

In 2013, Eritrea made no advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. While Eritrea did build a number of new schools for children in remote areas and nomadic communities, the Government is receiving this assessment because it continued to require children to participate in a national program called Maetot, under which some children in grades nine through eleven engage in agricultural, environmental or hygiene-related public works projects for varying amounts of time during their annual summer holidays from school. 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 continue to engage in child labor in agriculture and in the worst forms of child labor in commercial sexual exploitation. Gaps in legislation also exist, including the lack of laws to prohibit trafficking for labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Eritrea are engaged in child labor in agriculture and the worst forms of child labor in commercial sexual exploitation. The Government of Eritrea is also complicit in the worst forms of child labor through national policies and programs.(1) 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 (%)		31.2

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2012, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014.(2)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis, 2014.(3)

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	Production of corn,* wheat,* sorghum,* and other grains, and picking cotton* (1, 4-6)
	Herding livestock (1, 4, 5)
Industry	Working in garages, bicycle repair shops, and workshops (1, 4)
	Making household utensils and furniture* (1, 4)
	Domestic service (1)
Services	Working on the street in vending including, selling cigarettes, newspapers, chewing gum, cleaning cars, and transporting goods on donkey carts or tricycles*† (1, 4)
	Gathering firewood and hauling water (1, 4, 5)
	Working in tea and coffee shops* (1, 4)

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, 4, 7, 8)
	Compulsory labor in producing and maintaining school furniture;* in water-related projects such as building canals and irrigation; in reforestation activities such as planting trees; and in agricultural activities such as hoeing, terracing, and picking cotton* (1, 4, 6, 7, 9)
	Forced labor in mining (10)
	Compulsory participation in National Service or the Popular Army prior to the age of 18 (1, 4)
	Forced labor as a result of human trafficking (7, 8)

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

† Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

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

The Government of Eritrea sponsors a national program called Maetot, under which children in grades nine through eleven are required to engage in team-building through public works projects in agriculture, environmental protection, or hygiene during their summer holidays, in some cases for as long as two months.(1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11) Government declarations indicate that the purpose of Maetot is to instill in adolescents a proper work ethic and expose them to persons of other ethnic backgrounds in the aim of fostering appreciation for diverse cultures and strengthening national unity through cooperation and self-reliance. Adolescents may be asked to dig irrigation ditches or canals or maintain agricultural terracing.(11)







The Government of Eritrea also engages in a compulsory practice, whereby, in order to graduate from high school, students are required by the Government to complete their final, 12th, year of schooling and military training at the Sawa Center for Education and Training in remote Western Eritrea. In the course of the reporting period, the Government has attempted to identify persons under age 18 while attending Sawa so that this cohort is not required to undertake required military training before reaching 18.(1, 4, 6, 7, 9-11) Persons who attempt to flee or otherwise avoid military training and national service have in the past been subject to detention and poor treatment, including torture when caught. During the reporting period, the Government attempted to address the phenomenon of out-migration, including flight from Sawa, and although circumstances varied considerably, penalties were less severe for those caught fleeing Sawa as long as they agreed to resume their studies and complete national service.(6, 7, 11, 12).

In Eritrea, children who are not in school often enter the workforce; because of the limited number of schools, children may work at a young age.(4, 5, 8) Additionally, children from nomadic communities have difficulty accessing education, as their seasonal movements are incompatible with the formal school calendar.(13, 14) The Government made no known effort to collect or publish data on the worst forms of child labor.(1)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON 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 relevant 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	Labor Proclamation 118 of 2001 (15)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Labor Proclamation 118 of 2001 (15)
List of Hazardous Occupations Prohibited for Children	Yes		Labor Proclamation 118 of 2001 (15)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Constitution (16)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Penal Code (17)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Penal Code (17)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Proclamation 11/1991 (18, 19)
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	Yes	18	Proclamation 11/1991 (18, 19)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14	National Policy on Education (20, 21)
Free Public Education	Yes		National Policy on Education(20)

