

## Illegal Migrants and their Death in the Mediterranean Sea: A Case Study of Eritrea, Africa

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### *Abstract*

*Migration is almost as characteristic of Homo sapiens as tool making and culture building. This paper analyzes the number and percentage of deaths of illegal migrants in the Mediterranean Sea, of different six countries month wise of the year 2014 and 2015. It also describes the deaths of illegal migration by region, origin and route. The main focus has been given to analyze the percentage of illegal migration of Eritrea in terms of age and sex. The specific land route just after home country and maritime route from Libya and Tunis to cross the Mediterranean Sea heading to different European countries adopted by Eritrean illegal migrants has also been identified. Causes and push factors affecting illegally migrate from the country has been confirmed. The consequences of illegal migration in Eritrea have also been analyzed. This paper is the original outcome of secondary data and empirical study. Data have been gathered from BBC news agency, International Organization of Migration (IOM), and United Nation Human Charity Resources (UNHCR).*

**Keywords:** Migration, Illegal, Death, Route, Mediterranean Sea.

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### **Introduction**

Migration is a phenomenon that seems to be a human necessity in every age. Since man has a tendency to leave the areas in which life is difficult, he or she migrates to the areas where life may be easy and better (Husain 2002). Migration cannot be considered a mere shift of population from one place of residence to another, as it is most fundamental to the understanding of continuously changing space-content and space relationship of an area (Gosal 1961). Bogue (1959) considers a movement of people as an instrument of cultural diffusion and social integration those results in to more meaningful distribution of population. It is in this context that migration has been of central interest to a discipline like geography, which is spatially oriented and which lays its emphasis upon the understanding of spatial process and spatial interactions. Whenever migration takes place, in whatever form, it modifies the area of origin, the area of destination as well as the way of life of the migrants. Beaujeu-Garnier (1966) and Smith (1960) rightly remarked that area from which out-migrate, the area to which they in-migrate and the migrants themselves never remain same.

The trends of migration have also been considered as a sensitive index of changing pattern of economic opportunities in an area. Of the three major components of population change, migration is the most difficult to conceptualize and measure (Jones 1981) and social transaction (Zelinsky 1971). Barclay (1958) rightly remarked that the fact, that migrant is a person, who travels, is the only unambiguous element in the entire subject.

Lee (1966) broadly considers migration as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence with no restrictions on the distance involved in the moment. It was perhaps due to this consideration that Bogue (1959) limited the scope of the term migration to only those changes of residence that involve a complete change and readjustment of community affiliations of the individual. Thus, he excluded the local mover who may move just across the street.

All movements of people are selective in one way or the other. For instance, the migration who takes a decision to move from one place to another may be age selective, implying that the people belonging to working age group largely because of economic motives. At times, when people of the working age group happen to be the head of the family, the children may also move along with them. Similarly, selective among migrants may also occur by sex. In certain situations more males may move than the females, while in others, females may move more than the males. On the other hand, there are also instances like rural to urban migrations in developing countries where a large number of males move from rural areas to urban areas leaving their families behind in the native village. Such movements are largely due to economic motives where the employment opportunities attract the rural male folk to the urban centers but the high cost of living of the urban areas compels the male migrants to leave their families behind. Illegal migration involved no passports, visas, travel documents and in most instances little use of weapons, to fend off rivals (Segal 1993).

### Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the illegal migrants and their death in the Mediterranean Sea.
2. To analyze the death of illegal migration by region, origin and route.
3. To describe the spatio-temporal illegal migration of Eritrean.
4. To find out the percentage of Eritrean migrants to the total illegal migrants in terms of age and sex.
5. To identify the specific land and maritime route adopted by Eritrean illegal migrants.
6. To analyze the factors affecting illegal migration from the country of origin.
7. To describe the consequences of illegal migration in the native country.

### Data base and Methodology

This research paper is an outcome of both primary and secondary data. Primary data have been gathered through questionnaire and interviews with very few of concerned persons. Secondary data have been collected from different documentary evidences, such as books, files, newspaper, and web pages, published and unpublished materials. Data have also been gathered from BBC news agency provided by International Organization of Migration (IOM) and United Nation Human Charity Resources (UNHCR).

