

Eritrea

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

Statistics on the number of working children under age 15 in Eritrea are unavailable.¹⁷³⁰ A significant number of children work on the street, in the agricultural sector, and as domestic servants.¹⁷³¹ In rural areas, children who do not attend school often work on family farms and in subsistence farming, engaging in such activities as fetching firewood and water and herding livestock.¹⁷³² Children are expected to work from about the age of 5 by looking after livestock and working in the fields.¹⁷³³ In urban areas, some children work as street vendors of cigarettes, newspapers, or chewing gum.¹⁷³⁴ There are also underage apprentices in shops and workshops such as garages or metal workshops.¹⁷³⁵

There have been unconfirmed reports that forced labor by children occurred in the past,¹⁷³⁶ but there was no information available on the practice in 2005. There is a lack of data on the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Eritrea.¹⁷³⁷

Education is free and compulsory through grade seven.¹⁷³⁸ However, families are responsible for uniforms, supplies, and transportation, which can be prohibitively expensive; such costs discourage many parents from sending their children to school.¹⁷³⁹ In addition, schools are not physically accessible to all Eritreans, particularly in rural areas.¹⁷⁴⁰ Education above grade seven is not compulsory, and students must pay a nominal fee.¹⁷⁴¹

In 2002, the gross primary enrollment rate was 63 percent and the net primary enrollment rate was 45 percent.¹⁷⁴² Gross and net enrollment ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and therefore do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. Primary school

¹⁷³⁰ This statistic is not available from the data sources that are used in this report. Please see the "Data Sources and Definitions" section of this report for information about sources used. 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, such as the use of children in the illegal drug trade, prostitution, pornography, and trafficking. As a result, statistics and information on children's work in general are reported in this section. Such statistics and information may or may not include the worst forms of child labor. For more information on the definition of working children and other indicators used in this report, please see the "Data Sources and Definitions" section.

¹⁷³¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention, Concluding Observations: Eritrea*, CRC/C/15/Add.204, United Nations, Geneva, July 2, 2003, para. 55; available from [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CRC.C.15.Add.204.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CRC.C.15.Add.204.En?OpenDocument). See also ILO Committee of Experts, *Direct Request, Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) Eritrea (ratification:2000)*, [online] 2004 [cited September 28, 2005]; available from <http://webfusion.ilo.org/public/db/standards/normes/appl/index.cfm?lang=EN>.

¹⁷³² U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2004: Eritrea*, Washington, DC, February 28, 2005, Section 6; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/index.htm>. See also U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*, September 8, 2005.

¹⁷³³ ILO Committee of Experts, *Direct Request, Minimum Age Convention*.

¹⁷³⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Eritrea*, Section 6.

¹⁷³⁵ ILO Committee of Experts, *Direct Request, Minimum Age Convention*.

¹⁷³⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Eritrea*, Section 6.

¹⁷³⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports under Article 44 - Concluding Observations*, para. 57.

¹⁷³⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Eritrea*, Section 5.

¹⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴⁰ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*.

¹⁷⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Eritrea*, Section 5.

¹⁷⁴² UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=51> (Gross and Net Enrolment Ratios, Primary; accessed December 2005).

attendance statistics are not available for Eritrea.¹⁷⁴³ As of 2001, 86 percent of children who started primary school were likely to reach grade 5.¹⁷⁴⁴

There is a significant disparity in educational access between urban and rural-dwelling children, primarily because development has been concentrated in urban areas.¹⁷⁴⁵ According to the most recent figures available, which were drawn from surveys conducted between 1990 and 1999, 79 percent of urban children attended school compared with 24 percent of rural children.¹⁷⁴⁶ There is also a disparity between the number of boys and girls in school.¹⁷⁴⁷ It is common for girls attending rural schools to leave before the school day ends in order to work at home on domestic tasks.¹⁷⁴⁸

In 2003, the government added an additional grade to secondary school and required that all students throughout the country attend their final year at a location adjacent to the Sawa military training facility in the western region of the country; students who do not attend this final year of secondary school do not graduate and cannot sit for examinations to be eligible for advanced education.¹⁷⁴⁹ The remote location of the school, concerns about security, and societal attitudes restricting the free movement of girls resulted in few female students enrolling in their last year of high school.¹⁷⁵⁰ There is also concern that this school is under the authority of the military, and at least one official was reported as saying that he considers the students to be members of the armed forces.¹⁷⁵¹ According to the U.S. Department of State, students attend the Sawa military training camp and undergo military training during their last year of school.¹⁷⁵²

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

Article 68/1 of Labor Proclamation No. 118/2001 sets the minimum age of employment at 14 years.¹⁷⁵³ Young persons between the ages of 14 and 18 may not work between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., and they may not work more seven hours per day.¹⁷⁵⁴ Young persons are not permitted to work in jobs that involve heavy lifting, contact with toxic chemicals, underground work, the transport industry, dangerous

¹⁷⁴³ This statistic is not available from the data sources that are used in this report. Please see the “Data Sources and Definitions” section for information about sources used.

