

NO ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT COMPLICIT IN FORCED CHILD LABOR

In 2018, Eritrea is receiving an assessment of no advancement. Although Eritrea made some efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, government officials were complicit in the use of forced child labor in agriculture and military training. The government conducted 985 labor inspections during the year and provided education services to 8,575 out-of-school children in rural and remote areas. However, Eritrea is receiving this assessment because it continued to force students in grade 12, some of whom are under the age of 18, to participate in military training elements of the government's compulsory national service program, as well as forced agricultural labor. Evidence collected suggests that the national program called Maetot, in which children engage in compulsory labor in agricultural, environmental, and hygiene-related public works projects, did not take place during the reporting period due to financial constraints preventing implementation. However, Maetot remains an integral component of the government's national service framework. The government does not make law enforcement data publicly available and national laws and regulations do not identify hazardous occupations or activities prohibited for children. In addition, the government does not have a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address the worst forms of child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Eritrea engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in forced military training associated with national service and forced agricultural labor. 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 to 14	Unavailable
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	Unavailable
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate (%)		45.3

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019. (1)
Data were unavailable from International Labor Organization's analysis, 2019. (2)

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	Farming, activities unknown (3,4)
	Herding livestock (3-6)
Industry	Small-scale manufacturing (7)
	Mining, including gold (8)
Services	Domestic work, fetching water and firewood (4,7)
	Working in auto mechanic shops, bicycle repair shops, tea and coffee shops, metal workshops, grocery stores, the Asmara bowling alley, and open markets (3,5,7,9,10)
	Street work, including vending, cleaning cars, and begging (4,5,11)

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Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (Cont.)

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Compulsory participation in national service or military training associated with national service prior to age 18, and in agricultural and domestic work (12-16, 54) Forced labor, including in begging (12)

‡ 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 mandatory Summer Work Program, known locally as *Maetot*, under which children from grades 9–12 who may be younger than age 18 are required to engage in compulsory labor in public works projects and on government farms, including tree planting, terracing, traffic safety campaigns, and water security activities, during their summer holidays. (9, 12, 14, 54) Some children may be required to work on roads, dams, canals, and irrigation projects. (14, 54) Children who do not participate in *Maetot* are charged fines. Students who do not pay fines are not permitted to enroll in the next academic year. (54) According to the government, the *Maetot* program did not take place in 2018 due to budgetary constraints, despite continuing to be a part of the education system in Eritrea. (9)

The Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995 establishes compulsory military training and service, known as Active National Service, for all citizens ages 18 to 40. (15) To graduate from high school and meet the compulsory training component of National Service, students are required to complete their final year of schooling (grade 12) at the Warsai Yekalo Secondary School located at the Sawa military complex. Each year between 11,000 to 15,000 students enter grade 12 at Sawa, and while many of these students have typically reached age 18, some are reportedly as young as age 16. (12, 15–18, 54) Research suggests that at least half of the year spent at Sawa is devoted to mandatory military training, which includes military discipline and procedures, weapons training, a survival exercise, and a 2- to 4-week war simulation. (17, 19, 54) Some students are forced to conduct both agricultural activities on government-owned farms and construction on military housing, in addition to their military training. Girls are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and may be subject to forced domestic work, sexual violence, and concubinage in military training centers, including Sawa. (14, 54) In addition, conscientious objectors, including young Jehovah’s Witnesses, are not given an alternative to military service and are prevented from receiving a high school diploma, which leaves them vulnerable to becoming involved in child labor. (20)

The uncertain length of service, inability to earn higher wages in the private sector without completion of national service assignments, and notoriously harsh conditions at Sawa, and in some national service assignments provoked a significant number of youth, including unaccompanied minors, to flee Eritrea and may have also encouraged many to resort to the use of international smuggling or human trafficking networks. (3, 12, 16, 17, 21–24, 54) Adolescent children, some as young as age 14, who attempted to leave Eritrea were sometimes detained or forced to undergo military training, despite being younger than the minimum age of 18 for compulsory military recruitment. (3, 12, 17, 25, 54) In addition, the military periodically conducts roundups, known as *giffas*, to perform identity checks. There have been reports that *giffas* have resulted in the imprisonment of children alleged to be attempting to evade compulsory National Service, and the forced underage recruitment of children into the military. (13, 26, 54)