Methodologies have been adopted for shaping this research paper, secondary data have been tabulated, calculated and computed. Percentages of different country's illegal migrants have been found out by calculating from total migrants and men and women and minor percentage has also been found out. The outcome result of the data has been presented in tables and by the graphs.

### Area of the Study

Eritrea is situated in the Horn of Africa and lies north of equator between 12° 22' North to 18° 02' North latitudes and 36° 26' 21" East to 43° 13' East longitudes. It has an area of 124,300 square kilometers straightly located in North East Africa along the South Eastern coast of Red Sea and has a long sea coast 1151 km. Its neighboring countries are Sudan in the North West, Djibouti in South East and Ethiopia to the South. Across the Red Sea Eritrea has Saudi Arabia and Yemen as its closest neighbors. Administratively, the country is divided in to six *Zobas* (provinces): Anseba, Debub, Debubawi Keih Bahri, Gas Barka, Maekel and Semenawi Keih Bahri, (Fig. 01).



Fig. 01. Locational Map Eritrea

Eritrea is a land of contrasts with land rising from below sea level to 3,000 meters above sea level. There are three major physiographic zones: the Western Lowlands, the Central and Northern Highlands, and the Eastern Lowlands (also referred to as the Coastal Plains). Most of the Western Low Lands and Coastal Plains are associated with hot and dry climatic conditions, while the Highlands are relatively cool. The presence of flat land, relatively fertile soil, and a milder climate makes the Central Highlands a center of rain-fed agricultural activity. Several of the major urban centers of Eritrea, including the capital city, Asmara, are located in the Central Highlands zone. During good rains the Western Lowlands have a potential for cultivation and agro-pastoralism. The Coastal Plains are the locations of the densely populated part of the country, while the Lowlands are sparsely populated.

According to the estimation of Ministry of Local Government total population of Eritrea is about 3.2 million as of 2001. The population is essentially rural with about 80 per cent of the people living in countryside. The urban population is characterized by rapid growth, partly as a result of high rural urban migration. The population of Eritrea is not uniformly distributed throughout the country. About 50-60 per cent of the population lives in the high lands. The age distribution is typical of high fertility regimes in which a larger proportion of the population is to be found in the younger age groups than in the older age groups. Eritrea is a multi-ethnic society with nine different ethnic groups speaking nine different languages and professing two major religious, namely Christianity and Islam.

In regard to educational attainment 52 per cent of female households never attained schools, compared with 39 per cent of males. The median number of years of schooling is 0.7 for males and 0.0 for females because majority of women have never attended school. Urban areas have a wide lead over rural areas in the level of education attained. For example, 82 per cent of males and 70 per cent of females in urban areas have some education, compared with less than half of males (48%) and one third of females in rural areas (DHS 2002).

