

Eritrea

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

The ILO estimated that 37.9 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Eritrea were working in 2002.¹⁵⁴⁴ Children in urban areas work on the streets as vendors selling food, newspapers, cigarettes and chewing gum.¹⁵⁴⁵ Children living in rural areas work in the agricultural sector, predominantly on family farms, where they gather water and firewood, and herd livestock.¹⁵⁴⁶ Children are also employed in domestic service and small-scale manufacturing.¹⁵⁴⁷

Education is free and compulsory through grade seven.¹⁵⁴⁸ However, families must bear the cost of school supplies, uniforms and transportation, which impedes many children's access to schooling.¹⁵⁴⁹ In 2001, the gross primary enrollment rate was 60.5 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 42.5 percent.¹⁵⁵⁰ Gross and net enrollment ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and therefore do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. Recent primary school attendance statistics are not available for Eritrea. There is a significant disparity in educational access between urban and rural-dwelling children. Whereas 79 percent of urban children attended school, only 24 percent of rural children did so.¹⁵⁵¹ It is common for girls attending rural schools to leave before the school day ends in order to complete domestic chores.¹⁵⁵²

¹⁵⁴⁴ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2004.

¹⁵⁴⁵ Street children are defined by the government as children that work in the streets during the day and return home with their earnings to support their families. See Eritrean Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare, *Child Protection*, Eritrean Early Childhood Development, [online] n.d. [cited June 8, 2004]; available from <http://www.siup.sn/ecderitrea/child%20protection.htm>.

¹⁵⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2003: Eritrea*, Washington, D.C., February 25, 2004, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27726.htm>.

¹⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.* ECPAT International reported that commercial sexual exploitation of children in Eritrea is exacerbated by the presence of UN peacekeeping troops. Children as young as 12 years of age are reportedly to be involved in prostitution. Most work on the streets, in bars, or in hotels in Asmara and Massawa. See ECPAT International, *Eritrea*, ECPAT International, [database online] [cited August 2, 2004 2003]; available from http://www.ecpat.net/eng/Ecpat_inter/projects/monitoring/online_database/countries.asp?arrCountryID=55&CountryProfile=facts&CSEC=Overview,Prostitution,Pronography,trafficking&Implement=Coordination_cooperation,Coordination_cooperation,Protection,Recovery,ChildParticipation&Nationalplans=National_plans_of_action&DisplayBy=optDisplayCountry#cs1.

¹⁵⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Eritrea*, Section 5.

¹⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵⁰ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004*.

¹⁵⁵¹ This information is drawn from surveys conducted between 1990 and 1999. See UNICEF, *City to Countryside: A long way to go in schooling*, The Progress of Nations 2000- Lost Children, [online] n.d. 2000 [cited June 7, 2004]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/pon00/ctc.htm>.

¹⁵⁵² U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Eritrea*, Section 5.

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

Article 68 of Labor Proclamation No. 118 sets the minimum age of employment at 14 years.¹⁵⁵³ Young persons between the ages of 14 and 18 by regulation may work between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., but not more than 7 hours per day. Young persons are not permitted to work in jobs that involve heavy lifting; contact with toxic chemicals; underground work; dangerous machines; or exposure to electrical hazards.¹⁵⁵⁴

Forced labor is prohibited by the Constitution of 1996 under article 16.¹⁵⁵⁵ Penal Code 605 prohibits the procurement, seduction, and trafficking of children for prostitution.¹⁵⁵⁶ Penal Code 594 prohibits sexual relations with children under 15.¹⁵⁵⁷ Penal Code 595 bans sexual relations with children ages 15 to 18. Violators are subject to up to 3 years imprisonment.¹⁵⁵⁸ Inspectors from the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare (MLHW) are responsible for enforcing child labor laws. Due to the small number of inspectors, however, inspections are rare.¹⁵⁵⁹

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

The Government of Eritrea is implementing a National Program of Action on Children, coordinated by its National Committee on the Rights of the Child, which will be in effect through 2006.¹⁵⁶⁰ The MLHW is implementing child rehabilitation and reintegration programs for victims of child prostitution. The programs include vocational training, healthcare, and education services.¹⁵⁶¹ Programs for street

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments		
Ratified Convention 138	2/22/2000	✓
Ratified Convention 182		
ILO-IPEC Member		
National Plan for Children		✓
National Child Labor Action Plan		✓
Sector Action Plan		

¹⁵⁵³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Addendum: Eritrea*, CRC/C/41/Add.12, United Nations, Geneva, December 23, 2002; available from [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/8a52da90a06e49e7c1256ce000307fc9/\\$FILE/G0246422.pdf](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/8a52da90a06e49e7c1256ce000307fc9/$FILE/G0246422.pdf).

