

In 2015, Eritrea made efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, but was also complicit in the use of forced child labor. While the Government drafted legislation that contains prohibitions on the commercial sexual exploitation of children, Eritrea is receiving an assessment of no advancement due to its continued requirement that children participate in a national program called Maetot, under which children in grades 9 to 11 engage in compulsory labor in agricultural, environmental, or hygiene-related public works projects. In addition, although the law prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 into the armed forces, there may be children enrolled in the Government's compulsory military training program. Children in Eritrea are also engaged in child labor, including in agriculture and street work. The Government does not make law enforcement data publicly available. National laws and regulations also only identify a limited number of hazardous activities prohibited for children, and there is a lack of specific penalties for those who employ children who are under the minimum age for work.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Eritrea are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture and street work.(1-4) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Eritrea. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Attending School (%)	5-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Combining Work and School (%)	7-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate (%)		36.8

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2013, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015.(5)

Data were unavailable from Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis, 2015.(6)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Farming, including the production of corn,* wheat,* sorghum,* and other grains* (1-3, 7)
	Herding livestock* (1, 3)
Industry	Small-scale manufacturing* (1, 7, 8)
	Mining* (2, 9)
Services	Domestic work (1, 3, 7)
	Working in garages, bicycle repair shops, tea and coffee shops, and metal workshops (1, 3, 7)
	Street work, including selling cigarettes, newspapers, and chewing gum; cleaning cars; begging; and transporting goods on donkey carts or tricycles* (1, 3, 4, 7)
	Gathering firewood and hauling water* (1, 3)

Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (cont)

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking* (1, 8, 10, 11)
	Compulsory participation in Active National Service or the Popular Army prior to the age of 18 for military training, and agricultural and domestic work (3, 11-15)
	Forced labor, including in agriculture, environmental protection, and begging* (1, 3, 9, 11, 12)

* Evidence of this activity is limited and/or the extent of the problem is unknown.

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Some Eritrean girls who travel to Saudi Arabia or Gulf states for domestic work are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation upon arrival.(10) A smaller number of girls are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation in South Sudan, Sudan, and Israel.(11)

The Ministry of Education operates a national program, *Maetot*, under which children in grades 9 to 11 are required to engage in compulsory labor in public works projects in agriculture and environmental protection during their summer holidays, in some cases for as long as 2 months.(3, 11, 16-18) Adolescents may be required to dig irrigation ditches or canals, maintain agricultural terracing, or produce and maintain school furniture.(1, 3, 15) Government declarations indicate that the purpose of *Maetot* is to instill a proper work ethic in adolescents and to expose them to people of other ethnic backgrounds, with the aim of fostering their appreciation for diverse cultures and strengthening national unity through cooperation and self-reliance.(17)

The Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995 establishes compulsory military training and service, known as Active National Service, for all citizens ages 18 to 40.(19) To graduate from high school and meet the compulsory training component of National Service, students are required to complete their final year of schooling (grade 12) at the Sawa Education and Military Training Camp in remote western Eritrea; these students have typically reached age 18, but some are reportedly younger.(3, 11, 12, 14, 19) Limited evidence suggests military training includes military discipline and procedures, weapons training, and a 2- to 4-week war simulation.(14) Research found that some students are forced to conduct agricultural activities on government-owned farms, in addition to their military training, and girls may be subject to forced domestic work in military training centers.(15) For some attending Sawa, National Service may consist of 6 months of military training, followed by employment in a government work unit for 12 months. However, for others, the Government often fails to abide by the Proclamation’s 18-month limit on Active National Service.(20) Eritreans may be compelled to remain in the military indefinitely, or they may be assigned to work units not of their choosing.(20)

The uncertain length of service, lack of hope of ever being demobilized, inability to earn higher wages in the private sector, and notoriously harsh working conditions in the National Service provoked a significant number of youth, including unaccompanied minors, to flee Eritrea and may have also encouraged many to resort to the use of international smuggling or human trafficking networks.(12, 14, 18, 20, 21) Adolescent children who attempted to leave Eritrea were sometimes detained or forced to undergo military training, despite being younger than the minimum age of 18 for compulsory military recruitment.(11, 14)




National Service places an economic burden on children as their parents and older siblings are either already conscripted and paid meager wages, or have fled the country to avoid indefinite conscription. Many children drop out of school to work and financially support their families before they are conscripted.(14) Additional barriers that children face in accessing education are a shortage of schools; the inability to afford uniforms, supplies, and transportation; and a lack of birth registration, which is required to attend school.(3, 22)

Research did not find information on whether the Government made an effort to collect or publish data on the worst forms of child labor.

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Eritrea has ratified most key international conventions concerning child labor, including its worst forms (Table 3).

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The Government has established laws and regulations related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 4).

Table 4. Laws and Regulations Related to Child Labor

Standard	Yes/No	Age	Related Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Article 68 of the Labour Proclamation (23)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	No		
Prohibition of Hazardous Occupations or Activities for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 565 and 605 of the Penal Code (24)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 605 of the Penal Code (24)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 594, 595, 604, 605, and 609 of the Penal Code (24)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 510 of the Penal Code (24)
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 8 of the Proclamation on National Service (19)
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	N/A		
Compulsory Education Age	No		
Free Public Education	No		

In May 2015, the Government announced that it was considering the establishment of a new Criminal Code that contains prohibitions on the commercial sexual exploitation of children. However, the Code has not yet been proclaimed. Laws regarding the commercial sexual exploitation of children are insufficient as the procurement and offering of a child for prostitution, the production of pornography, and the use of children for pornographic purposes are not criminally prohibited.(12, 18)

The law's minimum age protections do not apply to children working outside formal employment relationships, such as those who are self-employed.(23, 25)