¹⁷⁴⁴ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=55> (School life expectancy, % of repeaters, survival rates; accessed December 2005).

¹⁷⁴⁵ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Summary Record of the 866th Meeting (Thirty-third session) - Consideration of Reports of States Parties (continued), Initial report of Eritrea (continued)*, CRC/C/SR.866, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, New York, June 2, 2003, para. 82.

¹⁷⁴⁶ See UNICEF, *City to Countryside: A long way to go in schooling*, The Progress of Nations 2000- Lost Children, [online] n.d. 2000 [cited June 7, 2004]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/pon00/ctc.htm>.

¹⁷⁴⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports under Article 44 - Concluding Observations*, para. 51.

¹⁷⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Eritrea*, Section 5.

¹⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 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. Human Rights Watch, *Essential Background: Overview of human rights issues in Eritrea*, Human Rights Watch, Washington, D.C., January 2004; available from <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/01/21/eritre6987.htm>.

¹⁷⁵⁰ Women may, however, earn an alternative secondary school certificate by attending night school after completing their compulsory term of national service. U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Eritrea*, Section 5.

¹⁷⁵¹ Amnesty International, *You have no right to ask*, 25. Human Rights Watch, *Background - Eritrea*.

¹⁷⁵² U.S. Embassy- Asmara, *reporting*.

¹⁷⁵³ ILO Committee of Experts, *Direct Request, Minimum Age Convention*. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Addendum: Eritrea*, CRC/C/41/Add.12, United Nations, Geneva, December 23, 2002, para. 68, 422; available from [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/8a52da90a06e49e7c1256ce000307fc9/\\$FILE/G0246422.pdf](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/8a52da90a06e49e7c1256ce000307fc9/$FILE/G0246422.pdf).

¹⁷⁵⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Addendum: Eritrea*, para. 68.

machines, exposure to electrical hazards, or the commercial sex trade.¹⁷⁵⁵ Section 3(9) of Labor Proclamation No. 118/2001 states that apprentices may be hired at the age of 14.¹⁷⁵⁶

The worst forms of child labor may be prosecuted under different statutes in Eritrea. Article 16 of the Constitution prohibits slavery and forced labor except when authorized by law.¹⁷⁵⁷ Proclamation 11/199 prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 years of age into the armed forces.¹⁷⁵⁸ Eritrean law criminalizes child prostitution, pornography, and sexual exploitation. Article 605 of the Criminal Code prohibits the procurement, seduction, and trafficking of children for prostitution.¹⁷⁵⁹

Inspectors from the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare (MLHW) are responsible for enforcing child labor laws.¹⁷⁶⁰ Legal remedies available to the labor ministry include criminal penalties, fines, and court orders.¹⁷⁶¹ According to the U.S. Department of State, inspections are rare because of the level of available resources and the small number of inspectors.¹⁷⁶² There is no information on the level of resources at the labor ministry devoted to investigating child labor abuses.¹⁷⁶³ There is no information on the number of inspections carried out in the past year,¹⁷⁶⁴ and, as of 2004, no labor inspection reports had referred to cases of child labor.¹⁷⁶⁵

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

The Government of Eritrea is implementing a National Program of Action on Children, coordinated by its National Committee on the Rights of the Child, which is scheduled to end in 2006.¹⁷⁶⁶ The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, however, is concerned that the National Committee on the Rights of the Child does not have sufficient resources to implement its mandate.¹⁷⁶⁷ There is a plan of action on child labor that primarily focuses on strongly integrating or reintegrating children with families, communities, and schools as a means of preventing or rehabilitating children engaged in child labor.¹⁷⁶⁸

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments		
Ratified Convention 138	2/22/2000	✓
Ratified Convention 182		
ILO-IPEC Member		
National Plan for Children		✓
National Child Labor Action Plan		✓
Sector Action Plan		

The MLHW works with at-risk children by providing a small subsidy to their families to help with food and clothing, as well as counseling services to help children reintegrate into their nuclear or extended

¹⁷⁵⁵ Ibid. U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Eritrea*, Section 6. U.S. Embassy- Asmara, reporting.

¹⁷⁵⁶ ILO Committee of Experts, *Direct Request, Minimum Age Convention*. U.S. Embassy- Asmara, reporting.

¹⁷⁵⁷ *The Constitution of Eritrea*, (May 23, 1997), Chapter III Article 16.

¹⁷⁵⁸ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Addendum: Eritrea*, para. 88.

¹⁷⁵⁹ The Protection Project, *2005 Humans Rights Report*.

