ERITREA
Second Voluntary National Review of Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals

JULY 2024
The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.
## CONTENTS

List of Figures ........................................................................................................................................... V
List of Tables ............................................................................................................................................... V
List of Abbreviations ................................................................................................................................. VI
Weights and Measures ............................................................................................................................... VII
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................. VIII
Message from the Minister of Finance and National Development ..................................................... 1
Message from the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Eritrea ................... 2
Executive Summary ...................................................................................................................................... 3

I - Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 6
  1.1 - Background and Outline .................................................................................................................. 6
  1.2 - Country Profile and General Context ............................................................................................. 7

II – Methodology and Preparation of Eritrea’s Second VNR ................................................................. 11
  2.1 - Process of Preparation of the VNR ................................................................................................. 11
  2.2 - Data and Scope ............................................................................................................................... 13
  2.3 - Development of the VNR ............................................................................................................. 14

III - Policy and Enabling Environment ................................................................................................. 15
  3.1 - Incorporation and Alignment of Agenda 2030 into the National Framework .................................. 15
  3.2 - Partnerships and Cooperation ...................................................................................................... 16
  3.3 - Leaving No One Behind ............................................................................................................... 17

IV - Reviewing Progress on the SDGs ................................................................................................. 21
  4.1 - SDG 4: Quality Education ........................................................................................................... 22
  4.2 - SDG 5: Gender Equality ............................................................................................................. 35
  4.3 - SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation ............................................................................................ 46

V - Conclusion and Steps Forward ....................................................................................................... 54

References .................................................................................................................................................. 56
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 - VNR Preparation Bodies .................................................................12
Figure 4.1 - Grade 3 Results on Monitoring Learning Achievement Survey ..................22
Figure 4.2 - Grade 5 Results on Monitoring Learning Achievement Survey ..................23
Figure 4.3 - Grade 12 Students Attaining Diploma or Degree on ESELCE Exam (percentage) ........................................................................................................23
Figure 4.4 - Pre-Primary Gross Enrolment Ratio ..................................................24
Figure 4.5 - Pre-Primary Net Enrolment Ratio ...........................................................25
Figure 4.6 - Adult Literacy Rate ...........................................................................30
Figure 4.7 - Youth Literacy Rate ...........................................................................30
Figure 4.8 - Access to Safe Water in Schools (percentage) .........................................32
Figure 4.9 - Access to Toilets and Latrines in Schools (percentage) .........................32
Figure 4.10 - Official Development Assistance Flows for Scholarships, 2010-2021 ........33
Figure 4.11 - Qualified Teachers (percentage), 2015/16-2022/23 .................................34
Figure 4.12 - Women Aged 20-49 Years Married Before 15 and 18 Years (percentage) ....38
Figure 4.13 - FGM/C Prevalence in Young Girls in Communities Under Study (percentage) ........................................................................................................40
Figure 4.14 - National Formal Labor Force Participation (percentage of total workers) ....41
Figure 4.15 - Gender Composition in Managerial Positions (percentage) ......................42
Figure 4.16 - Married Women's Decisions Regarding Their Own Healthcare (percentage) ........................................................................................................42
Figure 4.17 - Contraceptive Use Among Women Aged 15-49 Years (percentage) ..........43
Figure 4.18 - Married Women's Decisions Regarding Contraceptive Use (percentage) ........................................................................................................43
Figure 4.19 - Percentage of Villages Nationwide Certified as Open Defecation Free ......47
Figure 4.20 - Number of Villages Annually Certified as Open Defecation Free ..............48
Figure 4.21 - Percentage of Area Covered by Enclosures ........................................50
Figure 4.22 - Mangrove Plantation (Area in Km²) .....................................................51
Figure 4.23 - Official Development Assistance for WASH, 2000-2021 .......................52
Figure 4.24 - Percentage of Community-Based WASH Management Committees .........53

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 - VNR Preparation Bodies and Members ..................................................12
Table 4.1 - Enrolments in Degree and Diploma Programs within Tertiary Level of Education ........26
Table 4.2 - Gender Parity Index ...........................................................................28
Table 4.3 - Extent to Which GCED and ESD are Mainstreamed in Education ...............31
Table 4.4 - Selected List of International Rights Agreements to which Eritrea is a Party ........36
Table 4.5 - Available and Utilized Water Resources ...............................................48
Table 4.6 - Implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management .....................49
Table 4.7 - Level of Community Participation within WASH System .......................53
# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Celsius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENSAD</td>
<td>Community of Sahel-Saharan States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMESA</td>
<td>Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDF</td>
<td>Eritrean Defense Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EriTel</td>
<td>Eritrean Telecommunications Services Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>Education for Sustainable Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESELCE</td>
<td>Eritrean Secondary Education School Leaving Certificate Examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGM</td>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWA</td>
<td>Forest and Wildlife Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-Based Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCED</td>
<td>Global Citizenship Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHG</td>
<td>Greenhouse Gases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HA</td>
<td>Hectare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HLPF</td>
<td>High-Level Political Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communications Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGAD</td>
<td>Intergovernmental Authority on Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMS</td>
<td>Kilometers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoA</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoD</td>
<td>Ministry of Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoEM</td>
<td>Ministry of Energy and Mining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoFA</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoFND</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance and National Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoJ</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoLG</td>
<td>Ministry of Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoLSW</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoLWE</td>
<td>Ministry of Land, Water and Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoLWE-DoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Land, Water and Environment-Department of Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoLWE-WRD</td>
<td>Ministry of Land, Water and Environment-Water Resource Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoMR</td>
<td>Ministry of Marine Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoT</td>
<td>Ministry of Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoTC</td>
<td>Ministry of Transport and Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Metric Ton</td>
<td>2,204.62 Pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kilogram</td>
<td>2.204.62 Pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Meter</td>
<td>3.28 Feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Millimeter</td>
<td>0.03937 Inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kilometer</td>
<td>0.62 Miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Hectare</td>
<td>2.471 Acres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Led and coordinated by the Ministry of Finance and National Development (MoFND), Eritrea’s second Voluntary National Review (VNR) has been the culmination of a highly participatory, all-inclusive, collaborative effort, involving the diverse, substantial, and extremely valuable contributions of a host of partners and wide range of stakeholders.

Although we are unable to completely list them all here, our profound gratitude and deepest appreciation go to the many individuals, various government ministries, departments, and offices, different groups and organizations, and numerous other entities that provided vital input, offered tireless efforts, and played an immensely positive, facilitative role in the completion of the VNR process and report.

As well, special thanks are extended to H.E. Osman Saleh, Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Tesfai Ghebresellassie, