



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Committee on the Rights of the Child

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports submitted by Eritrea under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2020^{*}, ^{**}

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** The annex to the present report may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



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Abbreviations

ACERWC	African Charter Experts on the Rights and Welfare of Children
AIDS	Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome
ANC	Antenatal Care
BCG	Bacillus Calmette Guerin
CBGH	Community Based Group Home
CCWL	Children in Conflict with the Law
CEE	Complementary Elementary Education
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSS	Child Survival Strategy
ECD	Early Child Development
EEBC	Eritrea-Ethiopia Boarder Commission
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GoSE	Government of the State of Eritrea
HIV	Home Based Care
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDD	Iodine Deficiency Disorder
IEC	Information Education Communication
IECD	Integrated Early Childhood Development
IE	Inclusive Education
IGA	Income Generating Activities
ILO	International Labour Organization
IYCF	Infant and Young Child Feeding
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MIS	Management Information System
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
MoLWE	Ministry of Land, Water & Environment
NCD	Non-Communicable Diseases
NCEW	National Confederation of Eritrean Workers
NCH	National Child Health
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NFPS	National Forces of Police and Security
NSO	National Statistics Office
NSP	National Strategic Plan

NUEW	National Union of Eritrean Women
NUEYS	National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students
OAG	Office of the Attorney General
OPD	Out Patient Department
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PMTCT	Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TB	Tuberculosis
TCCE	Transitional Civil Code of Eritrea
TPCE	Transitional Penal Code of Eritrea
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VCT	Voluntary Counselling and Testing
WHO	World Health Organisation

Executive summary

1. Eritrea's 5th and 6th integrated periodic country report highlights implementation progress on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It provides an update on the post-fourth country report period covering the years 2014–2019, as well as responses to the “Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child’s on the fourth periodic report of Eritrea – CRC/C/ERI/CO/4”.
2. This report is written in a new situation of peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia which is positively impacting on the efforts of regional peace, security and development in the Horn of Africa. The lifting of the unjust UN sanctions imposed on Eritrea for almost a decade is also a welcome new development.
3. The State party seizes this occasion to pay tribute to the Committee for its advocacy works and guidance to advance the Rights of the Child, as well as many critical observations and recommendations which it brings into view. At the same time, the State party regrets to point out that several of the Committee’s posited observations on the fourth periodic country report (CRC/C/ERI/4) are untenable, and fabricated allegations derived from groups adverse to Eritrea. Therefore, the state party would like to encourage the committee to take an impartial and balanced position based on researched and verifiable facts.
4. In principle and in practice, the Government of the State of Eritrea (GoSE), upholds the rights and best interests of the child as its cornerstone in the process of building a developed nation in which the Eritrean people enjoy peace, prosperity and social justice. In spite of the tremendous socio-economic challenges inherited from the protracted history of destruction during the armed struggle for independence and the border war and external hostilities, it can be claimed with high degree of certainty that Eritrea is among the few countries on our continent where people live in peace and with real human dignity.
5. The sizeable investments in social services and infrastructure which the government continues to make have enabled the country to rise from the ashes and score remarkable progress in health, education and the standard of living. The government’s resolve is demonstrated by the tangible achievements made in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially in the health, education and child protection spheres where substantial changes have been made.
6. Despite the immense challenges it faces, Eritrea continues to make significant progress in all areas that are pertinent to the implementation of the CRC and other international human rights conventions to which it is signatory.
7. In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic which continues to plague the planet, inflicting heavy social and economic tolls, the GoSE has diligently prepared this periodic report through a participatory process while observing social distancing and other preventive norms. The fact that there has not yet occurred any single fatality due to the pandemic from the disease in Eritrea is clear evidence of the seriousness with which GoSE looks at the principles, policies and practices for the safeguarding, welfare and advancement of the Eritrean people, of which children constitute the majority.

I. Introduction

8. The GoSE avails this occasion to thank the Committee on the Rights of the Child for considering the fourth periodic report of Eritrea (CRC/C/ERI/4) at its 1987th and 1989th meetings held on 19 and 20 May, 2015 and presenting its concluding observations thereupon. The GoSE solemnly took notice of the observations and conclusions of the Committee (CRC/C/ERI/CO/4) distributed on 2 July 2015 and welcomed many constructive recommendation and subsequent dialogue held between the multi-sector delegation of Eritrea and the Committee.
9. This combined 5th and 6th periodic report presents the progress made in the implementation of the CRC by the State party during the six years period from 2014 to 2019. It takes into account the previous four periodic reports submitted, and builds upon the

progress of implementation made during the subsequent six years. As such this report presents recent matters that merit considerations of the Committee.

10. The report was prepared in the usual collaborative and participatory processes led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW), involving private and public sector stakeholders, including ministries, civil society organizations and local administrations.

11. The GoSE has been exerting all efforts within its powers towards the promotion of the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and reaffirms its unreserved commitment to the furtherance and observance of the rights set forth in the children's Convention and other international conventions to which Eritrea is a party.

II. Follow-up measures undertaken and progress achieved

12. The GoSE signed the ILO "Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention", 2011, (No. 182), in June 2019, thereby completing the ratification of all ILO Core Conventions.

III. Factors and difficulties impeding the implementation of the Convention

13. The State party rejects the misplaced and unfounded recurrent package of allegations against it, presented by the Committee as "factors and difficulties impeding the implementation of the Convention". The factors enumerated by the Committee are non-consequential and unrelated to the implementation of the CRC.

14. As a young nation, Eritrea has faced formidable existential threats for the most part of its formative year since its liberation in 1991. The protracted efforts of the last two decades which focused on vilifying, isolating and destabilizing the nation through wars, occupation, unjust UN sanctions and induced migration aimed at luring the young generation away from national development and service through global human trafficking networks have been immense. In the given situation, implementation of the 1997 Constitution was withheld and the duration of the national service has been extended beyond the 18 months duration as the country has had to grapple with the immediate priorities of defending its national security and sovereignty.

15. Despite the above belligerencies and challenges, Eritrea has remained resilient and has never relented on its efforts for national development. The independent political stance has been maintained by the strategies of self-reliance, people driven governance and development and equal rights and opportunities sanctioned by the legal and institutional bases. Consequently, peace and stability, development, progress and responsible popular participation, in particular by the youth, have remained the hallmarks of the overall national dynamics. Eritrea's exceptional achievement in meeting most of the MDGs and in particular the health goals before the target date did not come out of the blue.

16. As a result of the resilience of the government and people of Eritrea the ominous challenges and sanctions put in place have been thwarted opening up new realities of peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia that helped revitalize the regional dynamics of peace, security and development. Despite the challenges faced the GoSE has always worked to address the constraints created by the extension of the national service duration on the nation and in particular on the members of national service members.

17. Demobilization has been carried out including for married women and other segments of society and still continues to take place in the interim period. The National Service has been transformed into an important element of the human resource development strategy of the nation through the introduction of academic and vocational/technical education programmes. Furthermore, the national service members are nowadays the first beneficiaries of the upwardly revised new Civil Service and Military Salary Scale.

18. What is unacceptable is the causality inference made on national service – emigration and its impediment to the implementation of the Convention. It is also

unjustified. Emigration of Eritrea's youth is orchestrated by the misguided policies in particular by some western countries to wean the youth from the National Service and thereby degrade Eritrea's defence capabilities and national development efforts and further destabilize the social fabrics of the society by creating generation gaps. Preferential treatment of Eritrean youth has been their established policy. UNHCR was used as a convenient umbrella to this end. UNHCR's so-called Eligibility Guidelines – issued in 2009 and 2011 and still in force to-date – extends automatic asylum to all Eritrean National Service participants, despite GoSE opposition to the guidelines.

19. The above misguided policy is the primary pull factor that has prompted Eritrean youth to seek asylum in Europe and elsewhere. In many European countries, around 60% of the so-called Eritrean asylum seekers are actually citizens of neighbouring countries who pose as Eritreans due to the preferential treatment given to Eritreans. Nevertheless, Eritrea has strongly fought against organized smuggling and anybody involved in smuggling and human trafficking is accounted under the law. Moreover, the committee's allegation (Paragraphs 68/69 of the Concluding observation) that states "Trafficking, involved senior military officers" is outrageous and false. In fact, the President of the State of Eritrea has officially and repeatedly asked the secretary general of the UN to investigate the entirety of the trafficking process by an independent body is a vivid evidence of the non-engagement of the state party on trafficking.

20. It is an established international principle that peace and security, and human rights and development are interlinked. A new hope of peace and cooperation has recently emerged between Eritrea and Ethiopia and has progressed significantly, creating a new reality of regional peace, security and development in the Horn of Africa Region. The Peace and Friendship Agreement signed between the two countries on 9 July 2018, is of immense significance, as reflected in the five pillars of the Agreement, which include peace and friendship and cooperation in the political, economic, social and security sectors as well as joint endeavours to ensure "regional peace, development and cooperation", and the unequivocal implementation of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC) decision.

21. In spite of all the manifest political goodwill, and the measures and progress so far in a short period of time, building durable peace is not a simple undertaking that will materialize overnight with the signing of agreements. There are vested interests – local and otherwise – bent on derailing or impeding the process in motion. Consequently, progress in the implementation of some of the pillars – and notably the EEBC decision – has yet to be realized. Still, the tempo, overall direction and future prospects of the peace process is positive and more progress is expected to be achieved in the near future.

IV. Main areas of concern and recommendations

A. General measures of implementation

22. The General Measures of implementation, comprising of the legal instruments and policy directives prepared to guide the implementation of the CRC are as much as possible, dealt with in the following paragraphs. The Committee's previous recommendations are treated in the appropriate sections.

Legislation

23. Unlike the Committee's hypothesis indicating that the provisions of the Convention are not legally binding in the domestic jurisdiction (para. 9), the National Laws – the Transitional Civil Code of Eritrea (TCCE), Transitional Penal Code (TPCE), and the Transitional Criminal Procedure Code (TCPCE) and Transitional Civil Procedure Codes (TCPCE) are in compliance with the Convention. The 2015 Legal Codes are publicly available and preparations are underway for their enforcement across the country.

24. Functional tasks and responsibilities on policy, monitoring, training and human resources are promoted and regulated by line ministries. Moreover, regional administrations shoulder governance responsibilities and organization of implementation. The elected

regional and local assemblies (established by Proclamation 86/1996) are functional and also serve as a basis for exercising the citizens' rights and responsible role in public affairs. In particular, local governance (in 2862 villages, 751 localities) serves as the base of National Governance.

25. The sacrosanctity of the rights and welfare of the child is enshrined in almost all social, economic, judicial and policy documents of the Government. The sector development policies and strategies of various Government institutions and in particular the MoLSW, Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ministry of Health (MoH) and the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) indorse the protection of the rights and the development of the child.

Comprehensive policy and strategy

26. The MoLSW in collaboration with government institutions, regional administrations and civil society organizations, developed an integrated Comprehensive National Policy for Children in 2016. The policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of multi-stakeholders in realizing children's rights obliging all stakeholders to mainstream Child Rights in their respective policies, strategic plans and programmes. Furthermore, the policy addresses broad aspects of the CRC. The Committees' inferred view on lack of a comprehensive policy and strategy (para. 10) and the Government's approach on having several specific policy and strategy instruments to deal with the comprehensive issues of children are not in essence and outcome divergent.

27. A comprehensive national policy on persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, was prepared in May 2015 and discussed in a consensus building workshop convened in 2016. The Community Based Approach of the MoLSW – asserts the primary strategy for the care, protection and support of orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC).

28. The right to education of the people in general and all children in particular is protected in accordance with the Government's education policy through concrete action. There is free access to education all the way from the primary level to the tertiary education level. For the enhancement of girls, education, various affirmative measures have been taken, including the establishment of boarding schools for rural girls, building separate sanitation facilities for girls in schools, preparing affordable sanitary towels for girls, free school uniforms and books to economically disadvantaged girls, and awarding bicycle to outstanding girls. Besides due to the difficult terrain and life style of some part of the population there are children who can't access education, and a special program 'Areaiot' Complementary Elementary Education (CEE), is established to educate this children.

29. The National Health Policy of 2020 and the National Health Sector Strategic Development Plan (2017–2021) and in particular the public health system take special notes of Family and Community Health Care Services in all health facilities. The National Health Policy and Plan has been reviewed every five years.

Allocation of resources

30. The GoSE regularly allocates annual budget towards the implementation of diverse national programmes, including the promotion and protection of child rights. The government budget is topped by the periodic Eritrea-UN-Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework (SPCF) and other sources.

31. Despite the absence of a separate child rights based budgetary approach, as stipulated by the Committee (para. 15), the budget needs for the implementation programmes planned to enhance the rights of the child have been met, on the bases of the State party's economic resources. As the culture of dedication and commitment of Eritrea is vibrant among its citizens there is not a separate budget allocation for the coordination mechanism. Members of the coordinating body for the CRC are officials or experts of sector institutions and coordination is done at no cost.

32. In summary, the budget allocated and utilized by key ministries for children related programmes is presented in table 1 to show the partial magnitude of annual financial resources allotted to enhance the rights, welfare and development of the child.