Children, particularly in some rural areas, face difficulty accessing education due to a shortage of schools and the inability to afford uniforms, supplies, and transportation. (4, 9, 19, 27–29) Many teachers in Eritrea are recruited through the National Service system. Teachers forced to teach as part of National Service are frequently absent or flee the country, negatively impacting student education. (54) In addition, there is a lack of sufficiently trained teachers, particularly in rural areas where nomadic groups live. However, the government does assign teachers to travel with nomadic groups to facilitate access to education for nomadic children. (9) In 2018, the government assisted 117 children with physical disabilities in accessing education by providing the children with saddled donkeys that they used to ride to school. (4) Somali refugees living in Eritrea face additional obstacles

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to accessing education due to language barriers between government-trained teachers and a lack of qualified Somali-speaking teachers. Middle and high school education is conducted in English, which creates an additional language barrier for Somali refugee children. (9)

The government did not collect or publish data on child work, child labor, or the worst forms of child labor during the reporting period. (9)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Eritrea has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (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 laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Eritrea's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the minimum age for work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	14	Article 68 of the Labor Proclamation (30)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	No		
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 108(c), 297, and 316 of the Penal Code (31)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 297, 315–318 of the Penal Code (31)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 305–306 and 313–318 of the Penal Code (31)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Articles 390–392 of the Penal Code (31)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	No		
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Articles 7–8 of the Proclamation on National Service (15)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		Articles 109(e) and 111(b) of the Penal Code (31)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14‡	
Free Public Education	No		Article 21 of the Constitution (32)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (33-35)

In May 2015, the government announced that it was considering the establishment of a new Criminal Code that contains prohibitions on the commercial sexual exploitation of children. It is not clear whether the 2015

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Criminal Code is fully in effect or remains to be fully implemented. (19,36,37) Laws regarding the commercial sexual exploitation of children are insufficient because the use of a child for prostitution is not criminally prohibited. (38)

The law's minimum age protections do not apply to children working outside formal employment relationships, such as those who are self-employed. (30,39) Article 69 of the Labor Proclamation authorizes the Minister of Labor to issue a list of activities prohibited to children under age 18; however, the government has not determined by national law or regulation the types of hazardous work prohibited for children. (30,40) Laws related to the use of children in illicit activities are not sufficient because offering and procuring a child for the production and trafficking of drugs are not criminally prohibited. (38) Minimum age for voluntary military service is not applicable to Eritrea because all citizens ages 18 to 40 have the compulsory duty of performing Active National Service under the Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995. (15)

Although it does not appear that there are any laws that provide free basic education, several of the government's policies call for the provision of free and compulsory basic education to all children including, the Education Sector Development Plan, the National Education Policy, and the Comprehensive National Child Policy. (48, 49, 50).

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare that may hinder adequate enforcement, including the lack of financial resource allocation, complaint mechanisms, and referral mechanisms.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare	Enforces labor laws and investigates labor abuses, including child labor. (18,36) According to the government, child labor inspectors operate in every administrative zone. (41)
Citizen Militia	Performs night patrols and refers cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children or other exploitative practices to the Eritrean police. (42)
Eritrean Police	Enforces laws and investigates referred cases of child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children. (42)
National Security Administration	Works with the Eritrean police to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (43)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2018, labor law enforcement agencies in Eritrea took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the labor law enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown	Unknown (9)
Number of Labor Inspectors	Unknown	Unknown (9)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Unknown	Unknown (44)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Unknown	Yes (9)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Unknown	Yes (9)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown	Yes (9)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown	985 (9)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown	985 (9)

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Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (Cont.)

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown	0 (9)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown	N/A (9)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown	N/A (9)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Unknown	Yes (9)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown	Unknown (9)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Unknown	Unknown (9)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown	Unknown (19)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Unknown	Unknown (9)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Unknown	Unknown (9)

Although research was unable to determine whether reciprocal referral mechanisms exist between labor authorities and social services, the government maintains that penalties for labor violations are assessed in coordination with labor inspectors, administrators, and the police. (9) Although the exact number of labor inspectors is unknown, research indicates that the existing number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Eritrea's workforce, which includes approximately 2.7 million workers. (45) According to the ILO's technical advice ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, Eritrea would employ about 68 labor inspectors. (45-47) Inadequate resources, including transportation to remote areas, hinder government efforts to combat child labor. In 2018, the government trained 20 labor inspectors, including 8 newly hired inspectors. (9)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2018, criminal law enforcement agencies in Eritrea took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal enforcement, including human resources.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown	Unknown (9)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Yes (9)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown	Yes (9)
Number of Investigations	Unknown	Unknown (19)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown	0 (9)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	0 (9)
Number of Convictions	Unknown	0 (9)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (19)	0 (19)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Unknown	Unknown (9)

The National Service Proclamation sets the minimum age for compulsory military training at age 18. Despite evidence that children younger than age 18 are forced to participate in military training, research did not identify measures taken by the government in 2018 to enforce minimum age provisions for compulsory military training. (54) There have been reports that senior military officers have allegedly been involved in the trafficking of children. (26) Research was unable to determine whether authorities have investigated these allegations.

