Ethiopia: Availability of fraudulent identity documents; state efforts to combat document fraud (2014-January 2016)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Availability of Fraudulent Identity Documents

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an operations officer at the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) office in Addis Ababa stated that, based on the experience of document verification at their duty station, fraudulent identity documents were not prevalent in Ethiopia (IOM 19 July 2016). The same source explained that the IOM in Ethiopia runs a document verification program for the "immigration authorities of third countries" and is usually requested to check the authenticity of documents such as birth or death certificates, marriage certificates and school reports; reportedly, less than 4 percent of the documents verified by the IOM are fraudulent (ibid.). According to the Operations Officer, the IOM office verifies identity documents with relevant Ethiopian government departments as "[a]ll documents issued by Governmental offices are registered in their records and copies are kept in their files" (ibid.). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.1 Identity Cards and Passports

According to sources, Ethiopia does not have a universal format for their national identity card (World Bank and ESAAMLG May 2015, 5; FSS 2015, 46; US July 2015). The US Department of State's 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report for Ethiopia states that "the lack of a uniform national identification card" in Ethiopia has "allowed for the continued issuance of district-level identification cards subject to fraud" (ibid.). A joint report by the World Bank and the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group (ESAAMLG) [1] on anti-money laundering and the financing of terrorism in Ethiopia states that there is no national or regional Ethiopian identity card but rather "[e]ach kebele (similar to a ward) has its own identity card and there have been instances when false identity documentation has been used - particularly when receiving money transfers" (World Bank and ESAAMLG May 2015, 5, 6). A report on Ethiopian labour migration to the Gulf countries and to South Africa, prepared by the Forum for Social Studies (FSS), an Ethiopian research institute, similarly indicates that various types of ID cards are issued by "thousands of kebele within the country" and it is thus "very difficult for the immigration department [which relies on kebele cards to issue passports to Ethiopians] to check the veracity of these documents. This opens the door for the business of forging ID cards which is, unfortunately, rife in the country" (FSS 2015, 46). For information on identity cards issued in Addis Ababa, see Response to Information Request ETH104950.E.

According to the US Department of State's 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report for Ethiopia, "[r]eports suggest district level officials accepted bribes to change the ages on district-issued identification cards,
enabling children to receive passports without parental consent" (US July 2015). The FSS report, similarly states that many kebele officials "provide identity cards for underage teenagers and children testifying that they are above 18 years old" due to their acquaintance with the applicant or for financial favours (FSS 2015, 46). According to the same source,

[t]he main requirement to obtain a passport is to present valid kebele residential Identification Card (ID). However, ... the use of a kebele identity card to issue a passport is found to be fraught with profound problems. There are problems of forgery. (ibid.)

The FSS also notes that there is no "universal/national birthday certification system in the country" and it is therefore "very difficult for the Immigration Department to verify age claims of passport applicants" (ibid.). For information on the requirements to obtain an Ethiopian passport, including the passport's features, see Responses to Information Request ETH105301.E, ETH105190.E and ZZZ105007.E.

1.2 Driver's Licences

A December 2015 article by the Ethiopian Herald, an English-language newspaper published by the Ethiopian Press Agency, quotes the Director of Ethiopia's Federal Road Transport Authority [RTA or Federal Transport Authority (FTA)] as stating that there is a "huge number" of fraudulent driver's licences in circulation (the Ethiopian Herald 11 Dec. 2015). The Director added that, out of 900 driver's licences that the RTA was requested to verify for one company, 380 turned out to be fraudulent (ibid.). A June 2016 article by the Addis Fortune, an Ethiopian English-language weekly newspaper, reports that a two-year investigation conducted by the RTA identified 83 persons who were using fraudulent licenses; the results of the investigation found that the forgery of driver's licences "was prevalent in Dessie, Amhara Region; Somali Region, and Nekemte and Shashemene in Oromia Region" (7 June 2016). Further information on fraudulent driver's licences in Ethiopia could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. State Efforts to Combat Document Fraud

Information on state efforts to combat document fraud was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. A 2013 report by the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC) [2] on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism in Ethiopia indicates that in 2012 Ethiopia adopted a new law --Proclamation No. 760/2012: A Proclamation on the Registration of Vital Events and National Identity Card -- that would introduce national ID cards with a photograph, fingerprints and a "unique national ID number" for all Ethiopians 18 years of age or older (Feb. 2013, 9). Further information on the introduction of national ID cards could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

A June 2015 article by the Addis Fortune states that, in 2013, the RTA introduced plastic driver's licence cards, renewable every four years, but that "many licence holders still carry[…] paper licences, renewable every two years" (Addis Fortune 15 June 2015). According to the same source, in June 2015, the RTA opened a bid to develop a biometric driver's licence system that would include a collection of fingerprints "to prevent the creation of fraudulent licences" (ibid.). However, further reporting by the Addis Fortune indicates that, as of February 2016, the selection of the company to develop the system had not yet been finalised due to the ongoing complaints revision process by the RTA (ibid. 1 Feb. 2016). Further information on the introduction of biometric driver's licences could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group (ESAAMLG) is a regional intergovernmental body based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania that was established in 1999 with the purpose of combating money laundering (FATF n.d.).

[2] The Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC), presently known as the Global Center on Cooperative Security (Global Center), describes itself as a "nonprofit, nonpartisan policy institute dedicated to strengthening international counterterrorism cooperation." (Global Center n.d.b). According to information available on the website of the Global Center, the organization "works with governments, international organizations, and civil society to develop and implement comprehensive and sustainable responses to
complex international security challenges through collaborative policy research" and has offices in Washington, DC, London and New York (ibid. n.d.a).

References


Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Addis Ababa University; Global Center on Cooperative Security; Human Rights Watch; Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat.


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