Table 1: Example of financial expenditures related to children’s rights in various sectors

<i>Year</i>	<i>Health services</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Welfare and protection</i>	<i>Information</i>	<i>Sports and leisure</i>
2017	432 908 000	1 112 695 300	483 056 500	90 186 500	42 156 557
2018	576 500 000	1 310 400 000	479 300 000	129 700 00	60 134 558
2019	548 165 200	1 162 935 200	470 313 200	107 380 900	63 024 100
Development investment (2017–2019)	79 500 423	53 526 699	83 415	2 801 658	1 187 510
External source (2017–2019)	766 291 754	272 428 146	41 966 795		
Total	2 403 365 377	3 911 985 345	1 474 719 910	330 069 058	166 502 725

Source: Data gathered from respective institution, 2019.

Coordination

33. Please refer to the 4th CRC report (paras.74–78) for detailed description of coordination mechanism. Very few amendments were made to the TOR in order to include the NUEW in the Inter-Ministerial National Coordinating Body. The mandates of the five tiers remain unchanged.

34. A national UPR Coordination Body (NCB), coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and involving 10 other ministries, agencies and national civic organizations also functions to oversee the implementation of UPR recommendations and serves as epicentre for the maximization and support on other international obligations and reporting through a special office in the MoFA. The NCB has recently developed a five year UPR plan (2020–2024) to implement the 3rd Cycle accepted UPR recommendations which incorporate a sector plan of the MoLSW addressing the 11 recommendations pertaining to child rights and well-being.

Corruption

35. During the period in review, successful campaigns to sensitize the public and government institutions on corruption have been conducted through media outlets & workshops. A study commissioned by the National Police & Security Forces (NPSF) shows that corruption is insignificant in Eritrea. The study was presented in the International Conference on Eritrean Studies (October 2016). Institutional capacity building remains a major priority of the NPSF and is integrated into its consecutive strategic plans. A plan submitted to UNODC in February 2017 for international cooperation also focuses on Crime Prevention, Crime Investigation & Human Resources Development.

Data collection

36. In relation to the Committee’s observation and recommendations on para. 20 it is essential to note that the GoSE introduced a department for statistical & geographic data collection within the structures of the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) and its six regional administrations. The structure extends down to sub regional and administrative locality levels and is expected to strengthen unified statistical data across the social and economic spectrum.

37. The GoSE has also intensified the development of comprehensive Management Information Systems (MIS) in sector ministries and civil societies to collect, compile and verify data, including that of vulnerable and disadvantaged children. In this vein, sector

ministries and national civil society organizations have made strenuous efforts to build and strengthen their respective MIS. Data and information thus collected is used for informed decision and policy formulation, including for the effective implementation of the CRC and other international obligations and reporting. The information presented in this report has been gathered through the MIS of the National Statistics Office (NSO), MoH, MoE, MoJ, MoLSW and the NFPS.

Independent monitoring

38. It is an accepted international principle that the State holds the ultimate responsibility for respecting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights of its citizens. Thus the Eritrean Government bears the cardinal responsibility for the systemic implementation and monitoring of all rights.

39. The GoSE recognizes the complementary role of civil society organizations in implementing the CRC provisions and achieving child rights and child protection outcomes. The NUEW, National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS) and National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW) actively participate in the implementation of child-related activities in their respective domains. Moreover, the four National Associations for People with Disabilities (PWDs) play an important role in the promotion and protection of the rights of children with disabilities. Bidho, the national association of persons living with HIV/AIDS, also plays a significant role in awareness creation against the stigmatization of people living with HIV/AIDS. It is to be noted here that, Eritrea is not signatory to the Paris Principles since it has reservations on significant elements of its provisions.

40. The recommendations and observations of the Committee were also shared with all partners. Moreover, the fourth country report on the progress of implementation of the Convention and the reply given to the Committee on the issues related to Eritrea's fourth periodic report were printed and disseminated to all national institutions, including committees involved in ensuring women's and child rights at the central, regional and sub-regional levels. International organizations and Embassies in Eritrea were also copied.

41. By translating the CRC in 5 local languages Eritrea continues to widely publicize the Convention through the media, workshops, focus group discussions and during the annual International Children's Day commemorated on November 20, the International Disability Day commemorated on December 3, and March 8 International Women's Day and on other occasions. The 30th anniversary of the CRC was also marked on 20 November 2019, in an event organized jointly by MoLSW and UNICEF.

B. General principles

Non-discrimination

42. Eritrean law is generally constructed on the basis of the principle of equality and disallows all forms of discriminations. Proclamation No. 2/1991 TCCE made tremendous contribution to keep the law in harmony with the principle of gender equality.

43. Article 4 of the TPCE, Article 8(2) of the TCCE and other legislation of Eritrea enshrine the principles of equal rights of citizens before the law. The codified laws of Eritrea that include, inter alia, a number of the systematically organized legal provisions applicable to children deal with a variety of issues. The TCCE recognizes and guarantees the right of everyone to express his/her opinion freely. Any discrimination in the enjoyment of the rights of personality and liberties which are duly encompassed in the objectives and principles fought for by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front in the struggle for independence as well as those that are guaranteed by its National Programs is safeguarded by Article 8(2) of the TCCE for the purpose of ensuring that all citizens have the right to freely express their views and opinions. Moreover, Article 4 of the TPCE provides in an unequivocal manner that the criminal law applies to all alike without discrimination on ground of persons, social conditions, race or religion.

44. There are historical developmental disparities among communities living in different geographic regions of the country. These disparities have nothing to do with ethnic discrimination. The government has made relentless efforts to close the disparities by introducing various affirmative actions, including special educational programmes to nomadic and difficult to reach communities. To further improve the educational situation of nomadic communities, particularly girls, the Nomadic Education Policy Framework was developed by MOE in collaboration with nomadic communities, other ministries and bilateral and multilateral agencies. Indeed, Eritrea remains an oasis of ethnic and religious cohesion and harmony in a turbulent region racked by cleavages along these fault lines.

45. Eritrea is not in conformity to all sexual orientations beside heterosexuality & has not so far any experiences of the alien conducts of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual persons. Therefore, the concern over non-existent stigmatization of such persons and discrimination against children looked after from such non-existent families is a very presumptuous attachment on the part of the Committee with the subject matter. The Eritrean Penal Code has clearly put that homosexuality is illegal. Since homo sexuality is not acceptable and tolerated culturally and religiously by the Eritrean societies, for the sake of conformity with exogenous cultures, the GoSE cannot compromise the values of the Eritrean society.

46. A five year (2015–2019) Gender Action Plan that was developed in consultation with line ministries and national civic organizations has been operational. The ground work of gender equality created has encouraged families in general and women in particular to nurture their children without bias. The government commits to continue to strengthen its efforts to eliminate stereotypes and practices that discriminate against girls, including harmful practices. It also reiterates its commitment to the prevention of discrimination against children from minority groups and followers of any religion.

47. The laws of Eritrea ensure equal rights and protection in marriage and divorce, inheritance, child custody and adoption, equal access to judicial services, legitimizing three forms of marriage namely civic, religious and traditional while giving precedence to civil law in case of contravention. Legal age of marriage is 18 years for both sexes.

Best interest of the child

48. Acting in the best interest of the child is a key legal requirement concerning children in Eritrea. More importantly, statutes on the best interest of the child are reflected in the laws of persons, family, contract and others, such as right to inherit, establish proof of paternity of a child, guarantee the right to life if born alive, and to determine guardianship in default of parents. The following articles in the TCCE specifically deal with the protection of the best interests of the child: (TCCE, Art. 2–4, 199, 209, 211, 235, 316, 681, 834 and 1063).

Respect for the views of the child

49. The Transitional Civil Code reflects, to a large extent, the principles and provisions of the CRC, such as the best interest of the child. This principle requires primary consideration in all actions concerning the child. It also includes provisions for the right of a child who is capable of forming his or her own views to express his/her views freely in all matters affecting him/her.

50. To give due respect to children's views and children's involvement in defining problems and discussing solutions, GoSE organized a national forum in 2015 to analyse the situation of children in Eritrea. Since then, children's and the youth's participation is gaining momentum in the Eritrean context. There are 67 sub-zonal Women's Right & Child Rights Committees throughout the country, with 12 to 15 members each. Seats are reserved for two children (a girl & a boy 14–17 years old) to ensure that children's voices are heard. To enhance children's prominent participation, the MoLSW participation guidance booklet with information on defining roles and responsibilities of the youth members of the committees and organized to 1,000 (30 per cent females) committee youth members in five zobas the first-round training for children in 2019.

51. NUEYS provides platform and opportunities for all children and adolescents to express their views. During the period under review, NUEYS established over 40 mini-media clubs and youth centres in all Zobas, and established an ‘Idea Studio Eritrea’ aiming at unleashing potential of youth in entrepreneurship and problem solving.

Right to life, survival and development

52. The state party refers to its 4th Consolidated Report (para. 37) and Reply to the Committee on rights of the child (2011–2013) and reiterates its resolute rejection of the Committee’s persistent offensive allegation (Committee, para. 29) of “shoot to kill” and use of excessive force against children at border.

C. Civil rights and freedoms

Birth registration

53. The State party takes full note of the Committee’s recommendations (para. 31) on the need to strengthen the effort to ensure that all children born within the national territory, including those belonging to minorities and living in remote areas are registered, including the recommendation to seek technical assistance from UNICEF and other UN specialized agencies.

54. Registering a child at birth and death is compulsory in accordance to the TCCE (Articles 47–153). The recording of civil status is required promptly within 3 months for records of birth, one month for records of death and one month for records of marriage (as per TCCE Art. 62). Failure to draw a record by a civil status officer and failure to make a declaration within the time limit determined by law is a criminal offence (TCCE Art.141/142). According to Article 623 of the TPCE, omission to register the birth of an infant, by relatives, doctors, midwives or directors or administrative officers is punishable with a fine or simple imprisonment.

55. An effective registration system is being put in place across the country. The local administrations, guided by the MoLG are responsible for registration. Presently, every child is registered at birth and a registration number is duly given at the village/town of birth. Besides, Bcille Calmette-Guerin immunization (BCG) is given at birth or within a maximum of 45 days after birth and a vaccination card/record containing the birth date is obtained from the MOH.

56. In order to gain practical knowledge and to learn from the experiences of others on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS), Eritrea attended the fifth conference of African Ministers Responsible for CRVS Systems which took place in 2019, in Lusaka, Zambia. The Eritrean delegation was composed of five experts from the National Statistics Office (NSO), the MoLG and the UNICEF country office. Following the attendance of the conference, participants gained better understanding to address CRVS issues.

57. Currently, birth registration is functional in most urban, semi urban areas and big villages. It is showing a steadily increase in coverage. For instance, the central region has showed significant progress, with over 90% of births registered. To harmonize and consolidate the on-going birth registration system in all the administrative regions, MoLSW and the six regional administrations has conducted a three days review meeting jointly with the NSO and MoLG. This assessment was useful in identifying practical challenges and gaps. Important lessons were learned for future improvements in terms of coordination, coverage, uniformity and joint planning and the government is working to address the recommendations of the conference.

Freedom of expression

58. The State party is baffled by the patently erroneous observation of “severe restrictions placed on the press in the State party, which has a serious impact on children’s right to expression, participation and information” (para. 32). The assertion is indeed grossly at variance with the facts on the ground. We can only assume that this must be

based on paucity of information on the policies and prevailing practice pertaining to the subject in the country.

59. At a broader philosophical level, what needs to be clarified from the outset is whether the nature of ownership of a media outlet – i.e. public or private, impinges on, or limits in any negative way, the contents and spectrum of children’s media programs and/or their rights of expression and participation on the production of the stated media products. Our view is that there is no innate positive correlation between the type of ownership of media outlets and the richness in content, diversity, quality and relevance of children’s programs produced by the outlet in question. Indeed, one can argue with a high degree of plausibility that private media outlets, primarily driven as they are by commercialization and profit considerations, are perhaps more fraught with the risk of accommodating ethically substandard or even harmful children’s programs than publicly subsidized programs where the focus is on the common good.

60. On television, Eritrea’s publicly owned and globally broadcast (through Arab Sat and Nile Sat platforms, Live internet streaming and U-tube) Eri-TV channel has three weekly children and youth programs. These are i) Hello children ii) Fiorina; and iii) Heritage/Maeger. Each program has a duration of 30 minutes and the aggregate contents cover the whole gamut of timely, relevant and popular themes; i.e. health issues and sport events; social and ethical contests/materials; poems songs and music; Eritrean history; dramas; review of books; puppet show; college life and challenges etc. The children’s programmes are broadcasted on weekends and normally are watched by most members of the family-including parents and adults.

61. On radio, 15–30 minutes children’s programmes dealing with academic, cultural, historical issues, science and technology, inventions and innovation, short educational/inspirational stories, fables, health issues, psychological and ethical themes are broadcasted. Broadcast time is usually on Saturdays-at convenient hours when children are likely to tune to the radio during the weekend break. These radio channels also broadcast programmes on nation building, arts and culture, societal values, the rights of the youth, technological breakthroughs, as well as interactive discussions on current domestic, regional and international issues. These programmes are broadcast in Tigrigna, Tigre, Arabic, Afar, Bilen, Saho, Nara and Kunama languages.

