

# Eritrea

*The Government of Eritrea supported programs intended to reduce the worst forms of child labor, such as providing services to street children; however, these were not adequate to address the scope of Eritrea's child labor problem and omitted the numerous children working in agriculture and domestic service. The Government forcibly recruits children during the school break to plant trees, pick cotton, and work as domestic servants.*



## Statistics on Working Children and School Attendance

Children	Percent
Working	Unavailable
Attending School	Unavailable
Combining Work and School	Unavailable

## Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor<sup>1711</sup>

Children are exploited in the worst forms of child labor in Eritrea, many of them in agriculture. Children in rural areas of Eritrea work on farms producing corn, wheat, sorghum, and other grains, and in fields gathering firewood, hauling water, and herding livestock. Children's work in agriculture commonly involves use of potentially dangerous machinery and tools, carrying of heavy loads, and the application of harmful pesticides.<sup>1712</sup> Children are also engaged in domestic labor where they may face long hours of work and exposure to physical and sexual exploitation by their employers.<sup>1713</sup>

In urban areas, children repair vehicles and work on the streets as vendors.<sup>1714</sup> Children also work in garages and workshops making household utensils and furniture.<sup>1715</sup> In Asmara, some children engage in commercial sexual exploitation and street begging. Children working on the streets are exposed to a variety of dangers, which may include severe weather, accidents caused by proximity to vehicles, and vulnerability to criminal elements.<sup>1716</sup>

The Government of Eritrea imposes compulsory labor on secondary-level schoolchildren. Children in the ninth grade and above are forced to work for 2 months

during the school break for a national program called Mahtot. They are required to work on farms, provide domestic service, plant trees, and pick cotton.<sup>1717</sup>

In addition, the Government requires all secondary school students to complete their final, 12th year of schooling and military training at the Sawa Military Training Camp in remote western Eritrea in order to graduate.<sup>1718</sup> Students who do not attend are not eligible to take their final examinations or to graduate.<sup>1719</sup> Young persons are required to register for military service by the age of 17. Students who avoid military service are often victims of torture and poor treatment.<sup>1720</sup> Some students may be under the age of 18 while attending Sawa. Since children may leave school at age 13, they may receive military training at this age.<sup>1721</sup> After the 6 months of compulsory military training, national service conscripts, who may be under age 18, are either drafted into the military, deployed to work in mines and on agriculture and construction projects, or assigned to a technical college for further training.<sup>1722</sup>

Eritrea is a country of origin for children trafficked for forced labor, including commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>1723</sup> In rare instances, children are trafficked to the Middle East to serve as camel jockeys.<sup>1724</sup>

### Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Labor Proclamation sets the minimum age for employment at 14 and the minimum age for hazardous work at 18. Under this law, hazardous work includes transporting goods and passengers, heavy lifting, working with toxic chemicals and dangerous machines, and working underground, such as in mines, quarries, sewers, and tunnel digging.<sup>1725</sup> However, the Labor Proclamation does not include penalties for employers of children in hazardous work or children under the minimum age.<sup>1726</sup>

In addition, children in apprenticeships may engage in hazardous work if supervised by a competent authority. This includes dangerous and health-threatening tasks such as working in mines, quarries, and sewers. It is unclear at what age a child may become an apprentice.<sup>1727</sup>

	C138, Minimum Age	✓
	C182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	No
	CRC	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	No
	Minimum Age for Work	14
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18
	Compulsory Education Age	13
	Free Public Education	No

Slavery, servitude, and forced labor are prohibited by the Constitution.<sup>1728</sup> The Penal Code prohibits and provides penalties for trafficking in persons for sexual

exploitation, child rape, and child prostitution.<sup>1729</sup> There is no legislation to prohibit trafficking for labor exploitation.<sup>1730</sup> Children under 18 are prohibited from being recruited into the armed forces by Proclamation 11/1991.<sup>1731</sup> However, children under age 18 may receive military training.

### Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

Research found no evidence that the Government of Eritrea has established a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor.<sup>1732</sup>

The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare is the primary federal agency designated to enforce child labor laws, including criminal violations of the worst forms of child labor, such as trafficking. Information on inspectors and complaint mechanisms was unavailable.<sup>1733</sup>

During the reporting period, the Eritrean Government prosecuted persons for human trafficking, although it is unknown how many were prosecuted and whether the victims were children.<sup>1734</sup> Information was not available on other investigations, prosecutions, or convictions for other worst forms of child labor.

### Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The National Plan of Action on Child Labor and National Program of Action on Children are the primary government instruments to prevent and eliminate child labor in Eritrea. These policies aim to prevent child labor and rehabilitate children by reintegrating them with families, communities, and schools.<sup>1735</sup>

Child labor concerns are also mainstreamed into the Education Sectoral Development Plan and the UN Development Assistance Framework. However, these two development policies do not have budgets, detailed action plans, or targets related to the worst forms of child labor, and they do not appear to have been implemented to any significant degree.<sup>1736</sup>

In addition, the Government's compulsory labor and military training requirements for schoolchildren may diminish the impact of Eritrea's policies to combat the worst forms of child labor.<sup>1737</sup> Further, the Government has not provided information during the reporting period that it collects information on the worst forms of child labor, limiting their ability to inform policy.<sup>1738</sup>

### **Social Programs to Eliminate or Prevent the Worst Forms of Child Labor**

In the past, the Government supported child-centered social programs aimed to assist street children or reintegrate orphaned children with their extended families.<sup>1739</sup> In 2009, the Government, through its partnership with UNICEF, provided 4,426 street children with educational materials and cash subsidies to cover the cost of uniforms.<sup>1740</sup>

Current efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor also focus on anti-trafficking interventions. For instance, during the reporting period the Government conducted awareness-raising campaigns on human trafficking and participated in the Regional Program for Eastern Africa (2009-2012) to counter the trafficking of children.<sup>1741</sup> Eritrea also sponsored numerous youth and worker unions' anti-trafficking in persons education outreach programs.<sup>1742</sup> Other efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor include the Government's program to identify children engaged in commercial sexual exploitation and reintegrate them with their families.<sup>1743</sup>

Despite the initiatives described here, Eritrea's social programs are limited in scope and do not protect self-employed children or target areas where the majority of children work, such as agriculture, domestic service, and street vending.<sup>1744</sup>

#### **Based on the reporting above, the following actions would advance the reduction of the worst forms of child labor in Eritrea:**

##### **IN THE AREA OF LAWS AND REGULATIONS:**

- Provide penalties for employers of children in hazardous work and children under the legal minimum age.
- Establish a minimum age for apprenticeships and prohibit children in supervised vocational training programs from engaging in hazardous work.
- Enact legislation to prohibit all forms of trafficking.

##### **IN THE AREA OF COORDINATION AND ENFORCEMENT:**

- Establish a formal coordinating mechanism to monitor the worst forms of child labor.
- Publish data on inspections, criminal investigations, prosecutions, and other steps taken to enforce laws.

##### **IN THE AREA OF 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.
- Cease the forced recruitment of children during the school break to plant trees, pick cotton, and work as domestic servants.
- Develop procedures to ensure that children under the age of 18 are not recruited into the national military program.
- Conduct a national labor force survey to improve the availability of data on all forms of child labor, including the worst forms.

##### **IN THE AREA OF PROGRAMS:**

- Develop appropriate social protection programs to protect self-employed children and children working in agriculture, domestic service, and street vending.

<sup>1711</sup> Data provided in the chart at the beginning of this country report are not available from the data sources that are used by USDOL. Reliable data on the worst forms of child labor are especially difficult to collect given the often hidden or illegal nature of the worst forms. For more information on sources used for these statistics, the definition of working children, and other indicators used in this report, please see the “Children’s Work and Education Statistics: Sources and Definitions” section.

<sup>1712</sup> U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, October 9, 2008, para 9. See also Muluberhan Hagos, *Harmonisation of laws relating to children: Eritrea*, The African Child Policy Forum, 2007, 98; available from <http://www.africanchild.info/documents/Eritrea%20Report%20final%20Sarah.doc>. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, March 9, 2010, para 1. See also U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea,” in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2009*, Washington, DC, March 11, 2010; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/index.htm>.