¹⁷⁶⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Eritrea*, Section 6. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention, Initial reports of States parties due in 1996: Addendum, Eritrea*, CRC/C/41/Add.12, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, New York, December 23, 2002, para. 422.

¹⁷⁶¹ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, reporting.

¹⁷⁶² U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Eritrea*, Section 6. U.S. Embassy- Asmara, reporting.

¹⁷⁶³ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, reporting.

¹⁷⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶⁵ ILO Committee of Experts, *Direct Request, Minimum Age Convention*.

¹⁷⁶⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports under Article 44 - Concluding Observations*, para. 8.

¹⁷⁶⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of the Convention (Thirty-third session)*, CRC/C/15/Add.204, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, New York, July 2, 2003, para. 8.

¹⁷⁶⁸ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, reporting.

families.¹⁷⁶⁹ At-risk children are also enrolled or re-enrolled at local schools, and the MLHW tracks their development through local committees or ministry employees.¹⁷⁷⁰ The government has a program to identify children involved in commercial sex work and reintegrate them with their families and society.¹⁷⁷¹ The government is also making efforts to assist street children; they received allowances to purchase uniforms and books so that they could attend school, while those older than school age were sent to private training centers designed to help them learn a vocation and reintegrate into the community.¹⁷⁷² According to the U.S. Department of State, these types of prevention and reinsertion activities are one of the ministry's primary activities to address child labor issues.¹⁷⁷³

The government has conducted awareness campaigns through the state media for the general public and has conducted training for officials charged with enforcing child labor laws.¹⁷⁷⁴ Through state media, the government routinely provides information on its strategy and its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹⁷⁷⁵

The Government of Eritrea is implementing the Eritrea Education Sector Investment Project with support from the World Bank. The project is designed to increase enrollment and completion rates in basic education, especially for disadvantaged children, and to improve the quality of basic education by building classrooms, establishing a Teacher Training and Development Unit within the Ministry of Education, and implementing the Ministry of Education's curricula and pedagogical reform program.¹⁷⁷⁶

The AFDB is supporting two projects to improve access to basic and secondary education and reduce inefficiencies in the management of the education system. These two projects will construct over 800 new classrooms at both primary and secondary schools, including for special needs education; equip schools; and build capacity within the Ministry of Education.¹⁷⁷⁷

UNICEF is supporting the Government of Eritrea in elaborating its Education Sectoral Development Plan (ESDP), which provides an operational framework for developments in education; the government and other stakeholders discussed and adopted the ESDP in April 2005.¹⁷⁷⁸ UNICEF is supporting the construction of seven schools in order to help increase net school enrollment.¹⁷⁷⁹ UNESCO funded a Ministry of Education project to provide basic school supplies and writing materials to 40,000 students in

¹⁷⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Eritrea*, Section 5. U.S. Embassy- Asmara, reporting.

¹⁷⁷² UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Summary Record - Consideration of Reports*, para. 77. U.S. Embassy- Asmara, reporting.

¹⁷⁷³ U.S. Embassy- Asmara, reporting.

¹⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷⁶ The program started in June 2003 and is slated to run through February 2009. The World Bank Group, *Eritrea - Education Sector Improvement Project (Project Information Document)*, AB43, The World Bank Group, Washington, DC, April 17, 2003; available from <http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?pagePK=64283627&piPK=73230&theSitePK=40941&menuPK=228424&Projectid=P070272>.

¹⁷⁷⁷ Both projects began in 2005. African Development Bank Group, *Appraisal Report Education Sector Development Programme: Eritrea*, African Development Fund, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, June 2004; available from http://www.afdb.org/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/ADB_ADMIN_PG/DOCUMENTS/OPERATIONSINFORMATION/ADF_BD_WP_2004_130_E.PDF. African Development Bank Group, *ADF contributes to Education Sector Development in Eritrea*, African Development Bank Group, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, March 2, 2005; available from http://www.afdb.org/pls/portal/PORTAL.wvw_media.show?p_id=154810&p_settingssetid=19&p_settingsiteid=0&p_siteid=273&p_type=basetext&p_textid=155053.

¹⁷⁷⁸ UNICEF, *UNICEF Humanitarian Action: Eritrea Donor Update*, United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), New York, May 27, 2005; available from www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/HMYT-6CSL4D?OpenDocument.

¹⁷⁷⁹ Ibid. UN OCHA, *Eritrea: Humanitarian Update*, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), New York, June 30, 2005; available from www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/EVOD-6E8ASP?OpenDocument.

rural schools within the drought-affected sub-zones of Anseba, North Red Sea, and South Red Sea Regions.¹⁷⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸⁰ The project duration is January 2003 – January 2005. UNESCO, *Emergency Educational Assistance for drought-affected and displaced school-age children in Eritrea (on going)*, UNESCO, [online] n.d. [cited August 3, 2005]; available from http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=14109&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.