62. In the print media, the Tigrigna daily paper (Haddas Eritrea) has a weekly column entitled “Sunday with children” which covers mostly fables and stories that focus on ethical issues and a Saturday column on broader social and educational themes. The Arabic and Tigre papers (published four and two times a week respectively) contain similar regular columns.

63. In all the interactive programmes usually presented in group discussions or panel formats, the moderators are children or youngsters themselves. The Ministry of Information does not exercise editorial control or censorship on the content or packaging of the products outside the normative prohibited practices. These are contents that denigrate women or specific ethnic/language group/s; that idolize violence; that defame any person, etc.

64. Operative paragraph 33 reads: “the committee reiterates its previous recommendations that the state party remove excessive restrictions on the media in order to guarantee that children can access information and exercise their right to freedom of expression in accordance with the provisions of the Convention (see CRC/ERI/C/3, para. 35)”. Again, it is hard to understand the concrete considerations that have prompted the Committee to make this evidently erroneous and unwarranted recommendations.

65. Indeed, the Ministry of Information conducts periodic surveys from its domestic audiences through anonymous telephone calls. For example, in November 2017, the Ministry launched an extensive nation-wide survey of all its programmes by commercially procuring the professional services of the Marketing Department in the College of Economics and Business Administration. (This was partially funded by UNDP). In all these cases, the feedback obtained from a wide spectrum of our audiences (rural/urban, from all social groups and gender) was very positive.

66. The Television sector in Eritrea is deregulated. There are no legal restrictions for households to buy/import decoders whose cost hover around 300 Nakfa or 20 USD. This is a one-time investment, since the decoders last for 15/20 years. Eri-TV programmes are broadcast all over the globe through the Arab Sat and Nile Sat platforms due to our large diaspora globally. Thus, households who have decoders can receive up to 1310 Free to Air (FTA) channels (some repeated on different frequencies) that can be captured on the footprint of Arab Sat and Nile Sat. The nation-wide surveys carried out in November 2017 ascertained that 91% of households in 20 urban and semi-urban areas in Eritrea possess satellite dishes and decoders. So the Eritrean public in general has wide access to over 1000TV channels (BBC, CNN, Aljazeera, CGTN, MBCs, sports channels, TV stations from literally all eastern and northern Africa, the Middle East etc.). Even subversive channels broadcast from London, Paris and Mekelle are not prohibited. Although there is not accurate statistics, many households have access to pay view TV channels (mainly with subscriptions to DSRV and Bein TV channels.)

67. It is true that the Press Law that was enacted in the mid-1990s was suspended when certain private newspapers violated the explicit provisions against foreign funding and became tools of externally driven regime change agendas. But this has nothing to do with children's programmes; or restrictive information in general as Eri-TV in reality compete with over 1000 TV channels and the same is true with Radio Services. Internet and social media access is also not prohibited although lack of fibre optic based broad band connectivity imposes certain handicaps in terms of slowness of service and limitations in the ability to download large documents. Institutional/households Internet subscription and wide availability of Internet Cafes otherwise caters for those who wish to use the platform as another medium for education, entertainment and business purposes.

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

68. With regard to the Committee's concern on the respect of the rights of children belonging to all religious denominations, the GoSE reaffirms that freedom of religion is protected by law. The transitional codes protect the right of individuals to be free from any discrimination and prosecution on account of their religion. The stated observations by the committee do not represent the hard fact on the ground and this issue sufficiently addressed in our previous written responses.

69. According to the Eritrean Nationality Proclamation No. 21/1992 any person born to a father or mother of Eritrean origin in Eritrea or abroad has the right to an Eritrean identity. The proclamation does not discriminate against persons or groups of persons on grounds of race, colour, gender, religion or ethnic origin. Children of any races, colour, gender, religion, or ethnic origin have, as a matter of principle, equal rights and access to public services, among others education and health care services. As has been explained over and over again on several occasions, the question of the adult followers of Jehovah's Witnesses has nothing to do with their type of religion. It is simply a matter of failing to fulfil the secular citizenship obligations required of followers of all religious denominations.

D. Violence against children

Torture and other cruel or degrading treatment or punishment

70. The GoSE is cognizant of and strictly observes the provisions and principles of the articles of the CRC listed by the Committee. Although it would be absurd to claim that Eritrea is absolutely free from any crimes, one can proudly say that Eritrea is one of the few peaceful and safe places on the continent. The gross misrepresentation of the Eritrean reality by the Committee (paras. 36–37) is regrettable.

71. It is unacceptable to pursue the blame game course which the Committee enlivens by gathering information from sources enviously committed to discredit and disrupt the Eritrean living conditions and thereby achieve parity of image by reducing the virtues of others to their levels. In the first place, the assertion is erroneous as Eritrea does not have a military training of children where violence or torture of children may be plausibly carried

out. The story of a non-existent age old fairy tale of Wi'a military training institution is a ghost that lingers to haunt Eritrea's adversaries.

72. Prevention of all forms of violence in all settings is the priority action of child protection actors and stakeholders. Violence is prohibited in all its forms and in all settings by the TPCE. Corporal punishment and beating, as inhumane kinds of punishment, are abolished by Eritrean laws. The Committee's assertions and concerns are unfounded.

73. As indicated in the previous report, the MoE prohibits all and any kind of corporal punishment in schools. The MoE has published a training manual on avoiding corporal punishment in Eritrean schools. The manual states that corporal punishment violates the human rights, physical integrity and human dignity of people in general, and students in particular. It also stipulates that school discipline be administered in a manner consistent with the dignity of the child and the rights of the child. The MoE has provided extensive training on the basis of this manual. At the same time, it has made much effort to raise the general level of awareness in schools and to monitor implementation.

74. The Eritrean society holds a high moral ground in the sanctioning of rape and sexual harassment as immoral and sinful acts. Hence on the very rare and exceptional occasions that it occurs, it is dealt with very seriously, especially if it is perpetrated by adults on minors or by teachers and other staff on students. Although no one can condone even the generally minor incidents, the exaggeration of the issues as matters of concern is preposterous. The Eritrean people are law abiding and please rest assured as the Government has put in place adequate law enforcing mechanisms to hold accountable anyone who commits such crimes.

Freedom of the child from all forms of violence

75. The GoSE has taken note of the Committee's observations and recommendations (paras. 38–39) concerning the freedom of the child from all forms of violence. It concurs with the belief that no child should be subjected to any form of violence, exploitation and abuse. Freedom from violence is a fundamental human right. Being a party to the CRC, GoSE unequivocally condemns violence and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments or punishments. Violence against children, regardless of its nature or gravity, is absolutely not tolerated in Eritrea, though a comprehensive data on subtle violence which may exist in Eritrea against children is not available, and no comprehensive study has been conducted. However, there are a few complaints or reports of incidents presented to the police or courts.

76. Sexual offence against any person of any age is one of the most despicable crimes in Eritrea. Thus rape, other forms of sexual outrages, seduction, trafficking of infants and young persons for prostitution, public indecency in the presence of young persons, intentional exhibiting, handing over or delivering of indecent or obscene publications to an infant or young person, offering, lending, giving or selling to infants and young persons of objects, images or writings that unduly stimulate sexual instincts, incest with a young person etc. are punishable criminal offences in Eritrea.

77. MoLSW has established a community-based system to provide the necessary psycho-social and other forms of support for the full recovery and social reintegration of child victims of sexual or other forms of abuse. Under the supervision and management of MoLSW sub-zoba branch offices, trained social workers and women & child rights committees at grassroots level continuously conduct supervision to ensure that children are provided with the necessary attention and support.

78. Violence against girls, including rape, is a crime punishable by law, and any of sexual exploitation and abuse is not settled or mediated outside the court of law. There is no provision for marital rape in Eritrean laws. Rape committed against a child falls under the jurisdiction of the High Court, not the lower courts as, they constitute grave crimes. The parents of the victim, the victim herself file their complaints to the police immediately after the crime happens. The concrete practice consolidated by law enforcement agents is to register the rape complaint of the victim and simultaneously forward the victim to a health facility. Accordingly, the victim is given post-exposure prophylaxis injection within 72 hours as a preventive measure against HIV/AIDS infection. Both of the reports from the police and the health facility are then forwarded to the public prosecutor's office for the

immediate action of detaining the perpetrator and the follow up of legal proceedings. Compensation and rehabilitation, as redress for the moral and physical damages sustained by the victim, are issued in accordance with Articles 2090-2161 of TCCE.

79. The Office of the Attorney General (OAG), pursuant to Article 8 of the Transitional Criminal Procedure of Eritrea, has the power to direct investigations of alleged crimes that may have been committed in violation of the TPCE and other pertinent laws and regulations. The OAG involves itself in investigating sexual assaults which may have been committed upon girls/women whenever credible information is provided.

Table 2: Yearly number of rape offences reported to the police

Age	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
<15	85	86	111	93	92	128	595
16–17	109	98	119	82	70	93	571
Total	194	184	230	175	162	221	1 166

Source: Eritrean Police Statistics Unit, 2020.

80. During the reporting period, the MoLSW conducted community mobilization campaigns through its 400 social workers stationed in all zonal and sub zonal administrations on positive parenting and on preventing violence and abuse against children by reaching out to 411,308 persons (230,686 females) including children and adolescents, social workers and parents/guardians. Issues of violence against children were discussed openly. These discussions involved children and families, with the aim of breaking silence, which is important to securing public and government attention.

Harmful practices

81. In order to maintain the achievements and push forward the elimination of harmful practices and respond to the CRC recommendation on harmful practices, the GoSE developed a holistic budgeted five-year NSP titled ‘Eritrean National Strategic Plan to Ensure Women & Children’s Rights, Abandon Female Genital Mutilation, Underage Marriage and Other Harmful Traditional Practices, 2020–2024’ under the theme of ‘Towards Elimination’. The integrated NSP aims to eliminate all forms of harmful practices including FGM and underage marriage and to promote other women & child rights.

82. The introduction of an innovative community mapping approach in Eritrea is tracing the extent of communities’ free from FGM. One laudable success in FGM elimination which occurred during the reporting period is that two of the 67 sub-zones in Eritrea (Habero and Asmat) consisting of 72 villages that host 16,266 households and about 81,000 individuals have been confirmed free from FGM and officially and collectively declared FGM-free communities in February 2017.

83. Community mapping exercises were conducted in 2014, 2016 and 2018. The mapping exercises assessed the readiness of communities to abandon FGM against an “index of readiness for public declaration of FGM abandonment”. The model index was tested in 112 villages from which data were collected. The calculated indices indicated that 67 of the villages were ready for public declaration of abandonment of FGM while 45 villages needed further work and community mobilization and sensitization to become eligible for public declaration of readiness for FGM abandonment. Data collected from 86 villages in 2016 and 54 villages in 2018 was analyzed under one report. The results of the mapping exercise indicated that 58 of the total 140 villages surveyed were ready to make public declarations of the abandonment of FGM.

84. Eritrea has a very strong legal framework for tackling underage marriage. Article 581 of the Transitional Civil Code of Eritrea, as amended and replaced by Article 46 of the EPLF Civil Code by Proclamation 2/1991 states that no contract of marriage shall be valid if either of the spouses to be is under eighteen years of age. The Female Circumcision Abolition Proclamation No. 158/2007, as well as different sector policies and programmes,

such as the Comprehensive National Child Policy, the National 2015–2019 Gender Action Plan and the Health Policy and Strategy address FGM and Underage Marriage.

85. During the reporting period, a total of 250 cases of violation of the proclamation abolishing FGM were presented to the courts. 163 cases were indicted or verdict given and the 67 cases are pending. Many communities are enforcing bylaws at sub zone level to ensure that all marriages are held after reaching the age of 18. These communities sanction or approve marriages after the following procedures: (i) The family applies for marriage approval to the village administrator (ii) the administrator verifies the age of the person to be married through the register at the administrative office and provides a support letter to the nearest health facility for HIV/AIDS testing (iii) the health facility conducts an HIV/AIDS test, issues the couples with the test results, which they present to the religious institution in their community (iv) the church or mosque registrar sanctions the marriage (v) the registrar does not approve a marriage without the verification of the couple's ages.

86. Addressing existing gender norms by supporting gender equality and girls' and women's rights is also given due prominence. These efforts are complemented by community mobilization campaigns that reached between 125,000 and 150,000 persons annually. Launching of the African Union campaign to end underage marriage in Eritrea on June 2016 was a catalytic factor to end underage marriage.

Prohibition of polygamous marriage

87. The State party refers to the Committee's recommendation (para. 43) on the 'prohibition of polygamous marriage without any exception'. Eritrea is a multi-ethnic nation where its people practice diverse customary norms and follow different faiths, predominantly Christianity and Islam. The Eritrean national laws protect and duly recognize people's rights to exercise the rites of their belief, provided that such rites are not utilized for subversive purposes or are prejudicial to public order or morality. Eritrean laws outlaw bigamous marriages as punishable criminal offences.

