatening national security. The armed forces have authority to arrest and detain civilians. Civilian authorities maintain effective control over most security forces. Members of the security forces have committed numerous abuses.

A centralized police service investigates crimes and enforces traffic laws. Traffic police handle any traffic accidents/violations. Eritrea is divided into six districts. Maekel (meaning “Central”) District encompasses Asmara and the surrounding areas. Each district has smaller areas of responsibility, each with a police station.

Besides the criminal and traffic police, there are also military police responsible for responding to protests, riots, or other civil disturbances. Although the government maintains a special “riot police,” military police or actual military units generally respond to anything resembling civil unrest.

Eritrea has a diplomatic police unit that purportedly provides mobile and foot patrols at diplomatic missions in Asmara. These types of patrols have not been visible in recent years; however, the police have responded to alarms that originated from Embassy drills. This unit is also responsible for the investigation of crimes involving diplomatic property or personnel.

Eritrea employs law enforcement agencies managed by each municipality. These are unarmed police who do not have arrest powers and mainly oversee administrative issues. They are responsible for visiting building sites to ensure the builder has a permit; verifying that businesses have first-aid kits and fire extinguishers; and checking grocery stores for selling expired items or using plastic bags, which are illegal. They also regulate street vendors.

The civilian militia has taken on some patrol duties. At night, members patrol their neighborhoods. The civilian militia has static posts where they provide coverage to banks, gas depots, government buildings, the airport, etc. They are similar to police officers, just with more specific and restricted mandates, and are sometimes (particularly during large national holidays or events such as the May 24 Independence Day celebration) specifically instructed to check the documents of pedestrians to ensure compliance with National Service requirements.

## Police Response

The emergency line in Eritrea is **113**. Police generally do not speak English; communication can be difficult. Local police are generally willing to assist but sometimes lack the capability. It is possible that officers will not be able to arrive at the scene of the crime but would be willing to

take a police report at the station. It is not uncommon for individuals to provide police with transportation to a crime scene if a police vehicle is not available. District stations manage most crimes. However, if a crime involves corruption or the diplomatic community, districts refer it to headquarters for investigation.

U.S. citizen victims of crime should also report the incident to the Embassy, as it is unlikely that the local police will share that information. The U.S. Embassy is limited in its ability to assist in cases of arrest of U.S. citizens, especially those who are dual nationals of Eritrean descent. The government does not notify the U.S. Embassy of arrested U.S. citizens, and it does not allow U.S. Embassy visits to detainees. If authorities harass or detain a U.S. citizen, call or have a friend report the circumstances to the Embassy (+291-1-120-004). Attempt to get the name of the officer; this may be very difficult due to language barriers, and the fact that the Eritrean government is generally not cooperative.

## Travelers with Special Considerations

For [specific traveler concerns](#) in Eritrea, review the local laws and circumstances on the Department of State's Country Information Page.

- [Women Travelers](#)
- [LGB Travelers](#)
- [Travelers with Disabilities](#)
- [Student Travelers](#)
- [Faith-Based Travelers](#)

## Rule of Law, Arbitrary Detention, Official Harassment, Corruption, & Transparency

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Risk of Wrongful Detention “D” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Eritrea.

There have been reports of police corruption. Police occasionally use their influence to facilitate the release from prison of friends and family members. Private citizens use influence with police to harass, assault, and even jail those with whom they have personal disputes.

Lack of transparency and access to information make it impossible to determine the numbers or circumstances of criminal arrests and prosecutions. Eritrean law and the unimplemented constitution prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, but such acts remained widespread. The law stipulates that, unless there is a crime in progress, police must conduct an investigation and obtain a warrant prior to making an arrest; they may waive the process in cases involving national security. Detainees must appear before a judge within 48 hours of arrest, and authorities may not hold them for more than 28 days without charge. Nevertheless, authorities generally detain suspects for longer periods without bringing them before a judge, charging

them with a crime, or telling them the reason for detention. Authorities sometimes arbitrarily change charges during detention. Some persons are held without charge due to national security concerns.

Eritrean law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the process in which the law is applied lacks transparency. Persons seeking executive or judicial services sometimes report having obtained services more easily after paying a “gift” or bribe. Patronage, cronyism, and petty corruption within the executive branch are based largely on family connections and used to facilitate access to social benefits. Judicial corruption is a problem, and authorities generally do not prosecute acts such as property seizure by military or security officials or those seen as being in favor with the government. Local party officials, who draw no direct salary, are reported to engage in petty corruption to provide necessary paperwork.

## Cybersecurity

Eritel, a government-owned corporation, has a monopoly on providing land-based internet service. Internet cafes with limited bandwidth in Asmara and other cities are available for use however the high costs, the slow bandwidth and unreliable connections, and monitoring of internet communications limit accessibility is widespread, but most people do not have access to the internet. Internet users who needed larger bandwidth paid prices beyond the reach of most individuals.

## Import/Export Restrictions

The government tightly controls import and export licenses; typically, only government- or party-run entities can get these licenses. Even when an organization can import items, customs officials can hold up clearance with no explanation.

There are no known import restrictions on satellite phones.

A country-specific listing of items/goods prohibited from being exported to the country or that are otherwise restricted is available from the U.S. International Trade Agency [website](#).

*Additional resources and reports can be found in the [OSAC Traveler Toolkit](#).*