

Eritrea

The Government of Eritrea supported programs intended to reduce the worst forms of child labor, such as providing services to street children; however, these were not adequate to address the scope of Eritrea's child labor problem and omitted the numerous children working in agriculture and domestic service. The Government forcibly recruits children during the school break to plant trees, pick cotton, and work as domestic servants.



Statistics on Working Children and School Attendance

Children	Percent
Working	Unavailable
Attending School	Unavailable
Combining Work and School	Unavailable

Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor¹⁷³⁶

Children are exploited in the worst forms of child labor in Eritrea, many of them in agriculture. Children in rural areas of Eritrea work on farms producing corn, wheat, sorghum, and other grains, and in fields gathering firewood, hauling water, and herding livestock. Children's work in agriculture commonly involves use of potentially dangerous machinery and tools, carrying of heavy loads, and the application of harmful pesticides.¹⁷³⁷ Children are also engaged in domestic labor where they may face long hours of work and exposure to physical and sexual exploitation by their employers.¹⁷³⁸

In urban areas, children repair vehicles and work on the streets as vendors.¹⁷³⁹ Children also work in garages and workshops making household utensils and furniture.¹⁷⁴⁰ In Asmara, some children engage in commercial sexual exploitation and street begging. Children working on the streets are exposed to a variety of dangers, which may include severe weather, accidents caused by proximity to vehicles, and vulnerability to criminal elements.¹⁷⁴¹

The Government of Eritrea imposes compulsory labor on secondary-level schoolchildren. Children in the ninth grade and above are forced to work for 2 months

during the school break for a national program called Mahtot. They are required to work on farms, provide domestic service, plant trees, and pick cotton.¹⁷⁴²



In addition, the Government requires all secondary school students to complete their final, 12th year of schooling and military training at the Sawa Military Training Camp in remote western Eritrea in order to graduate.¹⁷⁴³ Students who do not attend are not eligible to take their final examinations or to graduate.¹⁷⁴⁴ Young persons are required to register for military service by the age of 17. Students who avoid military service are often victims of torture and poor treatment.¹⁷⁴⁵ Some students may be under the age of 18 while attending Sawa. Since children may leave school at age 13, they may receive military training at this age.¹⁷⁴⁶ After the 6 months of compulsory military training, national service conscripts, who may be under age 18, are either drafted into the military, deployed to work in mines and on agriculture and construction projects, or assigned to a technical college for further training.¹⁷⁴⁷

Eritrea is a country of origin for children trafficked for forced labor, including commercial sexual exploitation.¹⁷⁴⁸ In rare instances, children are trafficked to the Middle East to serve as camel jockeys.¹⁷⁴⁹

Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Labor Proclamation sets the minimum age for employment at 14 and the minimum age for hazardous work at 18. Under this law, hazardous work includes transporting goods and passengers, heavy lifting, working with toxic chemicals and dangerous machines, and working underground, such as in mines, quarries, sewers, and tunnel digging.¹⁷⁵⁰ However, the Labor Proclamation does not include penalties for employers of children in hazardous work or children under the minimum age.¹⁷⁵¹

In addition, children in apprenticeships may engage in hazardous work if supervised by a competent authority. This includes dangerous and health-threatening tasks such as working in mines, quarries, and sewers. It is unclear at what age a child may become an apprentice.¹⁷⁵²

	C138, Minimum Age	✓
	C182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	No
	CRC	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	No
	Minimum Age for Work	14
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18
	Compulsory Education Age	13
	Free Public Education	No

Slavery, servitude, and forced labor are prohibited by the Constitution.¹⁷⁵³ The Penal Code prohibits and provides penalties for trafficking in persons for sexual

exploitation, child rape, and child prostitution.¹⁷⁵⁴ There is no legislation to prohibit trafficking for labor exploitation.¹⁷⁵⁵ Children under 18 are prohibited from being recruited into the armed forces by Proclamation 11/1991.¹⁷⁵⁶ However, children under age 18 may receive military training.

Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

Research found no evidence that the Government of Eritrea has established a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor.¹⁷⁵⁷

The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare is the primary federal agency designated to enforce child labor laws, including criminal violations of the worst forms of child labor, such as trafficking. Information on inspectors and complaint mechanisms was unavailable.¹⁷⁵⁸

During the reporting period, the Eritrean Government prosecuted persons for human trafficking, although it is unknown how many were prosecuted and whether the victims were children.¹⁷⁵⁹ Information was not available on other investigations, prosecutions, or convictions for other worst forms of child labor.

Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The National Plan of Action on Child Labor and National Program of Action on Children are the primary government instruments to prevent and eliminate child labor in Eritrea. These policies aim to prevent child labor and rehabilitate children by reintegrating them with families, communities, and schools.¹⁷⁶⁰

Child labor concerns are also mainstreamed into the Education Sectoral Development Plan and the UN Development Assistance Framework. However, these two development policies do not have budgets, detailed action plans, or targets related to the worst forms of child labor, and they do not appear to have been implemented to any significant degree.¹⁷⁶¹

In addition, the Government's compulsory labor and military training requirements for schoolchildren may diminish the impact of Eritrea's policies to combat the worst forms of child labor.¹⁷⁶² Further, the Government has not provided information during the reporting period that it collects information on the worst forms of child labor, limiting their ability to inform policy.¹⁷⁶³

Social Programs to Eliminate or Prevent the Worst Forms of Child Labor

In the past, the Government supported child-centered social programs aimed to assist street children or reintegrate orphaned children with their extended families.¹⁷⁶⁴ In 2009, the Government, through its partnership with UNICEF, provided 4,426 street children with educational materials and cash subsidies to cover the cost of uniforms.¹⁷⁶⁵

Current efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor also focus on anti-trafficking interventions. For instance, during the reporting period the Government conducted awareness-raising campaigns on human trafficking and participated in the Regional Program for Eastern Africa (2009-2012) to counter the trafficking of children.¹⁷⁶⁶ Eritrea also sponsored numerous youth and worker unions' anti-trafficking in persons education outreach programs.¹⁷⁶⁷ Other efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor include the Government's program to identify children engaged in commercial sexual exploitation and reintegrate them with their families.¹⁷⁶⁸

Despite the initiatives described here, Eritrea's social programs are limited in scope and do not protect self-employed children or target areas where the majority of children work, such as agriculture, domestic service, and street vending.¹⁷⁶⁹

Based on the reporting above, the following actions would advance the reduction of the worst forms of child labor in Eritrea:

IN THE AREA OF LAWS AND REGULATIONS:

- Provide penalties for employers of children in hazardous work and children under the legal minimum age.
- Establish a minimum age for apprenticeships and prohibit children in supervised vocational training programs from engaging in hazardous work.
- Enact legislation to prohibit all forms of trafficking.

IN THE AREA OF COORDINATION AND ENFORCEMENT:

- Establish a formal coordinating mechanism to monitor the worst forms of child labor.
- Publish data on inspections, criminal investigations, prosecutions, and other steps taken to enforce laws.

IN THE AREA OF POLICIES:

- Implement child labor objectives in national policies and development plans by including budgets, detailed action plans, and targets related to the worst forms of child labor.
- Cease the forced recruitment of children during the school break to plant trees, pick cotton, and work as domestic servants.
- Develop procedures to ensure that children under the age of 18 are not recruited into the national military program.
- Conduct a national labor force survey to improve the availability of data on all forms of child labor, including the worst forms.

IN THE AREA OF PROGRAMS:

- Develop appropriate social protection programs to protect self-employed children and children working in agriculture, domestic service, and street vending.

¹⁷³⁶ Data provided in the chart at the beginning of this country report are not available from the data sources that are used by USDOL. Reliable data on the worst forms of child labor are especially difficult to collect given the often hidden or illegal nature of the worst forms. For more information on sources used for these statistics, the definition of working children, and other indicators used in this report, please see the “Children’s Work and Education Statistics: Sources and Definitions” section.