88. Scholarly writings often associate the downsides of polygamy with arranged marriage, early marriage, poverty, blind adherence to religious and/or customary norms, male domination, etc. As social norms could be transformed through time, the best strategy of the GoSE is to combat these challenges through education of the general public. The mandatory laws being in place, awareness raising campaigns are regularly conducted by concerned national bodies. The issues addressed include, the equality of both sexes in entering into marriage contract, determining the affairs of children, the administration of property; and the enjoyment of other related rights and assuming corresponding family related mutual obligations.

E. Family environment and alternative care

Family environment

89. The GoSE refers to pages 18–24 of the 4th CRC country report and Committee's recommendation (para. 44). The GoSE conducts various social protection programmes for vulnerable families hosting vulnerable children as explained in this section under children without parental care.

Right to leave and enter one's own country

90. As a matter of principle the regulation of child emigration is based on the best interest of the child. Child emigration, especially unaccompanied one, is not encouraged. The GoSE endeavours to enlighten Eritrean children that there is no place like home where the respect of human dignity and cultural values and identity is guaranteed. Children are as much as possible encouraged to stay at home. The government is deeply concerned about the xenophobia and harassment which immigrants face everywhere.

91. The GoSE noted with dismay the Committee's uncorroborated assertion of taxation requirements to re-enter the country, the enforced disappearance of children in migration and other returnees, family members including children being punished for other family

member's conduct (paras. 45–46). Since this is simple fabrication the State party sees no sense of purpose in replying to such nuisances.

Children deprived of a family environment

92. The State party wishes to explain that there is no practice of enforced disappearance, incommunicado detention and arbitrary arrest. All children have access to if and when their parents are detained. There are schedules of visits of close relatives, friends and their children on a daily basis. The prisoners' dignity, security and development are guaranteed in accordance to the TNCE. They are provided with health services, HIV/AIDS counselling, vocational skills training and academic education programmes, as well as sports, cultural and recreational activities.

93. Participants of national service are deployed in accordance to the overall institutional guidelines where social and practical criteria that incorporates assessments during education and training while the human resource demands of the various sectors is taken as a factor. Members assigned to posts distant from their families take leaves to visit their families.

Children without parental care

94. Among the efforts made to uphold the long-term care and best interests of children without parental care, the MoLSW took a perspective is the deinstitutionalization approach and this has enabled the majority of orphans to become absorbed within their own extended families. To ensure the availability of diverse options of social welfare for children without parental care, various programmes are available.

Re-unification of orphans and other vulnerable children (OVCs)

95. During 2014–2019 the MoLSW placed 3,933 orphans (1,864 females) in 1,116 families, enabling them to receive care and protection in family environments. The GoSE provided the host families with financial support for Income Generating Activities (IGA). This cash transfer is a one-time grant which amounts to USD 667.00 per family. According to field monitoring and follow-up reports, the IGAs have had big impact on improving access for vulnerable families to basic social services including education, health, food and nutritional security of children.

Table 3: Orphans re-unified with extended families

Age in years	2014			2015			2016		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
0–4	193	229	422	3	9	12	45	41	72
5–9	321	250	571	7	4	11	74	76	105
10–14	250	351	601	11	5	16	87	67	152
15–18	410	231	641	19	11	30	53	59	173
Total	1 174	1 061	2 235	40	29	69	259	243	502

Age in years	2017			2018			2019		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
0–4	6	10	16	16	17	29	58	37	95
5–9	16	12	28	24	25	38	123	115	238
10–14	9	13	22	38	29	65	143	137	280
15–18	11	9	20	23	18	49	129	109	238
Total	42	44	86	101	89	190	453	398	851

Source: MoLSW 2020.

Community based group-home (CBGH) services

96. The CBGH for orphans older than five years has been designed as an alternative solution to institutional arrangements. It provides a family like environment, where a limited number of children live in a family setting with adults who act as their parents. During the reporting period, 364 orphans were placed in CBGH and enabled to pursue their education along with their peers in family settings. The MoLSW designated a mother figure and an assistant in each group home to provide basic needs and parental affection. Communities around the group homes provided additional material and psychosocial support to make the orphans feel part of the community. As a matter of policy, the orphans hosted in group homes are children who don't have parents or don't have relatives or of extended family members.

Adoption

97. Forty-nine orphans were reunified with volunteer adoptive parents during 2014–2019. An assessment made by the MoLSW on the situation of adopted children in the Central Region (Zoba Maekel) revealed that the orphans are in good health; all attending schools and enjoying more meaningful life than those hosted in group homes and in orphanages.

Orphan children cared for in orphanage centres

98. The placement of orphans in orphanages is the last option, and orphanages have been continuously de-institutionalized. Out of the total orphans (1819) hosted in orphanage centres, 54.0% are girls.

Families of martyrs

99. Under the sponsorship of the MoLSW, twenty-two million dollars continues to be disbursed annually to provide social protection support to a significant number of martyrs' and other vulnerable families. During the reporting period, 38.8% of the annual budget for the Martyrs' families was allocated to children & youth. Moreover, Eritrean nationals residing inside the country and in the diaspora have been providing the vulnerable families with additional material, financial and psychosocial support.

HIV/AIDS affected families

100. In response to the critical need of HIV/AIDS affected children and families, the MoLSW, in collaboration with other partners, has continued to provide support and to optimize efforts, despite the meagre resources available to it. The cash transfer activities have enhanced household daily consumption. Additionally, the Ministry has continued to provide overall care of to HIV affected families and children in terms of psycho-social support and case-management procedures.

Table 4: Infected and affected orphans of HIV/AIDS living with families who were assisted

Age in years	2014			2015			2016		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
0–4	133	237	370	77	56	133	51	32	83
5–9	375	225	600	60	86	146	162	120	282
10–14	395	435	830	109	61	170	263	241	504
15–17	692	508	1 200	88	103	191	136	130	266
Total	1 595	1 405	3 000	334	306	640	612	523	1 135

Age in years	2017			2018			2019		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
0-4	80	66	146	74	76	150	71	67	138
5-9	172	165	337	188	160	348	117	135	252
10-14	274	222	496	320	305	625	205	245	450
15-17	145	145	290	167	150	317	181	219	400
Total	671	598	1 269	749	691	1 440	574	666	1 240

Source: MoLSW, 2020.

Female headed households

101. The Savings and Micro-Credit Programme (SMCP) is one of the schemes designed to alleviate the financial difficulties of households, especially female headed households which cannot qualify to get credit from banks. Many of the beneficiaries are female-headed households hosting orphans and vulnerable children. There are 609 village banks dispersed throughout the country that benefit a total of 65,032 clients, of which 36,012 (55%) are females.

Monitoring and child friendly complaints mechanisms in alternative care

102. The State party fully recognizes the importance of safe, friendly, accessible and confidential complaints receiving mechanisms in the protection of children in alternative care and in institutional arrangements. In compliance with the Committee's view, the MoLSW has established safe and child-sensitive counselling, complaints receiving and reporting mechanism to address violence committed against children. It has assigned 400 social workers to closely monitor and establish strong social interaction with children in alternative care and in institutional arrangements.

103. There is an on-going discussion between the MoLSW, UNDP and UNICEF to establish a systematic disaggregated data collecting, collating, analyzing, and reporting mechanism for child protection and social welfare programmes. This is expected to strengthen an integrated information management system that supports tracking case management for the improved child & social protection of vulnerable children.

104. The State party would like to correct the Committee's statement (para. 49 e) that the majority of children placed in orphanages are children with disabilities. Such information was never raised either in its written reports or during the discussions with the CRC Committee.

Children in prison with their mothers

105. The State party refers to the Committee's notation (para. 51 a & b) that "the living conditions of young children in detention facilities with their mothers are poor and that lactating mothers are having difficulties in providing proper nutrition for their infants owing to the poor quality of food provided in the detention facilities". This statement is utterly baseless.

106. In principle children of convicted parents are supposed to remain with their relatives in the event of the unfortunate instance of the detention of their mothers. However, some women prisoners who are unwilling to leave their children with members of their extended families, are allowed to keep their children. Such children are provided with a budget for their food and their hygiene needs, and with access to health care, kindergartens and elementary schools education with their peers.

107. Children in prison with their mothers are provided with four daily meals. The food they are served is of decent quality and quantity, and consists of the standard staple diet normally consumed by ordinary Eritreans. The prison wardens ensure that there is no malnutrition of any kind in the centres. There are visit schedules for families and friends, who may provide them with psychological and material support.

F. Disability, basic health and welfare

Children with disabilities (CWD)

108. Pertaining to the concerns of the Committee (para. 53) about CWDs and the recommendation (para. 54 a–c), the following paragraphs highlight the issues raised. The GoSE believes that disability is a human rights issue and has duly given it prominence in the National Charter & Macro-policy. The national disability policy promotes and protects the rights of persons with disability from social justice point of view.

109. Similarly, the Comprehensive National Child Policy also contains policy statements on CWDs. Policies & strategic plans of various ministries also assert allegiance with the promotion of rights & welfare of the child, as an integral part of their responsibilities.

110. The four national associations of persons with disabilities in Eritrea play important roles in the promotion of the rights of CWDs. They sensitize families and communities about CWDs and the improvement of the quality of life of for CWDs, and provide income generating support, appropriate mobility, and vision and hearing appliances.

111. As a result of the awareness raising and advocacy campaigns being carried out by the MoLSW and partners, children with various forms of disabilities are increasingly enrolling in educational and training programmes and accessing diverse services. The MoLSW orthopaedic workshops and the MOH clinic provide prosthesis appliances to disabled children and adults. During the reporting period, UNICEF funded the procurement of various mobility appliances which improved the mobility of thousands of CWDs, including victims of landmines and has enabled CWDs to access education and to perform other activities. During the reporting period 2014–2019 the number of beneficiaries of donkey for school project rose from 1000 to over 1,400 (40% girl students).

112. The MOE pursues an inclusive Education Policy, providing CWDs to attend regular schools and get special attention to ensure that they get quality and effective education. This is a recent introduction into the educational system and is progressively being put to test and is being integrated in many government and private schools. In the realization of this inclusive education initiative, the MOE is providing facilities and resources for CWDs in schools.

113. According to the report of the National Association of Intellectual Developmental Disability (NAIDD), the enrolment of children with intellectual and developmental difficulties in regular schools increased from 255 students in 8 schools in 2014 to 646 students in 19 schools during 2019.

Table 5: IDD enrolment and number of schools in 2014 and 2019 – Source: NAIDD, 2019

Regions	IDD students in years							
	No of schools		2014			2019		
	2014	2019	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Maekel	7	11	123	93	216	146	264	410
Anseba	1	2	21	18	39	21	53	74
S/Red Sea		1				20	31	51
Gash Baraka		1				9	11	20
N/Red Sea		3				26	30	56
Debub		1				14	21	35
Total	8	19	144	111	255	236	410	646

114. Currently, there are one public and two non-governmental elementary schools for children with vision and hearing impairments respectively. Some children with similar impairments are accessing education in inclusive schools. The MoE provides support to the

non-government special schools, in terms of curricula, capacity building and other technical matters. Construction is underway to expand the school for the deaf in the town of Keren. Students who complete their studies in these three schools are integrated into the regular schools at the next levels, where they receive special support.

Table 6: Special needs schools' enrolment by year and sex

Academic year	Schools			
	Abraha Bahta School for the Blind		Two Schools for the deaf	
	Total	Female	Total	Female
2014/15	51	20	145	69
2015/16	35	17	146	71
2016/17	35	15	145	40
2017/18	33	15	144	66
2018/19	33	15	144	66

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Basic Education Statistics 2014/15–2018/19.

115. The National Association for Visually Impaired Children reported that enrolment in both inclusive and special schools stands at 210 visually impaired children between the ages of 7 and 17 years.

Health and health services

116. The GoSE refers to the Committee's observations and recommendations (paras. 55 & 56) and reports that during the reporting period the MoH has developed a strategy that enables health professionals to identify developmental disabilities in the early period of children's lives. The strategy is incorporated into the Integrated Management of New Born and Childhood Illness (IMNCI), which is the key strategy of the MoH for the management of the most common diseases in children U-5 years. The MoH conducted training for health workers in primary health care facilities, and has also opened a wing in some of the health facilities where congenital and acquired disabilities such as Coronary Heart Disease (CHD), clubfoot, cleft palate, motor defects of children, etc. are corrected.

117. While Eritrea recognizes the challenges still being faced on the mortality rates of neonates, the Committee needs to appreciate the achievements gained in curbing maternal mortality rate is significant and Eritrea is one of the African countries recognized by the WHO in this respect. Yet, continuous efforts are being made to ensure that all maternal and neonate deaths do not occur in the society. In the present reporting period, deeper information is given on (i) neonatal, infant and under-5 children health services and (ii) maternal health services to have an objective understanding of the situation.

