

In 2014, Eritrea made efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, but was also complicit in the use of forced child labor and forced military recruitment of children. While the Government ratified the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, Eritrea is receiving this assessment of no advancement because it continued to require children to participate in a national program called Maetot, under which children in grades 9 to 11 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 Eritrean 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. Gaps in the legal framework exist, including a lack of specific penalties for employers of children in hazardous work and employers of children under the minimum age for work.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Eritrea are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture and street work.(1-4) 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, 2015.(5)
Data were unavailable from Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis, 2015.(6)

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* (1-4)
	Herding livestock* (1, 2)
Industry	Small-scale manufacturing* (1-3)
	Mining* (4, 7)
Services	Domestic work (1-3)
	Working in garages, bicycle repair shops, tea and coffee shops, and metal workshops (1-3)
	Street work, including selling cigarettes, newspapers, and chewing gum, cleaning cars, and transporting goods on donkey carts or tricycles*† (1-3)
	Gathering firewood and hauling water* (1, 2)

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* (1-3, 8)
	Compulsory participation in Active National Service or the Popular Army prior to the age of 18 (1-3, 9-11)
	Forced labor sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1-3, 7)

* 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 Ministry of Education operates a national program called Maetot, under which children in grades 9 to 11 are required to engage in public works projects in agriculture, environmental protection, or hygiene during their summer holidays, in some cases for as long as 2 months.(1, 2, 12-14) Adolescents may be required to dig irrigation ditches or canals, maintain agricultural terracing, or produce and maintain school furniture.(1-3) Government declarations indicate that the purpose of Maetot is to instill a proper work ethic in adolescents and to expose them to persons of other ethnic backgrounds, with the aim of fostering their appreciation for diverse cultures and strengthening national unity through cooperation and self-reliance.(13)

The Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995 establishes compulsory military training and service, known as Active National Service, for all citizens between ages 18 and 40.(15) In order to graduate from high school and meet the compulsory training component of Active National Service, students are required to complete their final year of schooling (grade 12) at the Sawa Military Training Camp in remote western Eritrea; these students have typically reached age 18, but some are younger.(2, 3, 7, 8, 15, 16) For some attending Sawa, National Service may consist of 6 months of military training followed by employment in a Government work unit for 12 months. However, for others, and for those who have no opportunity to attend grade 12, the Government often fails to abide by the Proclamation’s 18-month limit on National Service.(8) Eritreans may be compelled to remain in the military indefinitely or may be assigned to work units not of their choosing, both resulting in very low pay.(8) The uncertain length of service, the lack of hope of ever being demobilized, the inability to earn higher wages in the private sector, and notoriously harsh working conditions in the National Service provoke a significant number of youth to flee Eritrea and may also encourage many to resort to the use of international smuggling networks.(8, 10, 17) Adolescent children who attempt to leave Eritrea are sometimes detained or forced to undergo military training despite being younger than the minimum age of 18 for compulsory military recruitment.(3) During the reporting period, the Government attempted to reduce out-migration, including flight from Sawa, and although the circumstances varied considerably, penalties were less severe for those caught fleeing Sawa if they agreed to resume their studies and complete National Service.(13)

In Eritrea, children who are not in school often enter the workforce, and because of the limited number of schools, children may work at a young age.(2, 18) Additionally, children from nomadic communities have difficulty accessing education, as their seasonal movements are incompatible with the formal school calendar.(19)

The Government made no known effort to collect or publish data on the worst forms of child labor.(1)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR 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	✓

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor (cont)

Convention	Ratification
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

In September 2014, the Government ratified the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.(20)