¹⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Government of Eritrea, Constitution of Eritrea, 1996; available from http://www.nitesoft.com/eccm/Constitution_TOC.htm

¹⁵⁵⁶ Morals and the Family, Articles 589-607; available from <http://209.190.246.239/protectionproject/statutesPDF/EriteraF.pdf>. The penalty for violation of this law is up to five years in prison or a fine of 10,000 Nakfa or USD 740.74. For currency conversion, see Yahoo converter, [online] [cited August 4, 2004]; available from <http://finance.yahoo.com/currency?a=1600&s=AUDI&t=USD&c=0>. See also Task Force to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation in Tourism, *Penalties for Sex Offences in Eritrea*, World Tourism Organization, [online] 1998 [cited June 7, 2004]; available from http://www.world-tourism.org/protect_children/legislation_country/eritrea.htm.

¹⁵⁵⁷ The penalty for a violation of this law is up to five years in prison. Imprisonment of up to 8 years will be imposed when the victim is under the care of custody of the perpetrator. See Task Force to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation in Tourism, *Penalties for Sex Offences in Eritrea*, World Tourism Organization, [online] 1998 [cited June 7, 2004]; available from http://www.world-tourism.org/protect_children/legislation_country/eritrea.htm.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Task Force to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation in Tourism, *Penalties for Sex Offences*.

¹⁵⁵⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Eritrea*, Section 6d.

¹⁵⁶⁰ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Eritrea*, CRC/C/15/Add.204, United Nations, Geneva, July 2, 2003, Para.8; available from [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CRC.C.15.Add.204.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CRC.C.15.Add.204.En?OpenDocument).

¹⁵⁶¹ ECPAT International, *ECPAT International: Eritrea*.

children aim to reunite them with relatives, enroll them in regular schools, provide financial support to caretaker families, and develop income generating plans and vocational training opportunities for older children.¹⁵⁶²

The Government of Eritrea is implementing an Eritrean Integrated Early Childhood Development Project.¹⁵⁶³ The program is designed to improve access to education, improve health and nutrition, reunite orphans with extended families, keep vulnerable children in school, and enhance interagency cooperation.¹⁵⁶⁴ The government is also building new schools in remote areas, recruiting more teachers, and increasing enrollment and retention of girls.¹⁵⁶⁵ UNICEF has targeted child retention in addition to developing educational materials, training teachers, developing infrastructure, and increasing girls' access to education.¹⁵⁶⁶ The U.S. Department of Agriculture is likewise working with the government as part of a global effort to provide meals for school children.¹⁵⁶⁷

¹⁵⁶² Eritrean Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare, *Child Protection*.

¹⁵⁶³ The program started in 2000 and is slated to run through 2005. World Bank, *Eritrea: Integrated Early Childhood Development Project*, January 10, 2000; available from <http://www.worldbank.org/children/costs/eritrea.htm>.

¹⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶⁵ 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; available from <http://www.un.org/ga/children/eritreaE.htm>.

¹⁵⁶⁶ The focus on retention is a result of the persistent drought conditions throughout most of the country. UN Children's Fund, *UNICEF Humanitarian Action: Eritrea Donor Update*, ReliefWeb, [online] January 27, 2003 [cited June 14, 2004]; available from <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/6686f45896f15dbc852567ae00530132/56240270242aa50685256cbd006cf69e?OpenDocument>.

¹⁵⁶⁷ Washington File, *U.S. Funds Will Provide School Meals in Latin America, Caribbean*, August 17, 2004; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/Archive/2004/Aug/18-23606.html>.