Neonatal, infant and under-5 children health services

118. Paediatric services are integrated in all health facilities in the country, except for the Orotta National Paediatric Hospital which provides specialized services. There are Intensive Neonatal Care Units in all six regional and 10 other hospitals. In addition, there are eight facilities that solely provide maternal and child health services. To increase the skills of health workers and community health agents, 412 health workers were trained in IMNCI, 111 in essential neonatal care and 536 community health agents were trained in home-based maternal and neonatal care. Tetanus is no more a problem in Eritrea, since the country has virtually eliminated maternal and neonatal tetanus since 2004, and was recognized as such by WHO in 2007. The successful outcome was the result of the incorporation of TT vaccine into routine and antenatal care, and an initiative providing tetanus inoculations to school age girls. Good hygiene practice also plays a great role in the reduction/elimination of neonatal tetanus.

119. According to the Estimates Developed by the UN Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation in 2019, Neonatal Mortality Rate was reduced by 49 percent, from 35

per 1,000 live births in 1991 to 18 in 2018. In 2018, neonatal mortality in Eritrea accounted for 58 percent of the infant deaths and 43 percent of the under-fives deaths. The institutional neonatal mortality rate during this reporting period ranges between 1.9–3.4/1000 live births (Table 10). Similarly, the Inter-Agency Group estimated that the Infant Mortality Rate was reduced by 67 percent, from 94 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 31 in 2018. The under-five Mortality Rate was reduced by 73 percent, from 153 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 42 in 2018. The Sex-Specific under-five mortality rate for females was reduced from 139 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 36 in 2018, while the under-five mortality rate for males was reduced from 166 in 1990 to 47 in 2018. As compared to the rest of sub-Saharan Africa and the Africa Region as a whole, Eritrea is showing better results in the level of under-5 mortality rates (Table 11).

Table 7: Institutional number of live births, number of neonatal deaths and neonatal mortality rate per 1000 live births

<i>Period</i>	<i>Number of Live Births</i>	<i>Number of Neonatal Death</i>	<i>Institutional Neonatal Mortality Rate/1000 Live Births</i>
2014	41 570	141	3.4
2015	43 676	114	2.6
2016	43 522	83	1.9
2017	42 512	77	1.8
2018	47 835	105	2.2
2019	50 812	147	2.9

Source: MoH, DHIS-2, 2019.

Table 8: Comparison of sex-specific under-five mortality rate/1,000 live births

	<i>Sex-Specific Under-five Mortality Rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)</i>					
	<i>1990</i>			<i>2018</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Eritrea	166	139	153	47	36	42
SS Africa	189	171	182	83	72	78
Africa	186	168	165	81	70	71
World	96	91	93	41	36	39

Source: MoH, DHIS-2, 2019.

120. The number of children aged under-5 years who received services in all health facilities at outpatient department (OPD) and inpatient department (IPD) levels and the number of deaths and the death rate per 1,000 cases ranged from 0.4 to 1.6. The leading causes of death among children in health facilities during 2014–2019 were respiratory system infections/pneumonia, septicaemia, malnutrition and diarrhoea. These are all preventable diseases associated with poverty and poor sanitation, against which the country is working aggressively to ensure child health.

Table 9: Number of Under-5 children who received services or died occurrence in health facilities at OPD and IPD

<i>Year</i>	<i>Health Station OPD</i>	<i>Health Centers and Hospitals</i>		
	<i>Diagnosis</i>	<i>Diagnosis at OPD/IPD</i>	<i>Death at OPD/IPD</i>	<i>Death/1,000 Dx. at OPD/IPD</i>
2014	1 361 300	461 666	198	0.4
2015	1 086 686	425 058	665	1.6
2016	1 147 819	427 337	629	1.5

Year	Health Station OPD	Health Centers and Hospitals		
	Diagnosis	Diagnosis at OPD/IPD	Death at OPD/IPD	Death/1,000 Dx. at OPD/IPD
2017	1 312 821	462 361	625	1.4
2018	1 861 002	581 051	702	1.2
2019	1 861 925	582 170	802	1.4

Source: MoH, DHIS-2, 2019.

Maternal health services

121. Having healthy women and children is an important factor for the development of a healthy and prosperous nation, since women of child-bearing age and children make up about 60% of the total population. Moreover, when a mother dies in child birth, there is a significant chance that the new born baby dies in the first week. Therefore, in order to solve or reduce these deaths, the MOH has adopted the Essential and Comprehensive Emergency Maternal and New born Care as a main strategy for improving maternal and neonatal survival, including ensuring delivery for all women at health facilities under the care of skilled professionals.

122. As shown in table 13, the percentage of live births is encouragingly high, standing at more than 97% throughout the years of this reporting period, while the percentage of still-births is relatively high, ranging between 2.3 and 2.8%.

Table 10: Number of skilled birth attendance, live births, still births and percentages of live births and still births at health facilities, 2014–2019

Period	Skilled Birth Attendant	Live Birth	% Live birth	Still Birth	% SB
2014	42 724	41 570	97.3	1 154	2.7
2015	44 826	43 676	97.4	1 150	2.6
2016	44 770	43 522	97.2	1 248	2.8
2017	43 533	42 512	97.7	1 021	2.3
2018	49 091	47 835	97.4	1 256	2.6
2019	52 165	50 812	97.4	1 353	2.6

Source: MoH, DHIS-2, 2019.

123. It has been observed that, during this reporting period, the number & percent of low birth weight (<2.500Kg) against live births at health facilities lay in the range of 2456–2875, and 5.3%–6.7% respectively. Continuous effort is being made through pragmatic interventions in maternal nutrition and antenatal services to change the prevailing situation.

HIV/AIDS

124. While the prevalence of HIV among the general population remained below one percent, the government of Eritrea continued to regard HIV and AIDS as a priority issue for the country, recognizing the critical importance of proactively establishing appropriate programs and systems that would curb the spread of the epidemic. HIV counselling and testing and condom programming are some of the strategies implemented in the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS. It is interesting to observe that the prevalence of HIV in the young age group of 15–24 years old who come to health facilities for voluntary HIV counselling and testing is very low and that it is encouragingly showing a declining trend.

125. Elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV is one of the successful programs in Eritrea. There are 234 sites that provide HIV testing services for pregnant women in the country, integrated in ANC/MCH clinics, making 86% of health facilities in the country providing all the components of PMTCT that includes: primary prevention, Family Planning to avoid unintended pregnancy, provision of ARV for pregnant women

and prophylaxis for infants, and early infant diagnosis for HIV exposed infants. During this reporting period, the number of ANC attendees who accepted HIV testing and received their results was very encouraging, with a high coverage in the range of 87–98%. The positivity rate of HIV in pregnant women is decreasing, dropping off from 0.36% in 2014 to 0.21% in 2019, thereby indicating that almost all babies born alive are free of HIV infection.

Table 11: Number of HIV exposed infants tested with PCR and number & percent tested positive for HIV, 2015–2019

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number tested</i>	<i>Number Positive</i>	<i>Percent positive</i>
2015	219	1	0.5
2016	328	3	0.9
2017	156	1	0.6
2018	117	1	0.9
2019	124	2	1.6

Source: MoH, DHIS-2, 2019.

126. Moreover, table 14 above shows the number of HIV exposed infants tested with PCR and the number and percent of these who tested positive during this reporting period. The low prevalence in both cases is an indication of the pre-elimination stage of transmission of HIV from mothers to their babies.

127. Eritrea conducts Antenatal Care (ANC) HIV sentinel surveillance in order to estimate its national HIV prevalence in the general population and to determine the socio-demographic and geographic risk factors associated with increased HIV infection. The trend of HIV prevalence in the age groups 15–24 and 15–49 in ANC sentinel surveillance surveys conducted from 2003 until 2019 shows a remarkable decline in both age groups, with a reduction to 0.20% and 0.36%, respectively. During this reporting period, the prevalence across the years was in the range of 0.85%–0.36% for the age group 15–49 and 0.43%–0.20% for the age group 15–24 years.

128. Eritrea is scaling up the provision of ART in ANC sites so that pregnant women could receive their treatments without referral to other sites. Currently, there are 53 ART sites in the country. It is estimated that the national coverage for ART in Eritrea is 80%.

Tuberculosis (TB)

129. According to the Global TB Report of 2019, Eritrea has an estimated TB Incidence of 89 per 100,000 populations, including HIV positive people. The WHO estimates case detection to be at 61%. This means that the country is able to identify 61% of all suspected TB cases.

130. Table 15 below shows the number & percent of all forms of drug sensitive TB case detection in 0–14 year old children and 15 & above year adults during this reporting period. Children 0–14 years old comprise between 12.5%–16.8% of the total cases detected. In general case notification for Eritrea in 2019 is recorded at 65%.

Table 12: Number & percent of drug sensitive TB notification all forms in adults & children, 2014–2019

<i>Drug sensitive TB notification all form (Bacteriological confirmed & Clinical diagnosed) including previously treated</i>					
<i>Year</i>	<i>0–14 Years Children</i>	<i>15 years & above</i>	<i>Total Patients</i>	<i>% children 0–14 Years</i>	<i>% 15 years & above</i>
2014	306	2 119	2 425	12.6	87.4
2015	321	1 774	2 095	15.3	84.7
2016	356	1 890	2 246	15.9	84.1

Drug sensitive TB notification all form (Bacteriological confirmed & Clinical diagnosed) including previously treated

<i>Year</i>	<i>0–14 Years Children</i>	<i>15 years & above</i>	<i>Total Patients</i>	<i>% children 0–14 Years</i>	<i>% 15 ears & above</i>
2017	350	1 731	2 081	16.8	83.2
2018	293	1 599	1 892	15.5	84.5
2019	230	1 612	1 842	12.5	87.5

Source: MoH, DHIS-2, 2019.

131. Table 16 below shows the number & percent of Multiple Drug Resistant TB (MDR-TB) notification where the rates for 0–14 years old children was zero across the years of this reporting period. However, in 2019 one case out of the total 17 cases was under-15 years old that can be translated as statistically insignificant as the denominator is very low.

Table13: Number and percent of multiple drug resistant TB (MDR-TB) notification all form in adults & children, 2014–2019 – Source: MoH, DHIS-2, 2019

Multiple Drug Resistant TB notification all form (Bacteriological confirmed & Clinical Diagnosis)

<i>Year</i>	<i>0–14 Years Children</i>	<i>15 years & above</i>	<i>Total Patients</i>	<i>% children 0–14 Years</i>	<i>% 15 years & above</i>
2014	0	22	22	0	100
2015	0	32	32	0	100
2016	0	24	24	0	100
2017	0	24	24	0	100
2018	0	16	16	0	100
2019	1	16	17	5.9	94.1

132. During this reporting period, contacts of bacteriologically confirmed pulmonary TB cases were traced. As a result, a big number of under-5 children contacts were traced by health workers and TB DOTs promoters and were diagnosed as TB in the range of 3.6%–16.5% across the years. In addition, 17.5%–44% of children contacts were enrolled to IPT prophylaxis.

Table 14: Activity of contact tracing among <5 children, 2015–2019 – Source: MoH, DHIS-2, 2019

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of <5 contacts traced</i>	<i>Number and % Dx as TB</i>	<i>Number and % enrolled to IPT</i>
2015	448	32 (7.1%)	124 (38.3%)
2016	805	43 (5.3%)	142 (21.4%)
2017	1 025	37 (3.6%)	153 (17.5%)
2018	382	63 (16.5%)	132 (41.4%)
2019	388	36 (9.3%)	155 (44.0%)

133. More than 99% of functional TB laboratories have participated in external quality assurance. Active case finding among high risk groups, including diabetics, miners, pregnant mothers, mal-nourished children and prisoners has been strengthened. The National TB Reference Laboratory has been equipped with LPA.

Malnutrition-related diseases, including stunting, wasting and reported incidents of noma

134. The Committee's concern of malnutrition-related diseases is also a concern to the GoSE. However, according to the Health Management Information System (HMIS) data, there was not a single patient of Noma before and during this reporting period. This may probably be due to the early health-seeking behaviour of the community and the increased access of services, since cases of malnourished children are treated before they develop the disease. Moreover, the community integrated management of neonatal and childhood illnesses (C-IMNCI) which also uses antibiotics may probably treat the condition early before it develops to the disfiguring stages. Based on the National Health Policy, the improvement of the nutritional status of children and mothers has been given more attention.

135. The MOH, in collaboration with UNICEF, has been taking steps to scale up Community Infant and Young Child Feeding (C-IYCF), community education and therapeutic feeding programs at community and facility levels (See tables 20, 21 & 22). Admissions in tables 20 & 21 are severe cases of malnutrition in under-5 children while admissions in Table 22 are moderate cases of malnutrition. During the reporting period, the number of health facilities providing nutrition services was 260.

136. Micro-nutrient supplements, including iron-folate, vitamin A and zinc sulphate, are also provided at health facilities for pregnant women. Moreover, potassium iodate is provided to local salt producers for salt iodization.

Table 15: Community based therapeutic feeding

<i>Year</i>	<i>Admission</i>	<i>Cured</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Defaulters</i>
2014	10 321	9 588	13	720
2015	8 813	8 123	29	661
2016	15 484	14 279	146	1 059
2017	11 992	11 196	24	772
2018	4 139	3 827	14	298
2019	9 472	8 312	20	1 140

Source: MoH, DHIS-2, 2019.

