

In 2017, Eritrea made efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, but was also complicit in the use of forced child labor. The government worked with the UN to approve a Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework and launch a social program that aims to prevent children from exploitation. However, despite initiatives to address child labor, Eritrea is receiving this assessment because it continued to require children from grades 9-12 who may be younger than 18 years to participate in a national program called Maetot, where they engage in compulsory labor in agricultural, environmental, and hygiene-related public works projects. In addition, children were 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 agricultural labor. (11) 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 (%)		42.5

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018. (1)
Data were unavailable from Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis, 2018. (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)
	Herding livestock (4; 3)
Industry	Small-scale manufacturing (5)
	Mining, including gold (6; 7)
Services	Domestic work (5)
	Working in auto mechanic shops, bicycle repair shops, tea and coffee shops, metal workshops, grocery stores, and open markets (5; 8; 4; 3)
	Street work, including vending, cleaning cars, and begging (9; 10; 4)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (11)
	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 (12; 13; 14; 15; 11)
	Forced labor, including in begging (11)

‡ 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 from grades 9-12 who may be younger than 18 years are required to engage in compulsory labor in public works projects during their summer holidays. (14; 11) Some children may be required to work on roads, dams, canals, and irrigation projects. (14)

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. (16) 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. (12; 13; 16; 11) Limited evidence suggests that military training includes military discipline and procedures, weapons training, and a 2- to 4-week war simulation. (13) Previous reports 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. (14)







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; 17; 18; 19; 11; 20; 3) 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. (13; 11; 21; 3) Children face difficulty accessing education due to a shortage of schools and the inability to afford uniforms, supplies, and transportation. (22; 23; 24)

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 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 (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: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	14	Article 68 of the Labour Proclamation (25)
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 (26)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 605–607 of the Penal Code (26)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 594–595, 604–605, and 609 of the Penal Code (26)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (cont)

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Article 510 of the Penal Code (26)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment			
State Compulsory	Yes	18	Articles 7 and 8 of the Proclamation on National Service (16)
State Voluntary	N/A		
Non-State	No		Article 282(d) of the Penal Code (26)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14‡	
Free Public Education	No		

‡ Age calculated based on available information (27; 28; 29)

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. (30; 31) 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. (26)

The law's minimum age protections do not apply to children working outside formal employment relationships, such as those who are self-employed. (25; 32) 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. (25; 33) 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. (26) 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. (16)

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, research was unable to find information on law enforcement agencies' efforts to enforce Eritrea's child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare	Enforce labor laws. (30) According to the government, child labor inspectors operate in every administrative zone. (34)
Popular Army	Perform night patrols and refer cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children or other exploitative practices to the Eritrean Police. (9; 35)
Eritrean Police	Enforce laws and investigate referred cases of child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children. (9; 35)
National Security Administration	Work with the Eritrean police to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (36)

Labor Law Enforcement

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

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Number of Labor Inspectors	Unknown	Unknown
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Unknown	Unknown
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown	Unknown

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Unknown	Unknown
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown	Unknown
Number Conducted at Worksites	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (34)	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties were Imposed	0 (34)	Unknown
Number of Child Labor 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

Although there is no available inspection data, sources indicate that inspections are conducted among government businesses. (37)

Criminal Law Enforcement

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

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2016	2017
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 CHILD LABOR

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

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established one policy 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
Education Sector Development Plan (2013–2017)	Establishes 8 years of free and compulsory education for all children. (24)

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (38)

Although the government worked with UNICEF in 2013 to develop a Comprehensive Child Policy that includes the goal of preventing and eliminating child labor, research found that the policy has not been adopted or implemented. (39; 40)

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The government's compulsory military training requirement for Active 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. In addition, the government's continued use of compulsory labor through the *Maetot* program may also impede these efforts.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2017, the government participated in one program that may contribute to eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 9). However, gaps exist in this social program, including adequacy of efforts to address the problem in all sectors.

Table 9. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
UNICEF Country Program (2017–2021)*	UNICEF program, in collaboration with the government, which expands access to quality basic education for all children, and protects children from violence, exploitation and abuse. (39)

* Program was launched during the reporting period.

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

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	Ratify ILO C. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.	2013 – 2017
	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 – 2017
	Ensure that all children are protected by minimum age laws, including those who are self-employed.	2010 – 2017
	Criminally prohibit procuring and offering a child for prostitution and using, procuring, and offering a child for the production of pornography and pornographic performances.	2014 – 2017
	Criminally prohibit procuring and offering a child for the production and trafficking of drugs.	2013 – 2017
	Criminally prohibit the recruitment of children under 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2017
	Establish by law free basic public education.	2016 – 2017
Enforcement	Collect data on labor and criminal law enforcement and make the data publicly available.	2009 – 2017
Coordination	Establish coordinating mechanisms to combat child labor.	2009 – 2017
Government Policies	Adopt and implement the Comprehensive Child Policy.	2009 – 2017
	Ensure that children under age 18 are not recruited into Active National Service.	2009 – 2017
	Cease requiring children to perform compulsory labor under the <i>Maetot</i> program during the school break.	2009 – 2017
Social Programs	Ensure that all children have access to education by building more schools and removing financial barriers to attendance.	2010 – 2017
	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.	2009 – 2017
	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 – 2017

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