The Labor Proclamation 118 of 2001 does not require employers to keep a register containing the name, age, or date of birth of their employees, nor does it include penalties for employers of children in hazardous work or employers of children under the minimum age. Further, the Government does not provide protection for children working without a contract, leaving many children working for family businesses and as child domestics unprotected by the law.(8, 15, 20) A child may become an apprentice at the age of 14. Article 35 and Article 69 of the Labor Proclamation respectively indicate that no apprentice may alone be assigned to hazardous work, but that the list of activities prohibited to young employees shall not apply to any type of training carried out and supervised by a competent authority.(11, 15, 20) No law prohibits trafficking for labor exploitation.(7) Research did not uncover information on whether there are laws regulating the use of children in illicit activities such as drug trafficking. The Government has not ratified ILO Convention 182 or the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.

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, including criminal violations of the worst forms of child labor, such as trafficking.(1)
Eritrean Police	Address the worst forms of child labor, child trafficking, the use of children in illicit activities, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children by enforcing the law and investigating referred cases.(1, 11)
Popular Army	Perform night patrols and refer cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children or other exploitative practices to the Eritrean Police.(1, 11)
Eritrean Defense Forces	Refer cases of the worst forms of child labor to the Eritrean Police or the Ministry of Labor.(1, 11)

Criminal law enforcement agencies in Eritrea took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms. However, research found no evidence that labor law enforcement agencies took such actions.

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2013, participants in the Popular Army referred suspected cases of child prostitution to the Police, but the latter tended to try to resolve them through family mediation rather than legal action.(11)

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 6).

Table 6. Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
The National Plan of Action on Child Labor and National Program of Action on Children	Prevent child labor and support victims by reintegrating them with families, communities, and schools.(1) Incorporated into a Comprehensive Child Policy and the United Nations Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework.(11)
United Nations Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework †	Align with the Government's priorities, including protecting children from exploitative situations, and designed in consultation with the Government. Implementation began in 2013.(1, 22)

† Policy was launched during the reporting period.

Research did not uncover the extent to which the National Plan of Action on Child Labor and National Program of Action on Children have been implemented or what their impact has been on the elimination of the worst forms of child labor. The Government's compulsory military training requirements for 12th graders may diminish the impact of Eritrea's policies to combat the worst forms of child labor for all those wishing to obtain high school diplomas. In addition, the Government's use of compulsory labor through the Maetot program also may diminish these efforts.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

In 2013, the Government of Eritrea participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms (Table 7).

Table 7. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
UNICEF Education Program *	UNICEF program with the support of the Ministry of Education, built a number of permanent new elementary schools for the 2012-2013 academic year to target children living in remote areas and for nomadic populations.(23)

*The impact of this program on child labor does not appear to have been studied.

Eritrea's social programs are limited in scope and do not adequately protect or provide alternatives for self-employed children or target areas in which the majority of children work, such as agriculture, domestic service.

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 8).

Table 8. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Laws	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 – 2013
	Ensure that children working without a contract are protected from the worst forms of child labor.	2010 – 2013
	Prohibit children in supervised vocational training programs from engaging in hazardous work in line with international conventions.	2009 – 2013
	Enact legislation to prohibit all forms of trafficking and the use of children in illicit activities.	2009 – 2013
	Ratify ILO C. 182 and the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.	2013

Table 8. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms (cont)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Collect and publish data on inspections, criminal investigations, prosecutions, and other steps taken to enforce laws.	2009 – 2013
Coordination	Establish a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2013
Government 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.	2009 – 2013
	Ensure that children under the age of 18 are not recruited into the national military program.	2009 – 2013
	Cease requiring children to perform compulsory labor under the Maetot program during the school break.	2009 – 2013
Social Programs	Develop appropriate social protection programs to protect self-employed children and children working in agriculture and domestic service from the worst forms of child labor and study the impact of the UNICEF Education Program on child labor.	2009 – 2013
	Continue improving access to education by building more schools and developing alternative educational programs for nomadic communities.	2010 – 2013
	Conduct a national labor force survey to improve the availability of data on the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2013

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