Table 16: Facility-based therapeutic feeding

<i>Year</i>	<i>Admission</i>	<i>Cured</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Defaulters</i>
2014	3 875	3 699	124	52
2015	3 768	3 574	133	61
2016	4 751	4 432	227	92
2017	3 121	2 973	108	40
2018	1 568	1 540	25	3
2019	2 868	2 755	63	50

Source: MoH, DHIS-2, 2019.

Table 17: Supplementary feeding program

<i>Year</i>	<i>Admission</i>	<i>Cured</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Defaulters</i>
2014	40 187	37 887	100	2 200
2015	33 862	31 634	1	2 227
2016	50 679	46 775	126	3 778
2017	32 809	29 845	7	2 957
2018	16 387	14 343	351	1 693

<i>Year</i>	<i>Admission</i>	<i>Cured</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Defaulters</i>
2019	34 266	31 963	17	2 286

Source: MoH, DHIS-2, 2019.

137. The Committee's recommendation (in paragraph. 56) raises the disparities among regions and between wealthier and poorer households. Eritrea has embarked on a meaningful nation building process to address all attendant consequences but is taken as a question of generation. Nonetheless, Eritrea has laid a foundation despite the existential external threats faced for most part of the time since impendence. The National Charter and subsequent national development policies, strategies and programmes aim social justice and hinge on the promotion of equal rights and opportunities sanctioned by national law. Accordingly, concerted efforts is going on with promising results to bridge disparities including regional, urban/rural, income and living standard disparities. The wide range of development programmes continue to alleviate socio-economic problems, improve social services and utilities, such as education, public health, water, electricity, sanitation and hygiene, transport and communication facilities, and transforming agriculture to ensure food security.

138. The first Policy on AYPH was developed in 2004 and later a comprehensive study was conducted in 2012 to revisit the nature, root causes and extent of the health and social problems of adolescents in and out of school in Eritrea. Based on the results of such studies and the experiences gained during the past years, the MoH developed and disseminated culturally sensitive and appropriate materials for AYPH in 2014, and a five-year strategic plan on AYPH launched in 2015. So far, 79 health workers have been trained to provide youth-friendly health services. During this reporting period, 17 health facilities provided youth-friendly health services.

139. Although the Breast-Milk Substitute (BMS) code document has not been enacted, but is already in use in the country in accordance to the provisions of the law and health policy of the Government. The MoH follows various regulations and implementation modalities such as regulating feeding bottles, teats and dummies that are either locally produced or imported, protecting and promoting exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, encouraging continued breastfeeding up to two years or beyond with the introduction of new foods into the infants' diets, and regulation of the instructions for the correct use of foods for IYCF during starting complementary feeding at six months. In practice, the MOH promotes breast-milk substitutes only when these are absolutely necessary. In Eritrea over 98% of children are breastfed, and the median duration of breastfeeding of 22 months is among the highest in Africa. However, similar to other African countries, exclusive breastfeeding remains low with a median duration of only 2.5 months.

Standard of living

140. The State party took note of the Committee's Concerns and Recommendations (paras. 57–58) where it delves into the salary and allowance of national services participants, as well as the issues of self-reliance, infant mortality, regional disparity in access to food, water and sanitation, alleged forced evictions and demolition of houses. Based on the available human and financial resource, the GoSE is not sparing any effort to narrow the different forms of disparity in the country and is gradually implementing its social justice principle. The Committee has to rest assured that the GoSE has been relentlessly endeavouring to bring about social justice and create an egalitarian Eritrean society which is the main motto of its existence.

141. As explained in earlier paragraphs, the GoSE is doing its best to improve the income and living conditions of the families of national service conscripts through the introduction of positively revised salary scales. Besides, the government maintains various social security programmes, including operating affordable fair price shops for basic food commodities, providing relief food assistance to the most vulnerable households, granting, cash transfers to the survivors of martyrs, mobilizing communities to assist vulnerable

households in farm activities, providing free health and educational services to citizens across all levels of education, running micro-credit schemes, and many other measures that meet the special needs of particular groups. Food supplies that are sufficient for decent living are made available through sustainable food production and through imports.

142. Poverty elimination in general and malnutrition of under-five years children in particular are top priorities of the Government. Food Security is anchored mainly on the improvement of agricultural productivity through the structural transformation of agriculture, including resorting to modern irrigation, where modest progress has been achieved. Soil and water conservation is a strategic undertaking and drives environmental security and the fulfilment of food security. Recently introduced initiatives include the Minimum Integrated Household Agricultural Package (MIHAP). This is a dynamics contributing to the transformation of household food self-sufficiency and nutrition, and income generation. Citizens, including female-headed households and small-scale farmers, have benefited from this intensive and integrated agricultural intervention with small land holdings, where rain-water harvested in the form of check dams or micro-dams is used judiciously. Such initiatives have turnout especially important for the well-being of children.

143. The majority of the Eritrean population is agrarian. According to the land proclamation of the Government of the State of Eritrea, access to agricultural land is a right given to all village households in the country. The usufructuary land tenure system is egalitarian and gives equal status to women. Such kind of right contributes towards their economic freedom.

144. Safe drinking water and sanitation constitutes the right to every individual, without discriminations, to sufficient, safe, acceptable, accessible and affordable water and sanitation for personal use. This right to safe drinking water has received across the board international recognition, including through 2010 Human Right Council resolution. Eritrea, which is guided in its works by human rights conventions including the CRC and other conventions to which it is a party.

145. The Ministry of Land Water and Environment (MoLWE) considers that the international recognition of this right presents renewed opportunities to emphasize the practical work still to be done to ensure that all citizens, including the poorest and most marginalized children and families, gain access to and utilize safe drinking water. The goals for safe drinking water in the SDG 2030 development framework, is inclusive in the MoLWE work which is committed to bringing about change.

146. The Eritrean Government's water policy provides the overall development framework for the water sector, water law, water sector institutional framework and water sector human development program in order that the present and the future generation can enjoy optimal benefits. It promotes the principle of integrated water resource management, as a means for ensuring the sustainable management and utilization of water resources by creating enabling environments for the provision of a minimum core level of access to water for all with equity. It addresses the gender issue, particularly in all water activities. Several major water supply projects had been completed, providing access to safe water to 72% of the rural population by 2015. Access to safe drinking water in 2012 and 2019 is tabulated as follows:

Table 18: Access to safe drinking water supply in urban and rural areas in Eritrea

2012		2019	
Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
67.5%	95%	80.2%	>95%

Source: WRD, RWSC & FSS, 2012 & Report, 2019.

147. Construction of mega dams, provision of potable water pumps or taps, rural toilet facility in most of the villages are taking place gives priority to the disadvantaged population in the rural areas, benefiting primarily children, girls and women, and the rural population at large.

148. Despite these significant achievements, there still remains a 15 % deficit in the provision of full access to safe water. Progress to date is seriously threatened by prolonged spells of drought. Moreover, the lack of adequate institutional capacity, technology and knowhow is still a major challenge.

149. Life expectancy in Eritrea changed from 48 years in 1990 to 67 years in 2018; the number of schools rose from 132 in 1991 to 1987 in 2017, where 80% were in rural areas; the availability of a health care facility within a radius of 10 km increased from 46% in 1991 to 80% in 2019, the provision of potable water has reached 80% in rural areas and 92% in urban areas, accessibility to electric power stands at 43.5%, and road transport service reaches 85% of villages. These are a few indicators of the changing standard of living in Eritrea.

G. Education, leisure and cultural activities

150. The GoSE refers to paragraphs 282–357 of Eritrea’s 4th CRC report and the Committee’s recommendation (paras. 59–60). Education, including vocational training and guidance.

151. To ensure the effective implementation of its educational policy and principles the GoSE has been taking various measures, such as equitable access to education for the underserved communities including hard-to-reach disadvantaged groups, which comprise girls, children of nomadic people and children out of school. The principles are consistent with the recommendations of the Committee (paras. 24, 25 and 73).

Education policies

152. In Eritrea, all nationals have the right to education. This is clearly indicated in the national educational policy. Basic education is compulsory, and education is free of charge at all levels including at Technical and Vocational education and Training and Higher Education. The medium of instruction is also mother tongue at the pre-primary and elementary level. Moreover, students from poor families are given support at the national, regional, sub-regional and school levels with the provision of various items, such as stationery, school uniforms, and exemption from school payments. The University of Asmara has not been closed on the contrary, it is functioning as the college of Health Science and the Orotta school of Medicine and Dentistry (refers to paragraph 60 b).

153. The educational policy adheres to learner-centred and interactive pedagogy. This system allows a child to express his/her thoughts freely among his/her peers and with teachers. MoE believes that the skills and knowledge which a child acquires at an early stage encourage him/her to express his/her views more freely at home with family members and in the community. In addition, frequent seminars and meetings are conducted to raise the awareness of parents on this issue, especially during school opening and closing.

Basic education

154. In the Eritrean education system, basic education starts with two years of pre-primary schooling (ages 4–5). This is followed by five-years of Elementary Education, (ages 6–10), which is compulsory for all citizens, and with three-years of Middle School Education, (ages 11–13) which is compulsory for school-age children. This official school age has been effective since the 2012/13 academic year.

155. The main objective of Basic Education is to provide basic literacy and core knowledge that enable learners either to pursue their education further or to join the job market. The medium of instruction in pre-primary and elementary education is the mother tongue. The language of instruction is English from the middle school level onwards. As indicated in table 24, the number of schools teaching in the mother tongue has increased consistently. This has been the result of the measures taken to expand equal educational opportunities particularly to remote, rural areas.

Table 19: Elementary Education: Number of schools that teach in the mother tongue

	<i>Languages</i>								
	<i>Afar</i>	<i>Arabic</i>	<i>Bilen</i>	<i>Hidareb</i>	<i>Kunama</i>	<i>Nara</i>	<i>Saho</i>	<i>Tigre</i>	<i>Tigrigna</i>
2014/15	58	81	29	2	26	20	56	212	495
2015/16	59	81	31	4	26	20	58	211	491
2016/17	61	81	31	5	28	20	56	210	501
2017/18	61	78	31	6	30	22	55	217	510
2018/19	65	80	31	6	38	20	57	228	511

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

156. Basic Education Statistics and the Essential Education Indicators and other relevant data on education are collected annually by MoE. In addition, at certain intervals, an “Education Brief” is published. The educational data collected are disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, language of instruction, geographical location, disability, etc. These and other bulletins are disseminated to all educational offices, as well as various government and non-government organizations.

157. To enhance the data collection process, training is regularly provided starting from regional level up to schools by the Research and Statistics Division. MoE works closely with UNESCO on this issue. This is in conformity with recommendations (paras. 19 and 20) of the Committee.

Pre-primary education

158. The GoSE believes that investment in early childhood development contributes directly to the promotion of child rights, poverty alleviation and sustainable human resource development. The main objective of pre-school education is to develop children’s knowledge, skills and attitudes and make them ready for the next educational level. In addition, it facilitates the socialization, creativity, critical thinking and self-esteem of the child. Pre-school education is provided in formal Kindergartens and in non-formal Community Care-giving Centres or Rural Community Children’s Centres.

159. During the period under review, much attention has been devoted to early child education, with special emphasis on rural areas. From 2014/15 up to 2018/19, the total number of formal pre-primary schools increased from 483 to 622 indicating a 29% increase. As a result, enrolment at the pre-school level has been consistently increasing. As can be seen from table 25, enrolment at the pre-primary level has increased by 9% in between 2014/15 and 2018/19. The table also shows that females constituted 49% of the total enrolment in 2018/19.

Table 20: Pre-primary level: gross and net enrolment ratios by year and sex

<i>Academic Year</i>	<i>Enrolment</i>			<i>GER</i>			<i>NER</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
2014/15	21 723	20 399	42 122	18.3	18.0	18.2	16.7	16.4	16.6
2015/16	23 264	21 969	45 233	19.4	19.2	19.3	17.7	17.5	17.6
2016/17	23 196	21 702	44 898	18.9	18.5	18.7	17.3	16.8	17.1
2017/18	24 231	22 965	47 196	19.4	19.2	19.3	17.5	17.4	17.4
2018/19	23 673	22 352	46 025	18.8	18.6	18.7	17.5	17.2	17.4

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

Key: GER is Gross Enrolment Ratio and NER is Net Enrolment Ratio.

160. As stated above, the GoSE is making efforts to expand access to pre-primary education by giving much attention to rural and remote areas. One can also note from table 26 that female enrolment in rural areas showed an increase of 30%.

Table 21: Pre-primary: rural/urban enrolment

Academic year	Rural			Urban		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
2014/15	15 306	7 846	7 460	26 816	13 881	12 935
2015/16	18 309	9 312	8 997	26 924	13 952	12 972
1216/17	18 206	9 362	8 844	26 692	13 834	12 858
2017/18	20 616	10 622	9 994	26 431	13 530	12 901
2018/19	19 778	10 058	9 720	26 247	13 615	12 632

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

Challenges in pre-primary education

161. The main factors that affect enrolment in pre-primary education are not the ones stated by the Committee. The main challenges are the low number of ECCE facilities or schools, untrained/uncertified teachers, the poor learning environment and irregular in-service training.

Elementary education

162. All children are expected to complete elementary and middle school education, while at least attaining the minimum learning achievements defined by the curriculum. The main objective of elementary education is to give children a firm ground in literacy, numeracy and life skills.