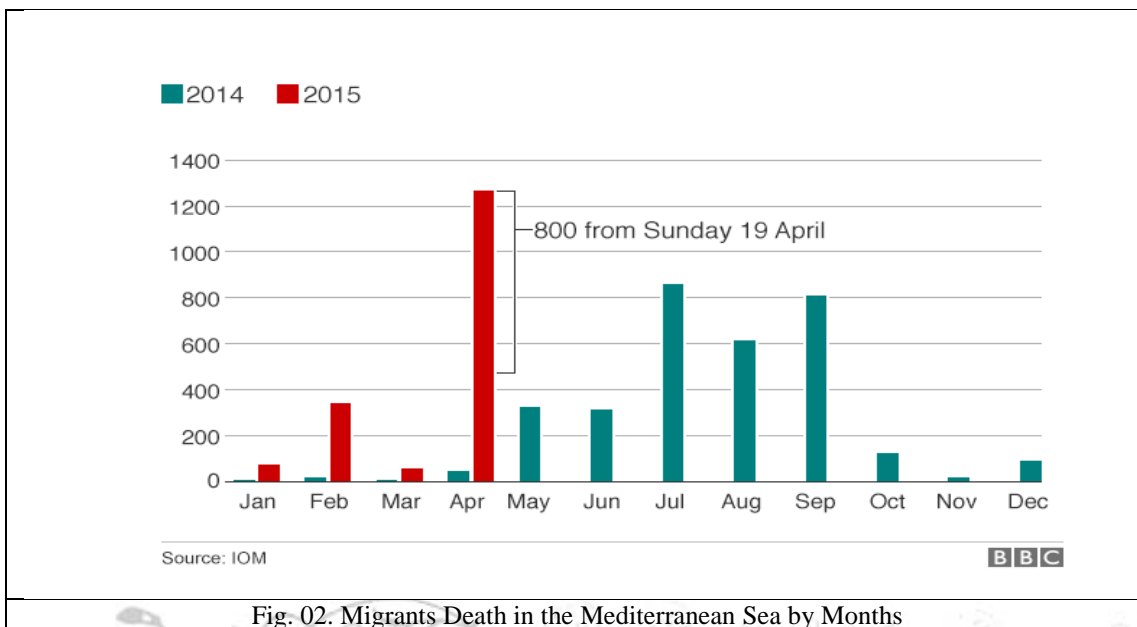


Fig. 02. Migrants Death in the Mediterranean Sea by Months

The figure 02 reveals that the death of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea fluctuating over the last two years. In the year 2014, highest number of death took place in the month of July more than 850 migrants followed by September (*i.e.*, about 800), August (*i.e.*, about 600), May and June contributed the same number (*i.e.*, about 300 each month) of migrants. While the month of January and March has insignificant number of death. The year 2015, is having only four months of data from January to April. Highest number of death occurred in the month of April more than 1200 migrants including Sunday on 19 April alone 800 migrants died. The second highest number of deaths took place in the month of February about 300 migrants in the Mediterranean Sea.

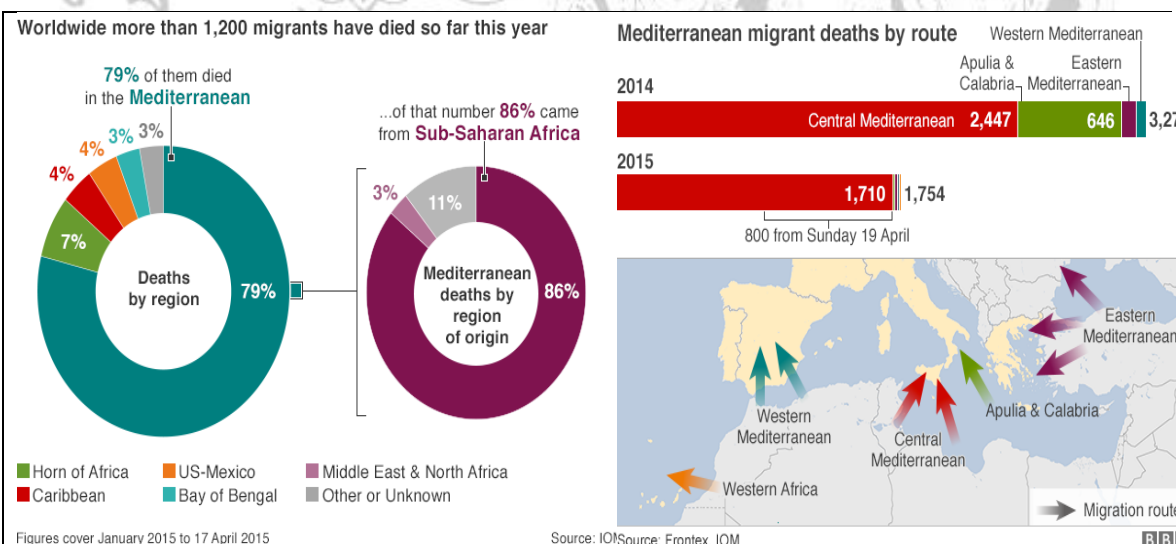


Fig. 03. Source: IOM. Migrants Death in the Mediterranean Sea by Region and Origin

Fig. 04. Source: Frontex, IOM, BBC. Mediterranean Migrants Death

The Figure 03 depicts the current death of migrants by region and region of origin from 1st January to 17th of April, 2015. Percentage of death by region noticed highest (*i.e.*, 79%) in the Mediterranean Sea followed by Horn of Africa (*i.e.*, 7%), Caribbean Sea and U.S Mexico (*i.e.*, 4% each) while least number of migrant deaths found in both Bay of Bengal and Other or Unknown region (*i.e.*, 3% each). In the same figure during the same time period present by the region of origin highest number of death occurred by Sub-Saharan Africa (*i.e.*, 86%) followed by other or Unknown region (*i.e.*, 11%) while least number of death by Middle East and North Africa region of origin.

