

In 2012, Eritrea made no advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. While support for programs to reduce the worst forms of child labor exists, the Government continued to sponsor a national program called Mahtot, under which children in grades nine through eleven are required to work for two months during the school break in various service and agricultural activities. In addition, even though the law prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 into the armed forces, there are children under age 18 enrolled in the Government's compulsory military training program at the Sawa Educational Institution. Gaps in legislation also exist, including the lack of laws to prohibit trafficking for labor. Children in Eritrea are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in dangerous activities in agriculture and domestic service.



Statistics on Working Children and Education

| Children | Age | Percent |
|---------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Working | 5-14 yrs. | Unavailable |
| Attending School | 5-14 yrs. | Unavailable |
| Combining Work and School | 7-14 yrs. | Unavailable |
| Primary Completion Rate | | 38.0 |

Sources:

Primary completion rate: Data from 2011, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013.(1)

All other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis, 2013.(2)

Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Children in Eritrea are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, some in dangerous activities in agriculture and domestic service.(3-6) There is limited evidence that children in rural areas of Eritrea work on farms producing corn, wheat, sorghum and other grains; they also work in fields gathering firewood, hauling water and herding livestock.(3, 6, 7) However, children working in agriculture may use dangerous tools, carry heavy loads, and apply harmful pesticides.(8, 9) Children employed as domestic servants may work long hours, performing strenuous tasks, without sufficient food or shelter. These children may be isolated in private homes and are susceptible to physical and sexual abuse.(10, 11)

Children also work in garages and workshops making household utensils and furniture, which may require them to

use dangerous machinery. In Asmara, some children engage in commercial sexual exploitation.(3, 6, 7, 12, 13)

The Government of Eritrea sponsors a national program called Mahtot, under which children in grades nine through eleven are required to work for two months during the school break in various service and agricultural activities.(3, 14, 15) Examples of these activities include producing and maintaining school furniture; water-related projects such as building canals and irrigation; reforestation activities such as planting trees; and agricultural activities such as terracing and picking cotton.(3, 14-16)

The Government of Eritrea engages in a compulsory practice, whereby, in order to graduate, 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. Some students may be under age 18 while attending Sawa.(3, 6, 7, 17, 18) Students who do not attend are not eligible to take their final examinations or to graduate.(3, 5, 7) After 6 months of compulsory military training, students at Sawa are either assigned college preparatory educational work, deployed to technical colleges for further training, or assigned national service tasks in the military or public works projects including being drafted into the military, deployed to work in gold mines and on agriculture and construction projects.(3, 6, 7, 14, 19-23) Persons who attempt to flee or otherwise avoid military training and national service are generally subject to detention and poor treatment if caught, and may be subject to torture.(14, 23, 24)

Eritrea

Children fleeing Eritrea for economic, political, or religious reasons (including conscientious objectors), or to avoid military training or national service, may be trafficked for forced labor, including commercial sexual exploitation abroad.(3, 5, 23)

The UN Human Rights Council has expressed grave concern at the use of forced labor, including the use of conscripts and minors in the mining industry.(18)

In Eritrea, children who are not in school often enter the workforce, as a result, children may work at a young age because of the limited number of schools.(3, 6, 7) Children from nomadic communities have difficulty accessing education, as their seasonal movements are incompatible with the formal school calendar.(25, 26)

Children are reported to work on the streets, but specific information on hazards is unknown.(3, 23, 27)

Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

During the reporting period no new laws or regulations were passed related to child labor.(3) The Labor Proclamation sets the minimum age for employment at age 14 and the minimum age for hazardous work at age 18. Under this law, hazardous work includes transporting goods and passengers; heavy lifting; working with toxic chemicals and dangerous machines; digging tunnels; and working underground in mines, quarries, and sewers.(3, 28) However, the Labor Proclamation does not require employers to keep a register containing the name, age, or date of birth of their employees; it does not 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 self-employed children or children working without a contract, leaving many children working for family businesses and as child domestics unprotected by the laws.(3, 28, 29) Eritrean labor proclamations and law require that employers take appropriate measures to ensure that workplaces and processes of work do not become causes of hazards to the health or safety of employees, including persons aged 14 to 18. A child may become an apprentice at 14.(28) However, children in apprenticeships are legally permitted to engage in training in hazardous work if supervised by a competent authority. This includes hazardous and health-threatening tasks such as working in mines, quarries, and sewers.(28, 29)

Slavery, servitude, and forced labor are prohibited by the Constitution.(30) The Penal Code prohibits and provides

penalties for trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation, child rape, and child prostitution.(3, 31) No law prohibits trafficking for labor exploitation.(5) Research did not uncover information on whether there are laws regulating the use of children in illicit activities such as drug trafficking.

