

Eritrea

Government Policies and Programs to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government of Eritrea's Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare (MLHW) is working in cooperation with UNICEF to implement community sensitization activities on children's rights.¹³³⁹ Another MLHW program, designed to prevent and rehabilitate commercial sex workers, includes a component that assists in advocacy for the eradication of commercial sexual exploitation of children, and helps to reintegrate and rehabilitate victims and provide them with self-help opportunities.¹³⁴⁰

The government has also initiated programs to construct new schools in remote villages, increase the number of teachers, and increase the enrollment and retention of girls.¹³⁴¹ UNICEF is promoting access to education in war-affected areas by rehabilitating schools, providing learning materials to displaced children, establishing makeshift classrooms, facilitating school lunch programs, and training teachers.¹³⁴² The government, in conjunction with the World Bank, is implementing a five-year, USD 49 million "Integrated Early Childhood Development Project" designed to improve childhood care and education, address child health issues, and provide support for children in need of special care and protection.¹³⁴³

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2000, the ILO estimated that 38.4 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Eritrea were working.¹³⁴⁴ Children work as street vendors, traders, in domestic services, in small-scale manufacturing, and on family farms.¹³⁴⁵ Some children are involved in small-scale gold mining.¹³⁴⁶

¹³³⁹ Coalition to End the Use of Child Soldiers, "Eritrea," in *Global Report 2001*, "Prevention" [cited December 20, 2002]; available from <http://www.globalmarch.org/virtuallibrary/childsoldiers-global-report/child-soldiers/eritrea.doc>.

¹³⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹³⁴¹ Minister of Labour and Human Welfare of the State of Eritrea, H.E. Mrs. Askalu Mekerious, Statement at the United Nations Special Session on Children, May 9, 2002, [cited December 12, 2002]; available from <http://www.un.org/ga/children/eritreaE.htm>.

¹³⁴² UNICEF, *Donor Update: Eritrea*, June 20, 2002.

¹³⁴³ World Bank, *Eritrea: Integrated Early Childhood Development Project*, January 10, 2000, [cited December 12, 2002]; available from <http://www.worldbank.org/children/costs/eritrea.htm>.

¹³⁴⁴ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2002.

¹³⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2001: Eritrea*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2002, 248-49, Section 6d [cited December 12, 2002]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8370.htm>.

¹³⁴⁶ The Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare, United Nations Children's Fund, and Save the Children (UK), *The Situation of Separated Children in IDP Camps in Eritrea*, July - September 2000, 22 [cited September 24, 2002]; available from [http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewSingleEnv/717680F5A685BC89C12569F500391EAC/\\$file/SCF-Situation+of+Separated+Chil.pdf](http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewSingleEnv/717680F5A685BC89C12569F500391EAC/$file/SCF-Situation+of+Separated+Chil.pdf).

Children as young as 12 years of age are reportedly involved in prostitution on the streets of Massawa and Asmara, as well as in hotels and bars.¹³⁴⁷ A 1999 MLHW survey on commercial sex workers revealed that 5 percent of prostitutes surveyed in Eritrea were aged 14 to 17 years.¹³⁴⁸ Eritrean children are reportedly trafficked to Saudi Arabia to work as domestic servants and menial laborers.¹³⁴⁹ In addition, children reportedly fought as soldiers with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. Insufficient birth registrations make it difficult to verify the ages of recruited soldiers.¹³⁵⁰

Education is free and compulsory through grade seven.¹³⁵¹ In 1998, the gross primary enrollment rate was 53.2 percent; 58.3 percent of boys and 48.1 percent of girls. The net primary enrollment rate was 33.9 percent.¹³⁵² The Ministry of Education estimates that only 37 to 38 percent of children attend school.¹³⁵³

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Transitional Labor Law No. 8/91 sets the minimum age for employment at 18 years, but allows for the employment of apprentices starting at the age of 14 years.¹³⁵⁴ The Labor Proclamation of Eritrea (Proclamation No. 118) provides that no person under the age of 14 may be employed, that young employees may not work between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., and that young employees may not work more than seven hours per day.¹³⁵⁵ Apprentices under 18 years of age are prohibited from

¹³⁴⁷ Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Eritrea: Sex Case With Military Prosecutor's Office", IRINnews.org, [online], August 29, 2001 [cited November 28, 2001]; available from <http://www.irinnews.org/Report>.