The Labour Proclamation of Eritrea No. 118/2001 does not require employers to keep a register containing the name, age, or date of birth of their employees, nor does it prescribe specific penalties for employers of children in hazardous work or employers of children under the minimum age for work.(23, 26)

A child may become an apprentice at age 14 and is not prohibited from engaging in hazardous work in supervised vocational training programs.(23, 26, 27)

Article 69 of the Labour Proclamation authorizes the Minister to issue a list of activities prohibited to children under age 18; however, the Government of Eritrea has not determined by national law or regulation the types of hazardous work prohibited for children.(23, 28)

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Laws related to the use of children in illicit activities are not sufficient because offering and procuring a child for the production and trafficking of drugs are not criminally prohibited.(24)

Minimum age for voluntary military service is not applicable to Eritrea because all citizens ages 18 to 40 have the compulsory duty of performing Active National Service under the Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995.(19)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor, including its worst forms (Table 5).

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare	Enforce child labor laws and monitor children working in hazardous conditions, particularly in urban areas.(18, 29)
Popular Army	Perform night patrols and refer cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children or other exploitative practices to the Eritrean Police.(1, 30)
Eritrean Defense Forces	Refer cases of the worst forms of child labor to the Eritrean Police or the Ministry of Labor.(1, 30)
Eritrean Police	Enforce laws and investigate referred cases of child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children.(1, 30)
National Security Administration	Work with the Eritrean police to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children.(10)

Labor Law Enforcement

Research did not find information on whether labor law enforcement agencies in Eritrea took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2014	2015
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Labor Inspectors	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Dedicated Inspectors	Unknown	Unknown
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Unknown	Unknown
Training for Labor Inspectors		
■ Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown	Unknown
■ Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
■ Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Labor Inspections	Unknown	Unknown
■ Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown	Unknown
■ Number Conducted by Desk Reviews	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown	Unknown
■ Number of Penalties Imposed That Were Collected	Unknown	Unknown
Routine Inspections Conducted	Unknown	Unknown
■ Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown	Unknown
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Unknown	Unknown
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown	Unknown
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Unknown	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Unknown	Unknown

Criminal Law Enforcement

Research did not find whether criminal law enforcement agencies in Eritrea took actions to combat the worst forms of child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2014	2015
Training for Investigators		
■ Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown	Unknown
■ Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Unknown
■ Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Investigations	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Violations Found	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Convictions	Unknown	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Unknown	Unknown

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Research found no evidence that the Government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor, including its worst forms.

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government of Eritrea has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 8).

Table 8. Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
Comprehensive Child Policies	Aims to prevent and eliminate child labor in Eritrea. Prepared in collaboration with UNICEF, the policies align with the UN Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework.(30)
UN Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework (2013–2016)	Aims to enhance the well-being of Eritreans through equitable access to quality basic education and strengthened protection of vulnerable children from exploitation.(31)
National Policy on Education*	Establishes 8 years of compulsory, free education for all citizens.(28, 32)

* Child labor elimination and prevention strategies do not appear to have been integrated into this policy.

Research did not reveal the extent to which the Comprehensive Child Policies were implemented, or what their impact has been on the elimination of the worst forms of child labor. The Government's compulsory military training requirement for Active National Service for students in grade 12 may diminish the impact of Eritrea's policies to combat the worst forms of child labor on all those wishing to obtain high school diplomas. In addition, the Government's continued use of compulsory labor through the *Maetot* program may also diminish these efforts.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2015, the Government of Eritrea participated in one program that may contribute to the prevention or elimination of child labor (Table 9).

Table 9. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
UNICEF Country Program (2013–2016)	UNICEF program, in collaboration with the Government, that aims to build on previous progress in complementary and nomadic education, and to assist the Government in enhancing the quality of basic education.(22) UNICEF also works with the Ministry of Labor to provide social integration and counseling services to approximately 3,500 street children.(33)

Although the Government of Eritrea participates in a program that targets street children, the scope of this program is insufficient to fully address the extent of children in street work. Furthermore, research found no evidence of programs that target children working in agriculture and domestic work and that specifically address the worst forms of child labor.

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor, including its worst forms, in Eritrea (Table 10).

Table 10. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ratify ILO C. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.	2013 – 2015
	Establish a minimum age for hazardous work and determine the types of hazardous work prohibited for children, in consultation with employers' and workers' organizations.	2015
	Ensure that all children are protected by minimum age laws, including those who are self-employed.	2015
	Amend the Labor Proclamation to require employers to keep a register containing the name and age or date of birth of their employees, and provide penalties for employers of children in hazardous work and employers of children under the legal minimum age.	2010 – 2015
	Prohibit children in supervised vocational training programs from engaging in hazardous work, in line with international conventions.	2009 – 2015
	Ensure that procuring and offering a child for prostitution, the production of pornography, and for pornographic performances are criminally prohibited.	2015
	Ensure that procuring and offering a child for the production and trafficking of drugs are criminally prohibited.	2015
Enforcement	Collect data on labor and criminal law enforcement and make the data publicly available.	2009 – 2015
Coordination	Establish a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2015
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Policy on Education.	2009 – 2015
	Ensure that the Comprehensive Child Policies are implemented and assess their impact on eliminating the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2015
	Ensure that children under age 18 are not recruited into Active National Service.	2009 – 2015
	Cease requiring children to perform compulsory labor under the <i>Maetot</i> program during the school break.	2009 – 2015
Social Programs	Ensure all children have access to education by building more schools, removing financial barriers, and increasing birth registration.	2010 – 2015
	Conduct research on child labor, including its worst forms.	2009 – 2015
	Expand existing programs to address the scope of children in street work. Institute programs to address child labor, including in agriculture and domestic work and the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation.	2009 – 2015

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