International Conventions and Selected Laws on Child Labor and Education

| | | |
|---|---|-----|
|  | 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 | 14 |
| | Free Public Education | Yes |

Children under age 18 are prohibited from recruitment into the armed forces by Proclamation 11/1991.(32, 33) However, in practice, some children under age 18 attend military training as a result of the Government's required service at the Sawa Educational Institution for those who wish to graduate from secondary school.(3, 6, 17)

The National Policy on Education states that children have the right to 8 years of free basic education beginning at age 6. The basic education cycle includes 5 years of primary education (grades one to five) and 3 years of junior secondary education (grades six to eight).(29) Education is compulsory until age 14.(29, 34)

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.(3)

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. Detailed information was not made available for the reporting period related to the Ministry's funding level or labor inspectors.(3, 7) Information was also unavailable on child labor investigations, prosecutions, and convictions.

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 mechanisms to combat child labor in Eritrea. These policies prevent child labor and support victims by reintegrating them with families, communities, and schools.(3) Addressing exploitive child labor was also a goal of the UN Development Assistance Framework and protecting children from exploitative situations is also incorporated in the UN Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework that was released in November 2012 and will be implemented from 2013 to 2016. However, research did not uncover the extent to which these development policies have been implemented or what their impact is on the elimination of the worst forms of child labor.(3, 7, 35-37)

The Government made no known effort to collect or publish data on the worst forms of child labor.(3) The Government's compulsory military training requirements for school children 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.

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

The Government was a participant in the Regional Program for Eastern Africa (2009-2012) to counter the trafficking of children; it also supported the Eastern African Police Chiefs Co-operation Organization, a regional effort to improve its law enforcement capacity to combat human trafficking.(38, 39) It is unclear whether the Government was actively involved in either of these efforts during the reporting period.(16) However, through the support of the Ministry of Education, a number of permanent new elementary schools were built for the 2012-2013 academic year to target children living in remote areas.(23, 40) UNICEF does not believe that there is an adequate number of school buildings for school-aged children, and estimates the teacher shortage at 25-30 percent. The Government was actively involved with UNICEF in building new schools for nomads, with as many as 100 new mobile facilities constructed in 2012 in regions in which children lacked access to permanent schools, or in which children failed to start school on time and needed remedial education.(23, 41)

Information remained limited on Government-implemented efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor during the reporting period. The Government of Eritrea sponsored numerous youth and worker unions' education outreach programs about anti-trafficking in persons and has provided shelter to orphans and vulnerable children.(5, 23, 35, 42) The Government continued to restrict the work of both national and international NGOs.(7, 16, 23)

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.

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

| Area | Suggested Actions | Year(s) Action Recommended |
|----------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Laws and Regulations | 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, 2011, 2012 |
| | Ensure that self-employed children and children working without a contract are protected from the worst forms of child labor. | 2010, 2011, 2012 |
| | Prohibit children in supervised vocational training programs from engaging in hazardous work. | 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 |

Eritrea

| Area | Suggested Actions | Year(s) Action Recommended |
|------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Laws and Regulations | Enact legislation to prohibit all forms of trafficking. | 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 |
| Coordination and Enforcement | Establish a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor. | 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 |
| | Publish data on inspections, criminal investigations, prosecutions, and other steps taken to enforce laws. | 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 |
| 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, 2010, 2011, 2012 |
| | Cease requiring children to perform manual labor under the Mahtot program during the school break. | 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 |
| | Ensure that children under the age of 18 are not coercively recruited into the national military program. | 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 |
| | Conduct a national labor force survey to improve the availability of data on the worst forms of child labor. | 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 |
| 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. | 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 |
| | Improve access to education by building more schools and developing alternative educational programs for nomadic communities. | 2010, 2011, 2012 |

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