163. Table 27, indicates that students' enrolment at the elementary level has shown gradual decrease over the stated years. On the other hand, there was an increasing trend in NER during the same period. This could show that the number of the over aged students at this level has dropped out of the system from time to time. But an overall assessment is being made to make a deeper understanding of the situation. Nevertheless, it is to be recognized that a successful Complementary Elementary Education (CEE) has been on-going as a special programme devised to address the right of those over-age children to compensate the opportunity cost lost by attending in the normal school system curriculum but instead are made to attend the CEE programme.

Table 22: Elementary level: enrolment, gross and net enrolment ratios by year and sex

Academic Year	Enrolment			GER			NER		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2014/15	197 898	163 786	361 684	110.6	98.0	104.5	84.7	79.1	82.0
2015/16	192 977	160 882	353 859	112.6	100.5	106.7	84.5	79.5	82.1
2016/17	190 231	156 776	347 009	105.9	93.4	99.9	85.9	80.4	83.2
2017/18	191 995	157 758	349 753	104.5	92.2	98.7	85.7	81.2	83.5
2018/19	190 502	156 980	347 482	103.3	91.1	97.4	85.6	81.5	83.6

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

164. Table 28 indicates that enrolment at the elementary level in rural areas increased in 2018/19 compared to 2014/15, both for males and females. However, the enrolment in urban areas showed a decrease both for males and females during the same period and an overall assessment is being made to make a deeper understanding of the situation.

Table 23: Elementary level: Rural/Urban enrolment

Academic Year	Rural			Urban		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
2014/15	223 858	125 109	98 749	137 826	72 789	65 037
2015/16	213 669	118 869	94 800	140 190	74 108	66 082
2016/17	209 848	117 468	92 380	137 161	72 763	64 398
2017/18	215 189	120 218	94 971	134 564	71 777	62 787
2018/19	226 256	125 890	100 366	121 226	64 612	56 614

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

Major challenges in elementary education

165. The main challenges encountered at the elementary level are that a substantial number of rural schools operate under community provided shades, the shortage of competent mother tongue teachers, the fact that 17% of primary aged school children are out of school and the prevalence of high gender disparity in the lowlands.

Middle schools education

166. Table 29 indicates that enrolment at the middle school level increased by 20% during the years 2014/15 to 2018/19. Female enrolment rose by 20%. At the same time, GER and NER increased by 13.5 and 6.5 percentage points respectively.

Table 24: Middle school education: enrolment, gross and net enrolment ratios by year and sex

Academic Year	Enrolment			GER			NER		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2014/15	80 882	66 149	147 031	80.3	72.4	76.6	37.2	38.4	37.8
2015/16	76 925	64 821	141 746	77.9	72.6	75.4	39.8	42.1	40.9
2016/17	85 628	72 495	158 123	84.6	79.2	82.0	42.2	45.3	43.7
2017/18	93 830	80 526	174 356	90.9	86.2	88.7	43.2	47.0	45.0
2018/19	94 989	81 545	176 534	91.4	86.6	89.1	42.5	46.3	44.3

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

167. Table 30 shows that enrolment at the middle level increased both in urban and rural areas from 2014/15 to 2018/19. In rural areas total enrolment increased by 29% and female enrolment increased by 36%.

Table 25: Middle level: rural/urban enrolment

Academic Year	Rural			Urban		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
2014/15	70 112	40 528	29 584	76 919	40 354	36 565
2015/16	64 521	36 837	27 684	77 225	40 088	37 137
2016/17	75 071	42 549	32 522	83 052	43 079	39 973
2017/18	82 850	46 512	36 338	91 506	47 318	44 188
2018/19	90 495	50 153	40 262	86 119	44 836	41 283

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

168. The major challenges in Middle school education are that more than half (56%) of the appropriate age population is out of school, as well as the acute shortage of schools and teachers.

Elementary and middle school flow rates

169. GoSE has made concerted efforts to provide access to education in all corners of the country. Moreover, it has expanded access for school children from rural and remote areas by opening boarding schools and hostels. These efforts helped many disadvantaged children from rural and remote areas in general, and girls in particular to access education.

170. As indicated in table 31, the dropout rates at the elementary and middle school levels have decreased in 2018/19 as compared to 2014/15. This is partly the result of the additional boarding and para-boarding schools and hostels opened in many parts of the country. These facilities are increasingly mitigating the domestic burden, as well as the sanitation and distance problems that girl students face in remote rural areas. The issue of repetition, however, is still one of the main challenges both at the elementary and middle school levels. Generally, the government is mindful of the difficulties which children in rural and remote places, and especially girls, encounter and is making concerted efforts to overcome them.

Table 26: Elementary and middle school flow rates, by year and sex

Academic Year	Levels	Dropout%			Repetition%			Promotion%		
		Male	Fem.	Tot.	Male	Fem.	Tot.	Male	Fem.	Tot.
2014/15	Elementary	8.7	5.8	7.4	8.8	6.5	7.8	82.5	87.7	84.9
	Middle	16.2	9.1	13.0	19.5	11.9	16.1	64.3	79.0	70.9
2015/16	Elementary	7.2	4.9	6.1	10.1	7.6	9.0	82.7	87.5	84.9
	Middle	9.5	5.1	7.5	19.7	11.6	16.0	70.8	83.3	76.5
2016/17	Elementary	6.3	4.4	5.5	10.4	7.9	9.3	83.3	87.6	85.2
	Middle	9.5	5.1	7.5	20.2	12.3	16.5	70.3	82.7	76.0
2017/18	Elementary	6.1	4.2	5.2	10.5	8.2	9.4	83.4	87.6	85.3
	Middle	9.5	5.2	7.5	22.0	13.8	18.2	68.6	81.0	74.3
2018/19	Elementary	7.1	5.0	6.1	10.9	8.4	9.8	82.1	86.6	84.1
	Middle	12.7	7.2	10.1	21.5	13.7	17.9	65.9	79.1	72.0

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

Secondary education

171. Expanding Secondary Education has been one of the main efforts made during the past five years. Opening new secondary schools in rural areas, especially for hard-to-reach groups, was rigorously pursued by the government, in order to create opportunities for all school age children at this level and for girls in particular. Despite the government's efforts, enrolment at the secondary level had decreased by 11% between 2015/16 and 2017/18. However, it increased by almost 4% in 2018/19 compared to 2017/18. Female enrolment has also shown a similar trend in the same period.

Table 27: Secondary education: enrolment, gross and net enrolment ratios by year and sex

Academic year	Enrolment			GER			NER		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2014/15	53 102	44 115	97 217	31.7	28.2	30.0	18.4	18.0	18.2
2015/16	46 383	41 281	87 664	28.8	26.4	28.3	18.4	18.6	19.0

Academic year	Enrolment			GER			NER		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2016/17	45 387	41 234	86 621	27.5	27.1	27.3	17.5	19.2	18.3
2017/18	43 408	39 835	83 243	25.8	25.6	25.7	16.3	18.3	17.3
2018/19	44 593	41 638	86 231	26.4	26.6	26.5	17.1	19.6	18.3

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

172. As table 33 shows, total enrolment in rural secondary schools decreased from 2014/15 to 2017/18, but started to increase in 2018/19. Both male and female enrolments, showed a similar pattern in urban areas too. Throughout the period, female enrolment in urban areas showed a slight increase in 2018/19 as compared to 2017/18. However, male enrolment showed a decrease in the reporting period and needs further investigation.

Table 28: Secondary education: Rural/Urban enrolment

Academic Year	Rural			Urban		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
2014/15	40 139	22 329	17 810	57 078	30 773	26 305
2015/16	37 511	19 757	17 754	50 153	26 626	23 527
2016/17	35 885	18 989	16 896	50 736	26 398	24 338
2017/18	34 441	18 048	16 393	48 802	25 360	23 442
2018/19	38 263	20 194	18 069	47 968	24 399	23 569

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

173. Table 34 indicates that dropout rate at the secondary level showed a decrease of almost 14 percentage points from 2014/15 to 2018/19. In the same period, repetition decreased by almost 2.9%. Although the dropout rate and repetition rates decreased in 2018/19 as compared to 2014/15, the indicators show that both the drop out and repetition rates must still be reduced in the future.

Table 29: Secondary education: Flow rates by year and sex

Academic year	Drop out %			Repetition %			Promotion %		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2014/15	30.3	24.0	27.5	19.8	10.5	15.6	49.8	65.6	57.0
2015/16	14.5	11.1	12.9	23.3	12.3	18.1	62.2	76.7	68.9
2016/17	14.5	10.8	12.8	20.0	11.0	15.8	65.6	78.1	71.5
2017/18	13.3	10.2	11.8	19.8	11.3	15.8	66.9	78.5	72.4
2018/19	14.8	12.0	13.4	16.1	8.9	12.7	69.1	79.1	73.9

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential education indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

174. As part of their secondary education, students who have completed grade 11 go to the Warsay Yikealo Secondary School in Sawa from all over the country to attend grade 12. All students who achieve passing marks in the Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate Examination are enrolled in various colleges.

175. Students who fail to meet these college entrance requirements are assigned to various technical and vocational training institutions. In Eritrea, there is a proven culture whereby educational institutions have never been used for military training, and children have never been recruited into the army.

Asmara community college of education and technical/vocational education and training

176. Some students who complete grade 10 are mainstreamed to the Asmara Community College of Education (ACCE) and to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions. As shown in table 35, the student population at ACCE increased by 23.3 between 2014/15 and 2018/19. At the same time, female enrolment showed a slight decrease. Total enrolment at TVET institutions increased by 26% in the same period. Female enrolment also increased by 20%.

Table 30: Enrolment: ACCE, TVET and NAVCO

Academic Year	Asmara Community College Education		Technical and Vocational Education (TVET+NAVCO)	
	Female	Total	Female	Total
2014/15	434	656	1 786	3 623
2015/16	419	810	1 175	2 228
2016/17	416	856	2 353	4 747
2017/18	412	846	1 317	2 822
2018/19	416	856	2 242	4 911

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

Gender parity index (GPI)

177. The MoE has endeavoured to effectively and equitably address the education needs of socially disadvantaged groups in general, and the girl child in particular. Expanding educational opportunities for girls and women, and attaining their parity with boys and men by narrowing the gender gap have been major issues of concern. Much emphasis has been laid on ensuring the participation, retention and performance of girls. Though gender disparity still prevails, the Gender Parity Index has shown a promising trend at almost all levels as indicated in table 36.

Table 31: Gender parity index

Academic year	Pre-primary	Elementary	Middle	Secondary
2014/15	0.93	0.83	0.82	0.83
2015/16	0.94	0.83	0.84	0.89
2016/17	0.93	0.82	0.85	0.91
2017/18	0.94	0.82	0.86	0.92
2018/19	0.94	0.82	0.86	0.93

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

178. The efforts made during the stated years have resulted in a gradual increase in female enrolment at all levels. Thus, an increase of almost 5%, 17% and almost 1.4% was observed in enrolment at the elementary, middle and secondary levels respectively, in the span from 2014/15 to 2018/19. The net enrolment ratio for female students also showed a similar trend at all levels in the same period.

Table 32: Net enrolment ratio by year and sex

Academic Year	Elementary			Middle			Secondary		
	Enrolment		NER%	Enrolment		NER%	Enrolment		NER%
	Total	Female	F	Total	Female	F	Total	Female	F
2014/15	283 815	132 244	79.1	72 560	35 047	38.4	58 839	28 083	18.0

Academic Year	Elementary			Middle			Secondary		
	Enrolment		NER%	Enrolment		NER%	Enrolment		NER%
	Total	Female	F	Total	Female	F	Total	Female	F
2015/16	272 188	127 347	79.5	76 909	37 585	42.1	58 691	29 126	18.6
2016/17	289 174	134 886	80.4	84 179	41 468	45.3	58 077	29 244	19.2
2017/18	295 978	138 993	81.2	88 492	43 884	47.0	55 900	28 449	18.3
2018/19	298 418	140 439	81.5	87 816	43 602	46.3	59 647	30 650	19.6

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential education indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

179. The strategic interventions taken to bridge the existing gender disparity in the education sector include expansion of schools, preparation of Communication Strategy on girls' education and awareness campaigns. A study on menstrual hygiene management in Eritrean middle schools was also conducted. As a result of the latter, pilot projects in the Maekel (central) region, Warsai Yekaelo and some schools have already started to provide sanitation facilities for girls.

180. TVET is considered a key strategy for equipping people with relevant, adaptable skills for wage employment and for self-employment. In addition to formal TVET, non-formal skills development has been provided as a strategy to meet economic requirements. This is expected to help create self-employment and income generation for certain target groups in accordance with their needs and the needs of the nation. Various types of training are provided in TVET Centres. Students are trained for two years after they complete grade 10, or for one year after they complete grade 12.

