

Institution: London South Bank University		
Unit of Assessment: 20 – Social Work and Social Policy		
Title of case study: Improving Eritrean refugees' status in Europe: influencing immigration policy in the UK and Europe and informing legal decisions		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Gaim Kibreab	Research Professor	1999 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Eritrea is one of the most militarised countries in the world. Its citizens are subject to compulsory and indefinite national service (ENS) from the age of 18. Professor Kibreab's body of research on the impact of ENS on Eritrean citizens has directly contributed to UK Home Office practice: it changed its immigration policy to acknowledge the threat of harm faced by rejected and returned asylum seekers. Since the Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) – where Professor Kibreab served as a key expert witness in 2016 – adopted the Eritrea Country Guidance, 4,051 Eritreans have been granted asylum in the UK. Professor Kibreab's research has also informed immigration policy in relation to Eritrean refugees in Switzerland, Sweden and Norway and has been used by legal counsel for expert witness in asylum cases in the UK. Professor Kibreab's research helps to maintain awareness among UK politicians of the situation in Eritrea, and has supported the work of the NGO association <i>Eritrea Focus</i>, which campaigns to create a more just Eritrean society.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>After the border war between Eritrea and Ethiopia broke out in May 1998 and the Eritrean government launched the Warsai-Yikealo Development Campaign (WYDC) in May 2003, the Eritrean government extended the Eritrean National Service (ENS) from 18 months to indefinite duration without remuneration. The ENS is now an almost universal obligation for all men between the ages of 18 and 54 and all women between the ages of 18 and 47. Moreover, draft evaders and deserters are subjected to severe punishment or even death. In 2003, the Eritrean government extended the duration of secondary education by one year and decided to relocate all 12th year students to the Sawa military camp to combine military training and education. This new policy meant that students were conscripted at the age of 16 and 17. Alongside national service, in 2012, the government introduced the People's Militia, composed of citizens released from ENS and civil conscripts, making Eritrea the most militarised country in the world. As a result, from an Eritrean population of just over 5,000,000, hundreds of thousands of people have fled the country, escaping the open-ended, slavery-like situation to seek asylum worldwide, including to EU countries. The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) reports over 47,000 asylum applications of Eritreans to EU countries in 2015 and nearly 39,000 in 2016.</p> <p>For more than two decades, Professor Kibreab has researched and critiqued the policies of the Eritrean government and the impact on its citizens, particularly in relation to the ENS. The Eritrean government has sought to downplay the punitive nature of ENS, and the high risks those fleeing the country face en route to safety and in transit countries. Kibreab's body of work has examined the root and proximate causes of displacement and its consequences.</p> <p>Conducting empirical research in Eritrea is near impossible due to government restrictions on foreigners and independent research, therefore field research was conducted with Eritrean</p>		

asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, South Africa and Kenya. Kibreab led a large study in 2012, with 190 Eritrean refugees responding to a detailed questionnaire comprising 117 questions. The respondents were diverse, representing a wide range of ethnicities, religions, marital status and gender. Among the 190 respondents, 38 were interviewed in depth. These data were updated in 2015 with further interviews with deserters and former Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) combatants in Geneva and London. Interviews were supplemented with analysis of primary sources from the Eritrean government such as policy documents, official interviews and speeches. The research analysed the basis of conscripts' perceptions concerning the roles they played in the national service as well as elsewhere within the framework of the ENS. The interviewed people were former conscripts who fled Eritrea, first to seek asylum in Ethiopia and Sudan, and later moving on to Kenya, South Africa, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Sweden and Norway after serving in the ENS/WYDC for an average of about six years. Professor Kibreab is constantly updating his research on Eritrean national service by interviewing members of the Eritrean diaspora and new arrivals who fled from the national service or to avoid conscription. Such interviews have been conducted between 2016 and 2020 in the UK. He has produced a book [R1], three peer-reviewed journal articles [R2, R3, R4] and chapters in edited books [R5, R6].

Key findings from Kibreab's research highlight the harsh conditions which Eritreans seek to escape:

- The national service is open-ended: once conscripted there is no means of exit. Men aged 18-54 and women aged 18-47 are all conscripted. This has had disastrous impacts on the livelihoods of people in the country. Labour is the main source of income so if everyone is conscripted the result is that families lose their principal income source.
- Commanders in the army egregiously disregard all human rights of conscripts. For example, sexual abuse is rampant throughout the Eritrean National Service, particularly against female conscripts assigned to work at the camp and in the military subsequent to the six months of military training.
- Despite the fact that the Eritrean government is a signatory of the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (1957), it uses forced labour as a means of political education mobilisation, and for purposes of economic and infrastructural development, as well as for instilling work-ethic and discipline under a rigorously enforced punishment regime.
- It has also failed to suppress the use of forced labour by the ruling party's firms and high-ranking officers of the forces contrary to the spirit and letter of the conventions. In addition, government also hires out conscripts to the private sector contrary conventions to which it is a party.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1 and R6 are submitted as outputs for REF2021 in UoA 20.

[R1] Kibreab, G (2017) [The Eritrean National Service: Servitude for the Common Good and the Youth Exodus](#). Eastern Africa Series. James Currey, Woodbridge. ISBN 78-1-84701-160-2.