According to the figure 04 shows that the highest number of migrant deaths occurred in the Central Mediterranean Sea route constituting about 74.62 per cent whereas, second number of deaths contributed by Apulia and Calabria route for about 19.70 per cent and Eastern and Western Mediterranean route combinedly contribute 5.67 per cent to the total percentage of world's migrants death in the year 2014.

In the year 2015, only four months data from 1st January to 17th of April show that the total number of migrant deaths occurred is about 1,754 persons. Central Mediterranean route alone contributed 1,710 illegal migrant deaths. It is to be pointed out that on 19th April; Sunday alone contributed 800 hundred deaths of migrants in the Central Mediterranean route which starts from Libya to Sicily, one of the islands of Italy. This route is followed by Eritrean and Somalian migrants started their journey from their home land to North Eastern Sudan, crossing the border of Egypt reaching to Libya (Fig 05) and from there they adopt the maritime route to cross the Mediterranean Sea.



According to BBC report, of those migrants who died in the Mediterranean, the vast majority of them began their journey in Sub-Saharan Africa. A much smaller number of migrants died travelling along the Mediterranean's other routes of its east and west and towards Apulia and Calabria, Italy.

According to figure 04 the highest number of deaths occurred by Central Mediterranean route. It is to be pointed out that since the civil war is going on in Syria, Eritrean and Somalian migrants adopted this route for heading to European countries as this has been proved by the table No 01 and figure 05. Eritreans and Somalians are starts their journey from their respective countries to North Eastern Sudan crossing the border of Egypt and reaching Libya and some of them Tunisia and from there starts their maritime journey to Sisley the nearest island (Fig. 05). Eritreans have been seeking asylum in the East Sudan for more than four decades and the region now hosts more than 100.000 refugees (UNHCR). Another route is to from east Sudan to Sinai desert to Israel. According to UNHCR statistic, the number of Eritreans crossing border from Sinai to Israel has increased from 1,348 to 17,175 in 2011. Libya has become a popular starting point for many journeyers, with people traffickers exploiting the country's power vacuum and increasing lawlessness. The relatively short distance to Lampedusa encourages more people to risk the journey.

Table. 01: Country Wise Migrants Reached Italy in 2014 by Sea Route

Country	Men		Women		Minors		Total	
	No	Percentage	No	Percentage	No	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Syria	25,155	31.67	6,203	38.94	10,965	52.74	<b>42,323</b>	36.44
Eritrea	<b>24,061</b>	<b>30.29</b>	<b>6,076</b>	<b>38.14</b>	<b>4,192</b>	<b>20.16</b>	<b>34,329</b>	<b>29.56</b>
Mali	9,382	11.82	27	0.17	529	2.54	<b>9,938</b>	8.56
Nigeria	6,989	8.79	1,454	9.13	557	2.69	<b>9,000</b>	7.75
Gambia	7,409	9.33	28	0.18	1,270	6.10	<b>8,707</b>	7.49
Palestinian	3,413	4.29	1,035	6.50	1,634	7.86	<b>6,082</b>	5.24
Somalia	3,010	3.79	1,104	6.93	1,642	7.90	<b>5,756</b>	4.95
<b>Total</b>	<b>79,419</b>	<b>99.99</b>	<b>15,927</b>	<b>99.99</b>	<b>20,789</b>	<b>99.99</b>	<b>116,135</b>	<b>99.99</b>

Source: BBC: By Emily Maguire, Lucy Rodgers, Nassos Stylianou and John Walton (2014)