The Government has established 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	Article 68 of the Labour Proclamation of Eritrea No. 118/2001 (21)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 69 of the Labour Proclamation of Eritrea No. 118/2001 (21)
Prohibition of Hazardous Occupations or Activities for Children	Yes		Article 69 of the Labour Proclamation of Eritrea No. 118/2001 (21)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 3 of the Labour Proclamation of Eritrea No. 118/2001; Article 565 of the Penal Code Proclamation of 1957 (21, 22)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 565 and 605 of the Penal Code Proclamation of 1957 (22)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 594, 595, and 604 of the Penal Code Proclamation of 1957 (22)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 8 of the Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995 (15)
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	N/A		
Compulsory Education Age	No		
Free Public Education	No		

The Labour Proclamation of Eritrea No. 118/2001 does not require employers to keep a register containing the name, age, or date of birth of their employees, nor does it prescribe specific penalties for employers of children in hazardous work or employers of children under the minimum age for work.(21, 23)

A child may become an apprentice at age 14 and is not prohibited from engaging in hazardous work in supervised vocational training programs.(21, 23, 24)

Eritrean law does not have prohibitions on child pornography. Additionally, research did not find whether there are laws regulating the use of children in illicit activities.

Minimum age for voluntary military service is not applicable to Eritrea because all citizens age 18 to 40 have the compulsory duty of performing Active National Service under the Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995.(15)

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	Investigate labor abuses, including child labor.(8)
Popular Army	Perform night patrols and refer cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children or other exploitative practices to the Eritrean Police.(1, 25)
Eritrean Defense Forces	Refer cases of the worst forms of child labor to the Eritrean Police or the Ministry of Labor.(1, 25)

Eritrea

NO ADVANCEMENT - EFFORTS MADE BUT COMPLICIT

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (cont)

Organization/Agency	Role
Eritrean Police	Enforce laws and investigate referred cases of child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children.(1, 25)
National Security Administration	Work with the Eritrean police to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children.(8)

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

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2014, no information was available regarding the number and training of labor inspectors, the number and type of labor inspections, child labor law violations, and citations or penalties issued.(14)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2014, no information was available regarding the number and training of investigators, the number of investigations, prosecutions, and convictions related to the worst forms of child labor.(14)

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 UN Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework.(25)
UN Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework (2013–2016)	Aligns with the Government's priorities, including protecting children from exploitative situations, and designed in consultation with the Government.(1, 26)
National Policy on Education	Establishes 8 years of compulsory, free education for all citizens.(23, 27)

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 on all those wishing to obtain high school diplomas. In addition, the Government's use of compulsory labor through the Maetot program may also diminish these efforts.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2014, the Government of Eritrea participated in one program that may have an impact on child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
UNICEF Country Program (2013–2016)*	UNICEF program in collaboration with the Government that aims to build on previous progress in the areas of complementary education and nomadic education, and to assist the Government in enhancing the quality of basic education.(18) UNICEF also works with the Ministry of Labor to provide social integration and counseling services to approximately 3,500 street children.(28)

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

Research found no evidence of programs to specifically address the worst forms of child labor in Eritrea, or programs that target areas in which the majority of children work, including agriculture and 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
Legal Framework	Ratify ILO C. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.	2013 – 2014
	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 – 2014
	Prohibit children in supervised vocational training programs from engaging in hazardous work, in line with international conventions.	2009 – 2014
	Enact legislation against child pornography and to prohibit the use of children in illicit activities.	2009 – 2014
Enforcement	Collect and publish data on the number of inspectors and investigators and their training, labor inspections, criminal investigations, and other steps taken to enforce laws.	2009 – 2014
Coordination	Establish a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2014
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 – 2014
	Ensure that children under age 18 are not recruited into Active National Service.	2009 – 2014
	Cease requiring children to perform compulsory labor under the Maetot program during the school break.	2009 – 2014
Social Programs	Strengthen the education system by building more schools and developing alternative educational programs for nomadic communities.	2010 – 2014
	Conduct research on child labor, including its worst forms.	2009 – 2014
	Assess the impact of the UNICEF Education Program on child labor.	2013 – 2014
	Develop appropriate social protection programs for street children and children working in agriculture, domestic service, and the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2014

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