<sup>1713</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by State Parties under Article 44 of the Convention, Second and third periodic reports of States parties due in 2006: Eritrea*, CRC/C/ERI/3, United Nations, Geneva, October 23, 2007, para 341; available from <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/CRC.C.ERI.3.pdf>. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, March 9, 2010, para 3, 2A.

<sup>1714</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2009: Eritrea,” section 7d. See also Hagos, *Harmonisation of laws relating to children: Eritrea*, 98. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, March 9, 2010, section 2a.1.

<sup>1715</sup> U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, March 9, 2010, para 1.

<sup>1716</sup> U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, February 18, 2009, section 23. See also Mussie Hadgu, “Eritrea, a Nation in Overall Crisis: Coping Strategies in Hard Times”, *asmarino.com*, [online], April 16, 2009 [cited August 12, 2010]; available from <http://www.asmarino.com/eyewitness-account/133-iii-eritrea-a-nation-in-overall-crisis-coping-strategies-in-hard-times->. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, March 9, 2010, para 2a.1.

<sup>1717</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Service for Life: State Repression and Indefinite Conscriptation in Eritrea*, New York, 2009, 56; available from [http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/eritrea0409web\\_0.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/eritrea0409web_0.pdf). See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *48th Session: Summary Record of the 1335th meeting: Consideration of Reports of States Parties (Continued), Consolidated second and third periodic reports of Eritrea*, CRC/C/SR.1335, United Nations, Geneva, June

13, 2008, 5; available from <http://tb.ohchr.org/default.aspx?country=er>.

<sup>1718</sup> Kaleyesus Bekele, “Politics - Woes of Eritrean Refugees,” *UNHCR Refugees Daily* (October 8, 2007); available from <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refdaily?pass=463ef21123&id=470b1e938>. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, February 18, 2009, para 5, 19, 20. See also Jonah Fisher, “Eritrea rapped for ‘military schooling’”, BBC News, [online], January 11, 2004 [cited October 18, 2010]; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3386965.stm>.

<sup>1719</sup> Kaleyesus Bekele, “Politics - Woes of Eritrean Refugees.” See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, February 18, 2009, para 5, 19, 20.

<sup>1720</sup> U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, February 18, 2009, para 5. See also Amnesty International, *Eritrea: ‘You Have No Right to Ask’ - Government Resists Scrutiny on Human Rights*, AFR 64/003/2004, Amnesty International, London, May 2004, 25. See also UN General Assembly, *Compilation Prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in Accordance with Paragraph 15(B) of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 5/1: Eritrea*, A/HRC/WG.6/6/ERI/2, September 18, 2009, 5; available from [http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session6/ER/A\\_HRC\\_WG6\\_6\\_ERI\\_2\\_E.pdf](http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session6/ER/A_HRC_WG6_6_ERI_2_E.pdf).

<sup>1721</sup> U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, February 18, 2009, para 5. See also UNICEF, *Education statistics: Eritrea*, accessed February 22, 2010; available from [http://www.childinfo.org/files/ESAR\\_Eritrea.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/ESAR_Eritrea.pdf). See also UNESCO, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2009: Overcoming Inequality: Why governance matters*, Oxford University Press, Paris, 2008; available from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001776/177683e.pdf>.

<sup>1722</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Service for Life*, 51-52. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara official, E-mail communication to USDOL official, October 27, 2010.

<sup>1723</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea,” in *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2010*, Washington, DC, June 14, 2010; available from <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,ERI,,4c1883f62d,0.html>. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, March 26, 2010, para 2a, 2b.

<sup>1724</sup> ILO Committee of Experts, *Individual Observation concerning Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) United Arab Emirates*, [online] 2008 [cited February 22, 2010]; available from <http://www.oit.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/pdconv.pl?host=status01&textbase=iloeng&document=10378&chapter=6&query=%23subject%3D03%40ref%2B%23YEAR%3D2008&highlight=&querytype=bool&context=0>. See also Awate, “Eritrean Regime Now Trafficking Children”, *awate.com*, [online], August 24, 2007

[cited February 22, 2010]; available from <http://www.awate.com/portal/content/view/4597/3/>.