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

Research found no evidence that the government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.

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In 2018, the government announced the formation of 5 national and 43 community-level committees focused on children’s rights. Research has found that the mandate of the committees is focused on reducing female genital mutilation and child marriage and does not extend to efforts to address child labor. (9)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 8). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including adoption and implementation.

Table 8. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
Comprehensive National Child Policy	Aims to address causes of child labor through conducting studies and assessments on the nature and conditions of child labor; designing advocacy and public awareness campaigns to sensitize on the worst forms of child labor; and empowering communities and the public sector to monitor and prevent child labor from occurring. (48) The policy also calls for the provision of free and compulsory basic education to all children irrespective of gender, sex, ethnicity, religion and disability. (48) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Comprehensive National Child Policy during the reporting period.
Education Sector Development Plan (2018–2021)†	Establishes 8 years of free and compulsory education for all children. (49) The government began implementing the Education Sector Development Plan during the reporting period. (52)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (50)

The government’s compulsory military training requirement as a part of national service for students in grade 12 may inhibit efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor for all those wishing to obtain high school diplomas. (20)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2018, the government funded and participated in programs that may contribute to eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 9). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the adequacy of efforts to address the problem in all sectors.

Table 9. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Complementary Elementary Education†	Government program created as the result of the Education Sector Development Plan that addresses the educational needs of out-of-school children ages 9 to 14 in remote and rural areas. Condenses 5 years of elementary education into a 3-year program to allow students to either mainstream into formal education at the secondary level or access vocational education. (4,19,49) In the 2017–2018 school year, the program served 8,575 children. (4)
Enhancing Equitable Access to Quality Basic Education (2014–2018)	\$25.3 million UNICEF-funded grant that aims to support the Ministry of Education to increase access to basic education for at least 39,026 out-of-school children. (28) During the reporting period, 18,880 out-of-school-children from nomadic and semi-nomadic communities were provided education through temporary learning spaces. In addition, 790 kindergarten teachers, directors, and child caregivers were provided in-service training on the national Early Learning and Development Standards, and the revised Early Childhood Care and Education curriculum. (29)
UNICEF Country Program (2017–2021)	\$31 million UNICEF-funded program, in collaboration with the government, which expands access to quality basic education for all children, and protects children from violence, exploitation, and abuse. (51,52) During the reporting period, disbursed \$3.9 million to expedite construction of classrooms in the Anseba and Northern Red Sea regions. (29)

† Program is funded by the Government of Eritrea.

Research found no evidence of programs that target children working in agriculture, domestic work, and street work, or that specifically address the worst forms of child labor.

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VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Eritrea (Table 10).

Table 10. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Establish a minimum age for hazardous work and determine the types of hazardous work prohibited for children, in consultation with employers' and workers' organizations.	2015 – 2018
	Ensure that all children are protected by minimum age laws, including those who are self-employed.	2010 – 2018
	Criminally prohibit the use of a child for prostitution.	2014 – 2018
	Criminally prohibit procuring and offering a child for the production and trafficking of drugs.	2013 – 2018
	Criminally prohibit the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2018
	Establish by law free basic public education.	2018
Enforcement	Publish information on labor inspectorate funding and number of inspectors, number of violations in which penalties were imposed and collected, number of routine inspections targeted, and whether a complaint mechanism, and a reciprocal referral mechanism is in place, as well as whether initial criminal training for new employees is provided.	2009 – 2018
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2018
	Establish mechanisms to ensure that children under age 18 are not forced to participate in compulsory military training.	2018
	Ensure that government officials are not complicit or involved in perpetuating the worst forms of child labor, including human trafficking.	2018
Coordination	Establish coordinating mechanisms to directly address child labor.	2009 – 2018
Government Policies	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement the Comprehensive National Child Policy.	2009 – 2018
	Ensure that children under age 18 are not placed in military or hazardous labor assignments as part of national service.	2009 – 2018
	Cease requiring children to perform compulsory labor under the <i>Maetot</i> program during the school break.	2009 – 2018
Social Programs	Ensure that all children have access to education by building more schools and removing financial and religious barriers to attendance, as outlined in the 2018 Education Sector Development Plan.	2010 – 2018
	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.	2009 – 2018
	Institute programs to address child labor, including in agriculture, domestic work, and street work, and the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation.	2009 – 2018

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