¹⁷³⁷ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, October 9, 2008, para 9. See also Muluberhan Hagos, *Harmonisation of laws relating to children: Eritrea*, The African Child Policy Forum, 2007, 98; available from <http://www.africanchild.info/documents/Eritrea%20Report%20final%20Sarah.doc>. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, March 9, 2010, para 1. See also U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea,” in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2009*, Washington, DC, March 11, 2010; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/index.htm>.

¹⁷³⁸ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by State Parties under Article 44 of the Convention, Second and third periodic reports of States parties due in 2006: Eritrea*, CRC/C/ERI/3, United Nations, Geneva, October 23, 2007, para 341; available from <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/CRC.C.ERI.3.pdf>. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, March 9, 2010, para 3, 2A.

¹⁷³⁹ U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2009: Eritrea,” section 7d. See also Hagos, *Harmonisation of laws relating to children: Eritrea*, 98. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, March 9, 2010, section 2a.1.

¹⁷⁴⁰ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, March 9, 2010, para 1.

¹⁷⁴¹ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, February 18, 2009, section 23. See also Mussie Hadgu, “Eritrea, a Nation in Overall Crisis: Coping Strategies in Hard Times”, *asmarino.com*, [online], April 16, 2009 [cited August 12, 2010]; available from <http://www.asmarino.com/eyewitness-account/133-iii-eritrea-a-nation-in-overall-crisis-coping-strategies-in-hard-times->. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, March 9, 2010, para 2a.1.

¹⁷⁴² Human Rights Watch, *Service for Life: State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, New York, 2009, 56; available from http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/eritrea0409web_0.pdf. See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *48th Session: Summary Record of the 1335th meeting: Consideration of Reports of States Parties (Continued), Consolidated second and third periodic reports of Eritrea*, CRC/C/SR.1335, United Nations, Geneva, June

13, 2008, 5; available from <http://tb.ohchr.org/default.aspx?country=er>.

¹⁷⁴³ Kaleyesus Bekele, “Politics - Woes of Eritrean Refugees,” *UNHCR Refugees Daily* (October 8, 2007); available from <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refdaily?pass=463ef21123&id=470b1e938>. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, February 18, 2009, para 5, 19, 20. See also Jonah Fisher, “Eritrea rapped for ‘military schooling’”, BBC News, [online], January 11, 2004 [cited October 18, 2010]; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3386965.stm>.

¹⁷⁴⁴ Kaleyesus Bekele, “Politics - Woes of Eritrean Refugees.” See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, February 18, 2009, para 5, 19, 20.

¹⁷⁴⁵ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, February 18, 2009, para 5. See also Amnesty International, *Eritrea: ‘You Have No Right to Ask’ - Government Resists Scrutiny on Human Rights*, AFR 64/003/2004, Amnesty International, London, May 2004, 25. See also UN General Assembly, *Compilation Prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in Accordance with Paragraph 15(B) of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 5/1: Eritrea*, A/HRC/WG.6/6/ERI/2, September 18, 2009, 5; available from http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session6/ER/A_HRC_WG6_6_ERI_2_E.pdf.

¹⁷⁴⁶ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, February 18, 2009, para 5. See also UNICEF, *Education statistics: Eritrea*, accessed February 22, 2010; available from http://www.childinfo.org/files/ESAR_Eritrea.pdf. See also UNESCO, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2009: Overcoming Inequality: Why governance matters*, Oxford University Press, Paris, 2008; available from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001776/177683e.pdf>.

¹⁷⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Service for Life*, 51-52. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara official, E-mail communication to USDOL official, October 27, 2010.

¹⁷⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea,” in *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2010*, Washington, DC, June 14, 2010; available from <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,ERI,,4c1883f62d,0.html>. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, March 26, 2010, para 2a, 2b.