<sup>1725</sup> Government of Eritrea, *Proclamation No.118/2001: The Labour Proclamation of Eritrea*, (2001), article 69.

<sup>1726</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1727</sup> *Ibid.*, article 33-38, 68-69.

<sup>1728</sup> Government of Eritrea, *The Constitution of Eritrea*, (May 23, 1997), article 16(3); available from [http://www.chr.up.ac.za/undp/domestic/docs/c\\_Eritrea.pdf](http://www.chr.up.ac.za/undp/domestic/docs/c_Eritrea.pdf).

<sup>1729</sup> Government of Eritrea, *The Transitional Eritrean Penal Code*, (1991), articles 589, 594-595, 597, 605-606.

<sup>1730</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea," in *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2009*, Washington, DC, June 16, 2009; available from <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/123357.pdf>. See also Government of Eritrea, *The Transitional Eritrean Penal Code*.

<sup>1731</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "Eritrea," in *Child Soldiers Global Report 2008*, London, 2008, 138; available from <http://www.child-soldiers.org/regions/country?id=66>.

<sup>1732</sup> U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, February 18, 2009*, para 7-8.

<sup>1733</sup> *Ibid.*, para 7. See also U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea," in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2008*, Washington, DC, February 25, 2009, section 7d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119000.htm>. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, March 9, 2010*, para 2c, d. See also U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report- 2009: Eritrea."

<sup>1734</sup> Embassy of Ethiopia, "Eritrea Rejects US Country Report on Human Trafficking", [www.eastafricaforum.net](http://www.eastafricaforum.net), [online], June 18, 2009 [cited December 31, 2009]; available from <http://www.eastafricaforum.net/2009/06/19/eritrea-rejects-us-country-report-on-human-trafficking/>.

<sup>1735</sup> U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, February 18, 2009*, para 8. See also U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report- 2010: Eritrea."

<sup>1736</sup> U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, February 18, 2009*, para 13. See also United Nations, *Eritrea: UN Development Assistance Framework (2007-2011)*, 2007, 32, 50; available from [http://www.undg.org/archive\\_docs/830-Eritrea\\_UNDAF\\_\\_2007-2011\\_-\\_Eritrea.pdf](http://www.undg.org/archive_docs/830-Eritrea_UNDAF__2007-2011_-_Eritrea.pdf).

<sup>1737</sup> Kaleyesus Bekele, "Politics - Woes of Eritrean Refugees." See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, February 18, 2009*, para 5, 19, 20.

<sup>1738</sup> U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, March 9, 2010*, para 3.

<sup>1739</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports under Article 44 - Second and third periodic reports*. See also Child Rights Information Network, *Child Rights References in the Universal Periodic Review: Eritrea*, November 30, 2009; available from <http://www.crin.org/docs/Eritrea.pdf>.

<sup>1740</sup> U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, March 9, 2010*, section 2d. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara official, E-mail communication to USDOL official, March 19, 2010.

<sup>1741</sup> Interpol, *Profile: Eastern African Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (EAPCCO)*, [online] [cited 2010 February 22,]; available from [http://www.iss.co.za/index.php?link\\_id=3893&slink\\_id=4556&link\\_type=12&slink\\_type=12&tmpl\\_id=3](http://www.iss.co.za/index.php?link_id=3893&slink_id=4556&link_type=12&slink_type=12&tmpl_id=3). See also UNODC, *Promoting the Rule of Law and Human Security in Eastern Africa: Regional Program 2009-2012*, December 2009, 3; available from [http://www.unodc.org/documents/easternafrika//regional-ministerial-meeting/Eastern\\_Africa\\_Regional\\_Programme\\_Final\\_Draft.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/easternafrika//regional-ministerial-meeting/Eastern_Africa_Regional_Programme_Final_Draft.pdf). See also Embassy of Ethiopia, "Eritrea Rejects US Country Report on Human Trafficking".

<sup>1742</sup> U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting, March 26, 2010*, para 4f.

<sup>1743</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report- 2010: Eritrea."

<sup>1744</sup> ILO, *IPEC Action Against Child Labour 2008: Highlights*, Geneva, February 2009, 34; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ipeinfo/product/viewProduct.do?productId=9471>.