¹³⁴⁸ ECPAT International, *Eritrea*, in ECPAT International, [database online] [cited September 3, 2002], "Child Prostitution"; available from http://www.ecpat.net/eng/Ecpat_inter/projects/monitoring/online_database.

¹³⁴⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2002: Saudi Arabia*, Washington, D.C., June 5, 2002, [cited December 12, 2002]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2002/10682.htm>.

¹³⁵⁰ Children as young as age 14 were reportedly used as Eritrean troop reinforcements to counter a May 2000 attack by Ethiopia. At the 1999 African Conference to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the Ethiopian Government also circulated a list of Eritrean prisoners of war between ages 15 and 18. Prior to the border conflict in recent years, hundreds of children were used as soldiers ("Red Flags") during the 30-year war for independence. Coalition to End the Use of Child Soldiers, "Eritrea." See also Integrated Regional Information Network, "Ethiopia-Eritrea: End to Use of Child Soldiers Urged", IRINnews.org, July 11, 2000, [cited December 27, 2002]; available from http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=2837&SelectRegion=Horn_of_Africa&SelectCountry=ETHIOPIA-ERITREA.

¹³⁵¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2001: Eritrea*, 247-48, Section 5. See also Youth at the United Nations, *Country Profiles on the Situation of Youth: Eritrea*, [cited November 28, 2001]; available from <http://www.esa.un.org/socdev/unyin/countrya.asp?countrycode=er>. See also UNESCO, *Education for All 2000 Assessment: Country Reports-Eritrea*, prepared by Ministry of Education, pursuant to UN General Assembly Resolution 52/84, September 1999, [cited December 12, 2002]; available from <http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/eritrea/contents.html>.

¹³⁵² The net primary enrollment rate was 31.4 percent for girls and 36.4 percent for boys. See World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*.

¹³⁵³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2001: Eritrea*, 247-48, Section 5.

¹³⁵⁴ Government of Eritrea, *Transitional Labour Law No. 8/91*, Articles 2, 27, 30, 32, as cited in Veronica Rentmeesters, Information Officer, Embassy of Eritrea, letter to USDOL official, August 23, 1996.

¹³⁵⁵ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *unclassified telegram no. 1447*, October 2, 2002.

performing dangerous and abusive labor.¹³⁵⁶ Proclamation No. 118 bars children, young workers and apprentices from working in transport industries, including warehouses or docks where heavy lifting, pushing or pulling is required; in jobs involving toxic chemicals, dangerous machines or power generation and transmission; or in underground work, including mines, sewers and tunnels.¹³⁵⁷

The 1996 Constitution prohibits forced labor, but the National Service Proclamation obligates that all citizens complete compulsory service in the national armed forces.¹³⁵⁸ The National Service Proclamation sets the minimum age for military service at 18 years and requires 18 months of duty.¹³⁵⁹ The Penal Code prohibits the procurement, seduction, or trafficking of children under the age of 18, and also bans sexual relations with children under 18 years old.¹³⁶⁰ Labor inspectors in the MLHW are charged with enforcing the child labor laws, but inspections are infrequent due to the small number of inspectors.¹³⁶¹

The Government of Eritrea ratified ILO Convention 138 on February 22, 2000, but has not ratified ILO Convention 182.¹³⁶²

¹³⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁵⁸ Government of Eritrea, *Constitution of Eritrea, 1996*, [cited September 24, 2002]; available from <http://www.hafash.org/constitution.htm>.

¹³⁵⁹ Government of Eritrea, *National Service Proclamation No. 82/95*, (October 23, 1995), Articles 8, 9 as cited in Global Report 2001: Eritrea.

¹³⁶⁰ Committing indecent acts with a child under age 15 is a criminal offense punishable by five years of imprisonment. Sexual acts with children between ages 15 and 18 are also prohibited, although the penalty is less severe. ECPAT International, *Eritrea*, "Protection".

¹³⁶¹ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *unclassified telegram no. 1447*. Laws on commercial sexual exploitation are also reported to be poorly enforced and inadequate. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2001: Eritrea*, 248-49, Section 6d. See also ECPAT International, *Eritrea*, "Protection".

¹³⁶² ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited September 3, 2002]; available from <http://iloex.ilo.ch:1567/english/newratframeE.htm>.