[R2] Kibreab, G (2017) [Sexual Violence in the Eritrean National Service](#). African Studies Review, 60 (1). pp. 123-143. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.5>

[R3] Kibreab, G., The Open-Ended Eritrean National Service: The Driver of Forced Migration, 15-16 October 2014, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1282042/90_1416473628_gaim-kibreab-the-openended-eritrean-national-service-the-driver-of-forced-migration.pdf

[R4] Kibreab, G. (2009). Forced Labour in Eritrea, The Journal of Modern African Studies, Mar., 2009, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Mar., 2009), pp. 41-72. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30224923>

[R5] Kibreab, G. (2014a). [Forced Migration in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa](#). In E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, G. Loescher, K. Long, & N. Sigona (Eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies (pp. 571-584): Oxford University Press.

[R6] Kibreab, G. (2020). [Problematizing 'Liberation' and Democratization in post-independence Eritrea](#). in: Kidane, M. (ed.) Alternative Approaches to Democratization in the Greater Horn of Africa: James Currey.

A leading publisher of academic books on Africa, Boydell Africa, described an 'outpouring of interest' in Gaim Kibreab's 2017 book *The Eritrean National Service: Servitude for the Common Good and the Youth Exodus*, regarded as a 'powerful, critical survey' which 'gives voice to the conscripts who are forced to serve indefinitely without remuneration under the ENS.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Professor Kibreab's research has led to the UK Home Office changing its policy on Eritrean refugees to acknowledge the real danger of harm faced by returning citizens that have escaped military service. His research has also influenced asylum policy in Sweden, Norway and Switzerland and is used by the European Asylum Support Office and by UK Immigration and Asylum officials to inform frontline staff of the human rights situation in Eritrea. Professor Kibreab's research expertise has been used for legal counsel in a large number of asylum cases and contributes to campaigning activities of Eritrea Focus.

Changing UK immigration policy on Eritrean refugees

Professor Kibreab's research was instrumental to the Home Office changing its Country Information and Guidance on Eritrea in August 2016 to acknowledge that asylum seekers fleeing national (including military) service or who left the country illegally were likely to be prosecuted and face serious harm [S1]. Previously, the country guidance reflected the official Eritrean Government's policy line that rejected asylum seekers returned to Eritrea would be fined and safely reintegrated.

This change to Home Office policy was initiated by an Upper Tribunal "country guidance" determination, to which Professor Kibreab gave extensive research-based evidence [S2]. Country Guidance determinations have become a central feature of asylum cases in the UK. Professor Kibreab has made significant contributions to three major country guidance cases, the most recent in 2016. The 2016 tribunal notes that: "*we consider that [Professor Kibreab] should be considered as a serious expert on country conditions in Eritrea.*" It concluded that his evidence generally "*should be accorded serious weight*" [S2, paragraph 228].

On 10 October 2016, the Upper Tribunal published a new Country Guidance case on Eritrea, *MST [one of the Appellants] and Others (national service – risk categories)*. The judgment confirmed that Eritreans who evaded military service and/or left the country illegally, continue to face a real risk of, serious harm or ill-treatment if returned to Eritrea. In response, from August 2016 the Home Office removed its previous Country Information and Guidance on Eritrea in relation to national (including military) service and illegal exit [S1].

Since this landmark decision, Home Office figures show that between 2016 to 2019, 4,051 Eritreans have been granted asylum in the UK, in comparison to 2,951 granted asylum between 2010 to 2014. For the individuals involved in these cases, Professor Kibreab's research indicates that this may have saved them from severe punishments had they been forced to return to Eritrea. A barrister at Doughty Street Chambers notes that, "*it is now difficult to refuse entry for any Eritrean below the age of 70...the general understanding is that they will be persecuted and subject to military service, irrespective of their age or sex.*" [S3]

Following the policy change, the UK Country Policy and Information Note *Eritrea: National Service and Illegal Exit, 2018* was updated. The note is used to inform the work of front-line UK Visa and Immigration officials that daily make decisions on asylum and human rights applications. Professor Kibreab's research is cited in the note. [S4]

Influencing immigration policy on Eritrean refugees in Sweden, Norway and Switzerland

In continental Europe, Professor Kibreab's research has informed the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Country of Origin Information Reports on Eritrea from 2015, 2016 and 2019. These reports are reference points for the 27 EU countries and feed into immigration policy decision making. In the EASO 2019 report Kibreab's research is cited 24 times [S5]. The Swedish, Norwegian and Swiss migration offices, responsible for providing information to policy-makers and adjudicators, have individually used Kibreab's research or directly called on his expertise when preparing reports on the Eritrean National Service. For example, the 2016

Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, LandInfo report on Eritrea cites Kibreab 25 times [S6].