Table 33: Technical and vocational education and training: enrolment by year & sex

Academic year	Technical Schools			National Centre for Vocational Training		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2014/15	850	718	1 568	987	1 068	2 055
2015/16	667	666	1 333	386	509	895
2016/17	1 416	1 264	2 680	978	1 089	2 067
2017/18	1 505	1 317	2 822	NA	NA	NA
2018/19	1 525	1 310	2 835	1 144	932	2 076

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

Nomadic education

181. The GoSE gives great emphasis to nomadic education. Yet students participation, class-room performance, gender balance and progression rates are still low. Education statistics indicate Eritrean nomads have much smaller enrolment than the national average. This is mainly because nomads live widely dispersed and constantly move from place to place to earn for their survival. Establishing the major social facilities like health clinics and primary education the GoSE is encouraging nomads to have a settled life at least for their families. In 2016/17, sixty five schools nomadic communities were served and 10 of these are boarding schools. The total enrolment in these schools in 2019 was 7,528, of which 46% were female.

Complementary elementary education (CEE)

182. The MoE is running a program of Complementary Elementary Education (CEE), for out-of-school children. The main objective of the CEE program is to provide three years education for out of school children aged 9–14 years. This program is equivalent to the five years of formal elementary education provided to younger children. The main beneficiaries of this program are girls from disadvantaged and remote, rural areas.

During the 2018/19 academic year, a total of 11,690 children enrolled 46 % of these were girls.

Table 34: CEE Program: Enrolment, dropout and completion by sex

Academic year	Enrolment		Dropout %		Completion %	
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
2014/15	7 032	2 990	15	15	85	85
2015/16	6 538	2 930	18	17	82	83
2016/17	8 589	3 994	15	15	85	85
2017/18	13 286	6 002	14	13	86	87
2018/19	11 690	5 347	15	15	85	85

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

Schools and teachers

183. Expanding access to education (with special emphasis on the disadvantaged) has been one of the targets of the government. A number of schools have been constructed and rehabilitated during the last five years. The number of schools at all levels in urban and rural areas has increased in 2018/19 as compared to 2014/15. Schools in rural areas increased by 26%, 8%, 16%, and 14% at the pre-primary, elementary, middle and secondary levels respectively, in 2018/19 as compared to 2014/15.

Table 35: Schools by level, location and year

Level	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
	Urban	Rural								
Pre primary	173	310	172	334	184	340	197	301	203	419
Elementary	182	773	186	772	187	784	198	789	173	836
Middle	99	253	103	259	105	266	115	267	102	300
Secondary	53	51	53	52	54	54	56	52	49	59

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

184. The MoE has been making concerted efforts to address the major challenges in teacher education. The total number of teachers increased in 2018/19 when compared to 2014/15, has been 22 %, 11%, and 17% at the pre-primary, elementary and middle school levels respectively. The number of female teachers showed a similar pattern in the stated period.

Table 36: Teachers by level and sex

Level	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
	Female	Total								
Pre-primary	1 418	1 456	1 558	1 601	1 503	1 541	1 538	1 603	1 751	1 876
Elementary	3 002	8 346	3 275	8 524	3 418	8 842	3 523	9 028	3 733	9 375
Middle	675	3 563	658	3 507	852	3 920	1 001	4 321	964	4 307
Secondary	631	2 800	536	2 567	591	2 547	713	2 810	599	2 516

Source: MoE, Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators, 2014/15–2018/19.

Leisure, recreation and cultural activities

185. Leisure, recreation and cultural activities are an integral part of the education system in the country. Physical education is provided at all levels. Sport competitions,

games and cultural activities are institutionalized at the regional, sub-regional and school levels. As part of the co-curricular activities in schools, students participate in variety of sports and cultural activities. Every year, competitions are held among schools in various cultural and sports activities. Many students participate in cultural activities according to their interests. Some of the cultural activities conducted in schools include: debating, general knowledge contests, painting, arts and handcrafts, innovation or creativity, drama and music. Moreover, there are a number of recreational establishments for youth in the six zobas (regions) of the country, and there are plans to expand them.

H. Special protection measures

Children affected by armed conflict

186. The GoSE refers to the Committee's alleged concerns (para. 63) and recommendation thereto (para. 64 a – d). It wishes to inform the Committee that the State party has ratified the optional protocol of the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict and has been strictly observing the Convention and its attendant protocol. Unlike the Committee's narratives, in Eritrea, conscription into the military, including in to the National Service, by law and practice, only applies to those above the age of 18 years. This is plainly stated in Proclamation No. 51/1994. According to Proclamation No. 82/1995, full time students and those who are certified medically unfit are also exempted from National Service, and this equally applies to all military training and recruitment.

187. Child labour is strictly prohibited in Eritrea by the national laws and international labour conventions. The allegations on child labour are unacceptable. In July 2018, an ILO technical mission visited Eritrea and engaged with various ministers, government officials and leaders of national civic organizations, to assess the actual labour rights situation in Eritrea, as well as to identify the areas of technical cooperation. Since the true nature of the Eritrean labour practices has been verified by various trade union organizations, including the ILO, focus should be geared to engage in meaningful interaction.

188. A labour inspection report carried out in 2019 shows that, in all of the inspected establishments, there was not a single specific infringement or contravention of the child-related labour standards. Moreover, the tripartite labour partners have been engaged in constructive dialogue with ILO experts and a positive relationship of cooperation is flourishing.

189. Since child labour is prohibited by national law the GoSE is mindful of the negative or hazardous consequences of it, strictly inspects child labour in large scale agricultural activities, forestry, fishing, manufacturing and construction sectors. Article 69 of the Labour Proclamation of Eritrea No. 118/2001, provides a comprehensive list of work domains prohibited to young employees.

190. Additionally, Article 68 of the same Labour Proclamation prohibits employing persons under the age of 14 years, and a young employee may not be assigned to work between 6:00 PM and 6:00 AM. Similarly, Article 9 (2) states, besides no contract of employment shall be enforceable against a person below the age of eighteen, if it is determined to be prejudicial to the interest of that person.

Children in street situations

191. In line with the Committee's recommendation (para. 67) in 2016 the MoLSW conducted a situational analysis of vulnerable and street children, as part of the review for the comprehensive national policy for the child. The assessment indicated that the factors contributing to the drifting of children into streets in Eritrea are increased migration to urban areas, family breakdowns, poverty induced by man-made and natural calamities, the influence of peers and the influence of environments that encourage

delinquency. The total number of vulnerable and street children in all six regional administrations is estimated to be 5,000.

192. Policy statements concerning street children were deliberately included in the Comprehensive Child Policy of 2016. This document gives directives to national stakeholders such as the MoLSW, MoE, MoH and NUEYS to endeavour for the reduction of the phenomenon, and to make provisions for appropriate services for these children in their strategic and operational plans.

193. The problems of street children are mainly dealt with through the community based approach, which has five major components, namely; i) educational support, ii) public sensitization of families, communities, teachers and school children, iii) guidance and counselling services, iv) vocational training and v) income-generating activities for their families. The MoLSW, in cooperation with partners, has been providing preventive and rehabilitative support to street children to enable them become self-supporting and productive. Between 2014 and 2019, a total of 4,500 vulnerable and street children were supported, in cooperation with UNICEF, with cash for registration fee, school uniforms, school supplies and books.

Trafficking, smuggling and abduction

194. Trafficking is criminalized in the Transitional Penal Code of Eritrea (Articles 605-07). Article 607 states that whosoever makes arrangements or provisions of any kind for the trafficking of women, infants and young persons, is punishable by Law. Eritrea is a state party to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and to the Trafficking Protocol. The concern of the Committee (para. 68 b) implicating the involvement of Eritrean officials in the crime is absurd and very offensive. The Committee needs to learn the transnational nature of human trafficking and smuggling, which touches upon different territories and legal systems and creates difficulties in apprehending perpetrators of such crimes and bringing them to justice. The GoSE has intensified its efforts to combat trafficking in persons, including at the regional level through the AU-Horn of Africa Counter Trafficking Initiative and Better Migration.

195. In February 2013, Eritrea formally requested the UN Secretary General, and in August 2015 called on the UN Security Council for an independent and transparent investigation of the networks perpetrating “hideous slavery” and human trafficking and to bring to justice all culpable parties, but to no avail. Nevertheless, Eritrea continues to play an active role in the Horn of Africa Anti-migration and Human Trafficking effort (Khartoum Process) and other international initiatives.

196. Eritrea has been engaged in different international, regional and national efforts to tackle illegal migration, human trafficking and smuggling including participation in the Palermo Convention, Valetta Summit (joint declaration and action plan), Khartoum process, Better Migration Management (BBM), the Global Compact for Migration and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Eritrea also participates in workshops organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

197. In accordance with the Palermo Convention and within the framework of the UNODC Regional Program for Eastern Africa (2016–2021), Eritrea has stepped up its engagement with regional and international stakeholders. This is to promote effective responses by member states in Eastern Africa to transnational organized crime, illicit trafficking, and illicit drug smuggling at the legal, technical and policy levels.

198. Eritrea has partnered with the UNODC in preventing transnational organized crimes and related illegal acts and the cooperation. Different workshops and ‘training of trainers’ had been conducted in partnership with UNODC in this endeavour inside and abroad.

Administration of juvenile justice

199. The State party refers to pages 67 paras. 385–387 of the 4th Country Report and the Committee’s recommendation (para. 71 a, b, c, d & e). The Eritrean criminal laws

give precedence to the rehabilitation and enablement of young offenders to become valuable members of the community. In handling young offenders, the Transitional Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code contain special procedures. Accordingly, informal procedures are followed in handling cases of young offenders. Young offenders are neither subjected to ordinary penalties nor kept in custody with adult offenders. The alternative penalties applicable to juvenile offenders may include admission to a curative institution, supervised education, and school or home arrest. Putting young offenders in custody is taken as a last resort. During imprisonment, educational and health services, vocational training which suits their age, access to libraries, as well as radio and television broadcasts are provided with good intention. The young offenders are not only rehabilitated, but also assisted to realize their full development potentials.

200. As stated in the 4th report, cases of children in conflict with the law such cases are heard in closed sessions that are separate from those for adult offenders. The GoSE also organizes after care services for children in conflict with the law, whereby they complete probation and correctional periods.

201. Under Article 174 of the TCPC, the court must appoint an advocate to assist the young person in cases where no parent, guardian or other person in loco parentis appears to represent the young person, or when the young person is charged with an offence punishable with rigorous imprisonment exceeding 10 years. The GoSE pays the fees of the advocate thus hired.

202. MoLSW in cooperation the Eritrea Police Force conducted several workshops and training courses for police and prison officers, public prosecutors and community judges on strengthening juvenile justice and Children in Conflict with the Law (CCWL), and the administration of juvenile justice.

Table 40: Number of robbery related juvenile offence cases reported annually

Age	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
<15	2	-	2	2	5	2	13
16-17	4	5	7	6	3	14	39
Total	6	5	9	8	8	16	52

Source: Eritrean Police Statistics Unit, 2020.

203. To promote child-friendly spaces for CCWL, the MoLSW, in partnership with partners, organized capacity building training courses for judges, police officers, social workers, members of child rights committees and others involved in the process of child justice. In an effort to promote child-friendly spaces in juvenile correctional rehabilitation centres and detention facilities, five detention places were provided with various recreational materials, including mini-libraries, TV sets, recreational kits, painting, IEC materials, sport materials, Renovation of buildings, and erection of partitioning of spaces aimed at to minimizing contact with adult offenders have also been carried out.

Children belonging to minority groups

204. The State party categorically rejects the allegations (para. 72) that “the traditional means of livelihood of some ethnic minority groups, including the Afar and the Kunama people, are being destroyed and that those groups are being displaced from their traditional territories” and the recommendations thereto as an unacceptable way of collecting malignant information on the part of the Committee.

I. Ratification of the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure

205. The State party has taken note of the Committee's recommendation on the ratification of this optional protocol and assures the Committee that due considerations will be given.

J. Ratification of international human rights instruments

206. Eritrea has acceded to several international human rights instruments (refer to 4th report). Eritrea in 2014 ratified the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment as well as the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children and in 2019 the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Signing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is being given due consideration.

207. An initial report on the optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the sales of children, child prostitution, and child pornography was submitted as an annex to Eritrea's 4th CRC Eritrea report.

K. Cooperation with regional and international bodies

208. The GoSE is well cognizant of the responsibilities and interplay required of it upon its entry into agreements and its accession to international treaties and conventions. Hence, Eritrea's cooperation with the regional and international bodies' cited in the committee's recommendation (para. 77) is something to be taken for granted.

209. Eritrea enjoys cordial relationships with the UN specialized agencies through the Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework 2017–2021 (SPCF). It maintains working relationships with the ILO through the Tripartite Labour partnerships, with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, with the Commission of the African Charter on Human & People's Rights, African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC).

210. Contrary to the Committee's perception, the State party cooperates with the (ACERWC) through the submission of periodic reports and follow up discussions. For instance, the 2015, Banjul discussion and the joint collaboration for the conference on the popularization of Agenda 2040 and findings of the study on Children on the Move in the Horn and North Africa regions, which was held in Asmara in 2019 could be mentioned.

V. Implementing and reporting**Follow up and dissemination**

211. The State party has seriously considered the Committee's observations and recommendations and took appropriate actions, as well as provided adequate explanations, as necessary.
