

In 2016, Eritrea made no efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor and was also complicit in the use of forced child labor. In addition to not making any efforts, Eritrea is receiving an assessment of no advancement due to its continued requirement that children in grades 9 to 11 participate in a national program called Maetot, where they engage in compulsory labor in agricultural, environmental, and hygiene-related public works projects. Children were also forced to enroll in the Government's compulsory military training program. 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 labor.(1, 2) 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 (%)		39.1

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016.(3)
Data were unavailable from Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis, 2016.(4)

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, including the production of corn, wheat, and sorghum (1, 5) Herding livestock (1)
Industry	Small-scale manufacturing (6, 7) Mining (8)
Services	Domestic work (1, 6) Working in garages, bicycle repair shops, tea and coffee shops, and metal workshops (1, 6, 9) Street work, including selling cigarettes, newspapers, and chewing gum; cleaning cars; begging; and transporting goods on donkey carts or tricycles (1, 10, 11)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor [‡]	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (7, 12) Compulsory participation in Active National Service or the Popular Army prior to the age of 18 for military training, and in agricultural and domestic work (1, 12-16) Forced labor, including in agriculture and begging (8, 12, 13, 16, 17)

[‡] Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

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The Ministry of Education operates a national program, *Maetot*, under which children in grades 9 to 11 are required to engage in compulsory labor in public works projects during their summer holidays, in some cases for as long as 2 months.(1, 12, 16, 18) Adolescents may be required to dig irrigation ditches or canals, maintain agricultural terracing, or produce and maintain school furniture.(1, 16)

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.(19) 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 Sawa Education and Military Training Camp; these students have typically reached age 18, but some are reportedly younger.(1, 12, 13, 15, 19) Limited evidence suggests that military training includes military discipline and procedures, weapons training, and a 2- to 4-week war simulation.(15) Research found that some students are forced to conduct agricultural activities on government-owned farms, in addition to their military training, and girls may be subject to forced domestic work in military training centers.(16)

The uncertain length of service, inability to earn higher wages in the private sector, and notoriously harsh working conditions in the National Service 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.(12, 13, 15, 20-22) Adolescent children 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.(12, 15, 21)




Children face difficulty accessing education due to a shortage of schools; the inability to afford uniforms, supplies, and transportation; and a lack of birth registration, which is required to attend school.(1, 23)

Research did not find information on whether the Government made an effort to collect or publish data on the worst forms of child labor.

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Eritrea has ratified most 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, including its worst forms (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Eritrea's legal framework to adequately protect children from child labor.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	14	Article 68 of the Labour Proclamation (24)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	No		
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 565 and 605 of the Penal Code (25)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 605–607 of the Penal Code (25)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 594–595, 604–605, and 609 of the Penal Code (25)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Article 510 of the Penal Code (25)
Minimum Age for Military Recruitment			
State Compulsory	Yes	18	Articles 7 and 8 of the Proclamation on National Service (19)
State Voluntary	N/A		
Non-State Compulsory	No		Article 282(d) of the Penal Code (25)
Compulsory Education Age	No		
Free Public Education	No		

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. However, the Code has not yet been proclaimed.(26) Laws regarding the commercial sexual exploitation of children are insufficient because the procurement and offering of a child for prostitution and the use, procurement, and offering of a child for the production of pornography and pornographic performances are not criminally prohibited.(25)

The law's minimum age protections do not apply to children working outside formal employment relationships, such as those who are self-employed.(24, 27)

Article 69 of the Labour Proclamation authorizes the Minister 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.(24, 28) 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.(25) 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.(19)

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). However, gaps in labor law and criminal law enforcement remain and most enforcement information is not available.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare	Enforce child labor laws.(26) According to the Government, child labor inspectors operate in every administrative zone.(29)
Popular Army	Perform night patrols and refer cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children or other exploitative practices to the Eritrean Police.(10, 18)
Eritrean Police	Enforce laws and investigate referred cases of child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children.(10, 18)
National Security Administration	Work with the Eritrean police to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children.(30)

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Labor Law Enforcement

Research did not find information on whether labor law enforcement agencies in Eritrea took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2015	2016
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Labor Inspectors	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Dedicated Inspectors	Unknown	Unknown
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Unknown	Unknown
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown	Unknown
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	Unknown
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Labor Inspections	Unknown	Unknown
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown	Unknown
Number Conducted by Desk Reviews	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown	0 (29)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown	0 (29)
Number of Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown	Unknown
Routine Inspections Conducted	Unknown	Unknown
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown	Unknown
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Unknown	Unknown
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown	Unknown
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Unknown	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Unknown	Unknown

Criminal Law Enforcement

Research did not find information on whether criminal law enforcement agencies in Eritrea took actions to combat the worst forms of child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2015	2016
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown	Unknown
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Unknown
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Investigations	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Violations Found	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Convictions	Unknown	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Unknown	Unknown

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 has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 8).

Table 8. Key Policies Related to Child Labor[‡]

Policy	Description
Comprehensive Child Policies	Aims to prevent and eliminate child labor in Eritrea. Aligns with the UN Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework.(18)

[‡] The Government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.(31, 32)

Although it does not appear that there are any laws that provide for free and compulsory education, there is a policy that sufficiently provides for free and compulsory education.(32)

Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Comprehensive Child Policies. The Government's compulsory military training requirement for Active National Service for students in grade 12 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 continued use of compulsory labor through the *Maetot* program may also diminish these efforts.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2016, the Government participated in one program that may contribute to the prevention or elimination of child labor (Table 9).

Table 9. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
UNICEF Country Program (2013–2016)	UNICEF program, in collaboration with the Government, that improved the quality of basic education.(23) UNICEF also worked with the Ministry of Labor to provide social integration and counseling services to approximately 3,500 children vulnerable to street work.(33)

Although the Government participates in a program that targets children vulnerable to street work, the scope of this program is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem. Furthermore, research found no evidence of programs that target children working in agriculture and domestic work and that specifically address the worst forms of child labor.

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 10).

Table 10. 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 – 2016
	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 – 2016
	Ensure that all children are protected by minimum age laws, including those who are self-employed.	2010 – 2016
	Ensure that procuring and offering a child for prostitution and using, procuring, and offering a child for the production of pornography and pornographic performances are criminally prohibited.	2014 – 2016
	Ensure that procuring and offering a child for the production and trafficking of drugs are criminally prohibited.	2013 – 2016
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016

Table 10. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms (cont)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Establish by law an age up to which education is compulsory that is the same as the minimum age for work.	2016
	Establish by law free basic public education.	2016
Enforcement	Collect data on labor and criminal law enforcement and make the data publicly available.	2009 – 2016
Coordination	Establish a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2016
Government Policies	Ensure that the Comprehensive Child Policies are implemented.	2009 – 2016
	Ensure that children under age 18 are not recruited into Active National Service.	2009 – 2016
	Cease requiring children to perform compulsory labor under the <i>Maetot</i> program during the school break.	2009 – 2016
Social Programs	Ensure that all children have access to education by building more schools, removing financial barriers, and increasing birth registration.	2010 – 2016
	Conduct research on child labor, including its worst forms.	2009 – 2016
	Expand existing programs to address the scope of children in street work. Institute programs to address child labor, including in agriculture and domestic work, and the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation.	2009 – 2016

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