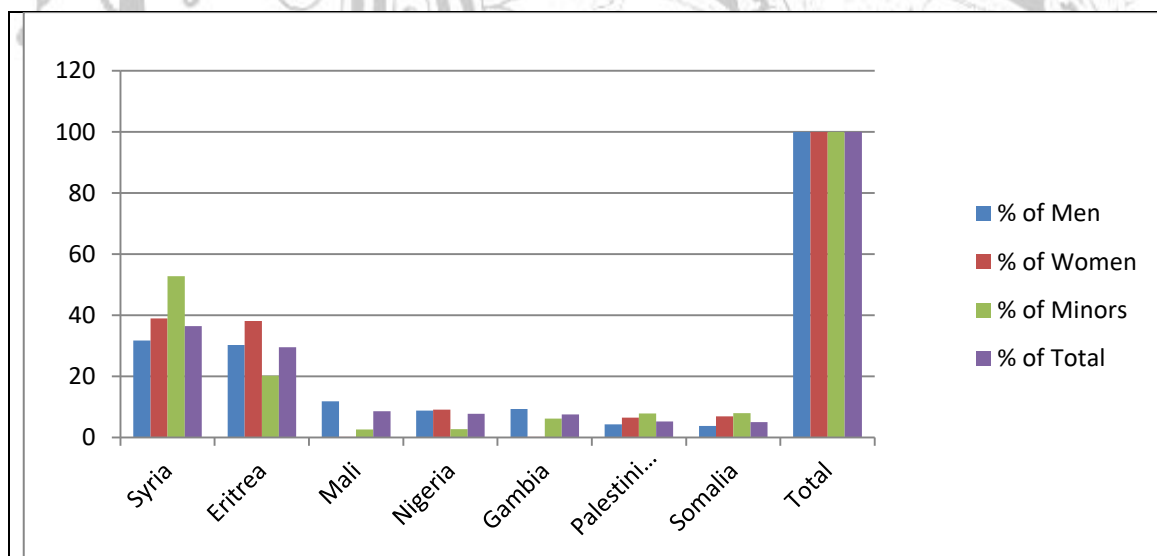


Fig. 06. Percentage of Different Country`s Migrants Arrived Italy by Sea in 2014

The table 01 reveals that the highest number of migrants (*i.e.*, 42,323) arrived Italy from Syria in 2014 by Mediterranean Sea, accounting 36 per cent to the total percentage of migrants. Eritrea stood second (*i.e.*, 34,329) accounting 29.56 per cent followed by Mali (*i.e.*, 8.56%), Nigeria (*i.e.*, 7.75%), Gambia, Palestine, and Somalia (*i.e.*, 7.49, 5.24 and 4.95%) respectively.

In male migration highest number of migrants are from Syria (*i.e.*, 25,155) accounting 31.67 per cent followed by Eritrea (*i.e.*, 24,061) 30.29 per cent, Mali (*i.e.*, 9,382) 11.82 per cent, Gambia (*i.e.*, 7,409) 9.33, Nigeria (*i.e.*, 6,989) 8.79, Palestine and Somalia (*i.e.*, 3,413 and 3,010) 4.29 and 3.79 per cent respectively.

In female migration Syria and Eritrea has almost the same number (*i.e.*, 6,203 and 6,076) accounting 38.94 and 38.14 per cent followed by Nigeria (*i.e.*, 1,454) 9.13 per cent, Somalia (*i.e.*, 1,104) 6.93 per cent and Palestine (*i.e.*, 1,035) 6.50 per cent respectively. While least number of female migrated from Mali (*i.e.*, 27) accounting 0.17 per cent to the total female migrants took place.

In the case of minor migration the highest number is from Syria (*i.e.*, 10,965) accounting 52.74 per cent followed by Eritrea (*i.e.*, 4,192) 20.16 per cent, Somali (*i.e.*, 1,642) 7.90 per cent, Palestine (*i.e.*, 1,634) 7.86 per cent and Gambia (*i.e.*, 1,270) 6.10 per cent respectively to the total percentage of minor migrants. This can also be denoted by table 01 about Eritrea that the highest percentage 70.08 (*i.e.*, 24,061), of migration took place of male population 17.70 per cent (*i.e.*, 6,076) female and 12.21 per cent (*i.e.*, 4,192) minor from the total.

This is to be pointed out that since 2011, the Civil War is being observed in Syria consequently highest number of migrants contributed by the country. But without any kind of war the second highest number of migrants contributed by Eritrea to total migrants, male, female and minor migrants reached Italy in 2014 by Mediterranean Sea. International Organization of Migration (IOM) estimates that the rate of death in this route to Italy is 4.13 percent to the total percentage of migrants.

This is also to be pointed out that a large chunk of women (*i.e.*, 6,076) accounting 39.14 per cent from the total percentage of women migrated from Eritrea. While Syria has approximately the same percentage of women migrants (*i.e.*, 38.94%) in the miserable situation of Civil war since last six years.