In Sweden, Eritreans are in the top 10 of asylum applicants. A senior analyst at the Swedish Migration Agency explained that they struggle to obtain reliable information on human rights in Eritrea and that they have used Kibreab's research to help with their intelligence: *"I can confirm that the Swedish government has used Gaim's [Kibreab] work and will continue to do so... We need experts like Gaim to keep us up to date to allow the immigration officials to do a successful job."* [S7]

Switzerland remains one of the most popular destinations in Europe for Eritrean refugees, with *The Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)* drawing on Kibreab's expertise and research for many years. A Country of Origin Information Analyst who first met Kibreab in 2009 and has used his research in a recent report for EASO [2019] explains why his research-based expertise is so valuable: *"It is extremely difficult to research the Eritrean internal situation because it is so closed to outsiders... we need to rely on experts for any detailed information... generally speaking, the work provided by the professionals (Gaim included) does hold up well under challenge"* [S7].

Informing legal counsel representing Eritrean asylum seekers

Professor Kibreab's research has directly contributed to the legal cases for Eritrean refugees seeking asylum. He has provided many written reports, based on his research, which are used by legal teams when representing clients. Doughty Street Chambers, an internationally renowned firm of barristers specialising in human rights and civil liberties have acknowledged the credibility his research expertise brings to their cases: *"[Professor Kibreab] has worked on the last three principal case studies and he has been recognised for doing so by the courts (Article 4). He is well respected – whilst the courts challenge professional witnesses, he more than holds his own."* [S3]. Kibreab's credibility as an expert witness is also confirmed by a solicitor at Justice and Rights Law firm in London. He describes Kibreab as 'the best expert witness for Eritreans' and explains that his work is always accepted by the judiciary and never challenged: *"It is always seen as qualitative, thorough and detailed"* [S3]. Albany Solicitors, an immigration law practice based in Bristol, has drawn on Kibreab's expertise to produce reports to support their clients' cases for asylum: *"Kibreab's work provided weight, particularly when dealing with an individual case-by-case basis... in the last 10 years Gaim has potentially represented between 10 and 20 clients of this practice."* [S3].

Maintaining awareness of Eritrean human rights violations

Professor Kibreab's recognition as an expert witness in government and legal circles means that his research contributes to maintaining awareness among UK politicians of the suffering inflicted by Eritrea's military regime on its own citizens. For example, in 2017 Kibreab was one of only three academic witnesses at the Foreign Affairs Committee's Annual Review of the Work of the FCO [S8]. In 2018, he was a witness at the International Development Committee's examination of forced displacement in Africa [S9] and has presented twice to the *All Party Parliamentary Group on Eritrea*, which ensures the UK parliament maintains a focus on the situation in Eritrea [S10].

Professor Kibreab's research knowledge has aided the credibility of the campaign work of *Eritrea Focus*, an association of NGOs, human rights organisations, exile and refugee groups concerned with reducing crimes against humanity and making the Eritrean state more just. Professor Kibreab has spoken at two large conferences organised by Eritrea Focus in 2019 and 2020. The co-founder attests to the importance of Professor Kibreab's research to provide an evidence base for its work: *"Professor Kibreab is a recognised international expert on Eritrean National Service and its economy. His knowledge provides our association with evidence-based research that exposes the harsh reality of life in Eritrea. He is currently working with other experts to produce an ambitious blueprint that offers a new and progressive path for the Eritrean society."* [S10]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[S1] <https://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/en/content/uk-upper-tribunal-publishes-new-country-guidance-case-eritrea>

[S2] MST and Others (national service – risk categories) Eritrea CG [2016] UKUT 00443 (IAC) Appendix III, pg199-222 <https://tribunalsdecisions.service.gov.uk/utiac/2016-ukut-443>

[S3] Compilation of interviews with solicitors. The Innovation Partnership. Includes interviews with Solicitor, Doughty Street Chambers, May 2020, interview with Solicitor Justice and Rights Law Firm, May 2020 and interview with Solicitor, Albany Solicitors, May 2020

[S4] UK Country Policy and Information Note Eritrea: National service and illegal exit, 2018. Kibreab is quoted on p. 25.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726192/Eritrea - NS Illegal Exit v5.0e July 2018 .pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726192/Eritrea_-_NS_Illegal_Exit_v5.0e_July_2018_.pdf)

[S5] EASO reports at https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1253549/90_1434088711_2015-06-11-easo-eritrea-report-final.pdf (2015),

https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/COI- Eritrea-Dec2016_LR.pdf (2016) and

https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2017271/2019_EASO_COI_Eritrea_National_service_exit_and_return.pdf (2019).

[S6] LandInfo Report Eritrea: National Service <https://landinfo.no/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Eritrea-national-service.pdf>

[S7] Compilation of interviews with COI experts, The Innovation Partnership 2021.

[S8] Foreign Affairs Committee. Oral evidence: Human Rights: Annual Review of the Work of the FCO, HC 687, Tuesday 28 February 2017

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/foreign-affairs-committee/human-rights-annual-review-of-the-work-of-the-fco/oral/48064.pdf>

[S9] International Development Committee. Oral evidence: Forced displacement in Africa, HC 1433, Tuesday 6 November 2018

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/international-development-committee/forced-displacement-in-africa-anchors-not-walls/oral/92379.pdf> and

the Government response

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmintdev/2357/2357.pdf>

[S10] Email from co-founder of Eritrea Focus.