¹⁷⁴⁹ ILO Committee of Experts, *Individual Observation concerning Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) United Arab Emirates*, [online] 2008 [cited February 22, 2010]; available from <http://www.oit.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/pdconv.pl?host=status01&textbase=iloeng&document=10378&chapter=6&query=%23subject%3D03%40ref%2B%23YEAR%3D2008&highlight=&querytype=bool&context=0>. See also Awate, “Eritrean Regime Now Trafficking Children”, *awate.com*, [online], August 24, 2007

[cited February 22, 2010]; available from <http://www.awate.com/portal/content/view/4597/3/>.

¹⁷⁵⁰ Government of Eritrea, *Proclamation No.118/2001: The Labour Proclamation of Eritrea*, (2001), article 69.

¹⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵² Ibid., article 33-38, 68-69.

¹⁷⁵³ Government of Eritrea, *The Constitution of Eritrea*, (May 23, 1997), article 16(3); available from http://www.chr.up.ac.za/undp/domestic/docs/c_Eritrea.pdf.

¹⁷⁵⁴ Government of Eritrea, *The Transitional Eritrean Penal Code*, (1991), articles 589, 594-595, 597, 605-606.

¹⁷⁵⁵ U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea," in *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2009*, Washington, DC, June 16, 2009; available from <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/123357.pdf>. See also Government of Eritrea, *The Transitional Eritrean Penal Code*.

¹⁷⁵⁶ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "Eritrea," in *Child Soldiers Global Report 2008*, London, 2008, 138; available from <http://www.child-soldiers.org/regions/country?id=66>.

¹⁷⁵⁷ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, February 18, 2009*, para 7-8.

¹⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., para 7. See also U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea," in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2008*, Washington, DC, February 25, 2009, section 7d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119000.htm>. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, March 9, 2010*, para 2c, d. See also U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report- 2009: Eritrea."

¹⁷⁵⁹ Embassy of Ethiopia, "Eritrea Rejects US Country Report on Human Trafficking", www.eastafricaforum.net, [online], June 18, 2009 [cited December 31, 2009]; available from <http://www.eastafricaforum.net/2009/06/19/eritrea-rejects-us-country-report-on-human-trafficking/>.

¹⁷⁶⁰ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, February 18, 2009*, para 8. See also U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report- 2010: Eritrea."

¹⁷⁶¹ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, February 18, 2009*, para 13. See also United Nations, *Eritrea: UN Development Assistance Framework (2007-2011)*, 2007, 32, 50; available from http://www.undg.org/archive_docs/830-Eritrea_UNDAF__2007-2011_-_Eritrea.pdf.

¹⁷⁶² Kaleyesus Bekele, "Politics - Woes of Eritrean Refugees." See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, February 18, 2009*, para 5, 19, 20.

¹⁷⁶³ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, March 9, 2010*, para 3.

¹⁷⁶⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports under Article 44 - Second and third periodic reports*. See also Child Rights Information Network, *Child Rights References in the Universal Periodic Review: Eritrea*, November 30, 2009; available from <http://www.crin.org/docs/Eritrea.pdf>.

¹⁷⁶⁵ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, March 9, 2010*, section 2d. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara official, E-mail communication to USDOL official, March 19, 2010.

¹⁷⁶⁶ Interpol, *Profile: Eastern African Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (EAPCCO)*, [online] [cited 2010 February 22,]; available from http://www.iss.co.za/index.php?link_id=3893&slink_id=4556&link_type=12&slink_type=12&tmpl_id=3. See also UNODC, *Promoting the Rule of Law and Human Security in Eastern Africa: Regional Program 2009-2012*, December 2009, 3; available from http://www.unodc.org/documents/easternafrika//regional-ministerial-meeting/Eastern_Africa_Regional_Programme_Final_Draft.pdf. See also Embassy of Ethiopia, "Eritrea Rejects US Country Report on Human Trafficking".

¹⁷⁶⁷ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, March 26, 2010*, para 4f.

¹⁷⁶⁸ U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report- 2010: Eritrea."

¹⁷⁶⁹ ILO, *IPEC Action Against Child Labour 2008: Highlights*, Geneva, February 2009, 34; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ipecinfo/product/viewProduct.do?productId=9471>.