A leading scholar E. G. Ravenstein, whose few of the migration laws are accepted by the Eritrean Illegal migrants can be noted that “*The majority of migrants go only a short distance (distance decay)*”, and “*Migrants proceed step by step*”. Here most of the migrants proceed first in the neighbouring countries like Ethiopia and Sudan few of them seek asylum to stay for a short time than from there they intend to move to other neighboring countries and finally heading to European countries. Lee also pointed out that *Man is more active in international migration than women*. Eritrean male migrants outnumbered the female and minor migrants.

## **Factors Causing Illegal Migration**

Deteriorating socio-economic, religious and political situations at the place of origin Eritrea constitute the “push factors”, while perceived or better socio-economic, free religious and stable political conditions at the place of destination European Countries comprise the “pull factors”. Improvement of socio-economic conditions is believed to be the driving force behind people’s decision to abandon their place of origin in favour of new temporary or permanent residence.

In Eritrea, push factors include high rate of unemployment, very low wages, extreme poverty, prolonged insecurity, lack of access to basic needs such as food, water, transportation, medical services, healthcare and livelihoods, lake of power supply, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, unending military services, lack of freedom of speech, expression, write, walking, travelling and other serious human rights violations, an absence of civil society, political opposition or independent media are all contributory factors.

Conscription is also a major component of the government’s policy under the 1999 National Service Proclamation (NSP) which was extended in May 2002 under the Warsai- Yikaalo Development Campaign (WYDC). There is no specific definition of this campaign and no official figures regarding how many

people are in active service (Hirt 2010). However high school children must undertake one year of military school at the Sawa Training Camp to be able to complete their course of studies. Those formally demobilized remain members of the National Reserve Army and are frequently called up for military duty, training or work service.

Physical factors like natural disasters such as drought, severe food shortage, unfertile agricultural land, poor soil, soil erosion, desertification, famine are also including the push factors in the country of Eritrea.

The "push factors" of Eritrea is much greater than the "pull factors" of Europe. Upheavals and instability across much of Africa and the Middle East, combined with the perception that Libya's doors are open have led to a massive increase in the numbers trying to reach Libya. "Worsening repression in Eritrea" has been a great factor, while Eritreans already in refugee camps in Sudan have decided to make a dash for the Mediterranean.

### **Consequences of Migration**

It has widely been recognized that migration affects the area of out migration, the area of in migration and the migrants themselves. Each migrant, by nature, seek to recreate something of the original milieu in the mist of the new environment and consequently, enriches the civilization (Beaujeu 1966). This is fact that working class people between 15 to 45 years of age are declining and negatively affecting the place of origin. Death rate has also become high because of old age people staying in the country. As a result of old people and children remain in their houses dependency ratio has become so high.

Women outnumbered men has caused social and economic problems. More proportion of women in the workforce reducing their wages in domestic, agricultural and industrial occupations. Dominancy of women has also become one of the social problems. Rate of prostitution has also been increased. Work areas weather it is agriculture or industrial has been affected negatively. Reduction of students as well as teachers leads to close of schools. Migration is causing deterioration in the social, economic, cultural and political fields of Eritrea.

### **Conclusion**

Eritrea is a poorest country in the continent of Africa. This country of this country is dominated by agricultural and other primary activities. The country is having experience of illegal migration since long. There is no official data provided by the concerned government. Authentic figure from their reliable agencies are also not available. Restrictions on issue of passport below 45 years and to unmarried women prevent legal migration.

There is a fluctuation of migrant death, in the year 2014 and 2015. A large number of deaths occurred in the month of July and September in 2014 more than 800 each month while in 2015. April alone contributed more than 1200 including 19<sup>th</sup> April's pathetic incident. The highest number of death occurred in the region of Mediterranean Sea while corresponding percentage contributed by Sub- Saharan origin. Eritreans and Somalians are starts their journey from their respective countries to North Eastern Sudan crossing the border of Egypt and reaching Libya and some of them from Tunisia starts their maritime journey to Sisley the nearest island.

Eritrea stands second in the number of migrants reached Italy in 2014 by the Mediterranean Sea. Its male outnumbered female. Present research has highlighted the negative impacts of illegal migration. These circumstances exhibit the great problem of declining human resources and drain of brain in the country of Eritrea.



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