

Eritrea

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

The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare (MOLHW) is working in cooperation with UNICEF to implement community sensitization activities on children's rights.⁹¹⁶ UNICEF is also promoting access to education in war-affected areas by providing learning materials to displaced children, establishing makeshift classrooms, and training teachers.⁹¹⁷ The government is in the process of evaluating the quality of primary education, although the country's weak national economy and lack of institutions and expertise limit reform efforts.⁹¹⁸ From 1993 to 1997, government expenditure on education as a percentage of the gross national product increased from 2.1 percent to 4 percent.⁹¹⁹

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 1999, the ILO estimated that 38.6 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 in Eritrea were working.⁹²⁰ Children work as street vendors, in domestic services, in small-scale manufacturing, and on family farms.⁹²¹

Children as young as 12 years of age are reportedly involved in prostitution on the streets of Massawa and Asmara, as well as in hotels and bars.⁹²² A 1999 MOLHW survey on commercial sex workers revealed that 5 percent of prostitutes surveyed in Eritrea were between the ages of 14 and 17 years.⁹²³ In addition, children fight as soldiers with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. Insufficient birth registrations make it difficult to verify the ages of recruited soldiers.⁹²⁴

⁹¹⁶ "Prevention," ECPAT International Database: Eritrea, at http://www.ecpat.net/eng/Ecpat_inter/projects/monitoring/online_database/ on 11/28/01.

⁹¹⁷ UNICEF, *Donor Update: Eritrea*, September 5, 2001 [hereinafter *Donor Update*].

⁹¹⁸ UNESCO, *The Education for All (EFA) Assessment: Country Reports—Eritrea* [hereinafter *EFA 2000 Assessment*].

⁹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹²⁰ *World Development Indicators 2001* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001) [hereinafter *World Development Indicators 2001*].

⁹²¹ *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000—Eritrea* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2001) [hereinafter *Country Reports 2000*], Section 6d, at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/af/782.htm>.

⁹²² "Eritrea: Sex case with military prosecutor's office," IRIN news.org, at <http://www.irinnews.org/Report>, on 11/28/01

⁹²³ "Child Prostitution," ECPAT International Database: Eritrea, at http://www.ecpat.net/eng/Ecpat_inter/projects/monitoring/online_database/ on 11/28/01.

⁹²⁴ Children as young as age 14 were reportedly used as Eritrean troop reinforcements to counter a May 2000 attack by Ethiopia. At the 1999 African Conference to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the Ethiopian Government also circulated a list of Eritrean prisoners of war between ages 15 and 18. Prior to the border conflict in recent years, hundreds of children were used as soldiers ("Red Flags") during the 30-year war

Education is free and compulsory from the ages of 7 to 13, or through grade seven.⁹²⁵ In 1996, the gross primary enrollment rate was 53.4 percent, with 58.7 percent of boys enrolled, compared to 48.1 percent of girls. The net primary enrollment rate was 30.4 percent.⁹²⁶ The Ministry of Education estimates that only 37 to 38 percent of children attend school.⁹²⁷ In rural areas, girls often leave school early to work at home.⁹²⁸

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Transitional Labor Law No. 8/91 sets the minimum age for employment at 18 years, but allows for the employment of apprentices starting at the age of 14 years.⁹²⁹ The 1996 Constitution prohibits forced labor, but the National Service Proclamation obligates that all citizens complete compulsory service in the national armed forces.⁹³⁰ The National Service Proclamation sets the minimum age for military service at 18 years and requires 18 months of duty.⁹³¹ The Penal Code prohibits the procurement, seduction, or trafficking of children under the age of 18, and also bans sexual relations with children under 18 years old.⁹³²

Labor inspectors in the MOLHW enforce child labor laws, but inspections are infrequent due to the small number of inspectors.⁹³³ Eritrea ratified ILO Convention 138 on February 22, 2000, and has not ratified ILO Convention 182.⁹³⁴

for independence. See Coalition to End the Use of Child Soldiers, *Global Report 2001: Eritrea* [hereinafter *Global Report 2001*]. See also “Ethiopia-Eritrea: End to Use of Child Soldiers Urged,” UN OCHA Integrated Regional Information Network for Central and Eastern Africa, July 11, 2000.

⁹²⁵ *Country Reports 2000* at Section 5. See also Youth at the United Nations, *Country Profiles on the Situation of Youth: Eritrea*, at <http://www.esa.un.org/socdev/unyin/countrya.asp?countrycode=er> on 11/28/01, and *EFA 2000 Assessment*.

⁹²⁶ The net primary enrollment rate was 28.8 percent for girls and 32 percent for boys. See *World Development Indicators 2001*.

⁹²⁷ *Country Reports 2000* at Section 5.

⁹²⁸ ILOLEX database: Eritrea at <http://www.ilolex.ilo.ch> on 11/27/01.

⁹²⁹ Transitional Labour Law No. 8/91, Articles 2, 27, 30, 32, as cited in Veronica Rentmeesters, Information Officer, Embassy of Eritrea, letter to ICLP official, August 23, 1996.

⁹³⁰ Constitution of Eritrea, 1996, Articles 16(3), 25, at http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/er00000_.html on 11/27/01.

⁹³¹ National Service Proclamation No. 82/95, October 23, 1995, Articles 8, 9, as cited in *Global Report 2001*.

⁹³² Committing indecent acts with a child under age 15 is a criminal offense punishable by 5 years of imprisonment. Sexual acts with children between ages 15 and 18 are also prohibited, although the penalty is less severe. See “Protection,” ECPAT International Database: Eritrea [hereinafter “Protection,” ECPAT Database], at http://www.ecpat.net/eng/Ecpat_inter/projects/monitoring/online_database/ on 11/28/01.

⁹³³ Laws on commercial sexual exploitation are also reported to be poorly enforced and inadequate. See *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6d and “Protection,” ECPAT Database.

⁹³⁴ ILOLEX database: Eritrea at <http://www.ilolex.ilo.ch> on 11/27/01.

NOTE: Hard copies of all Web citations are on file.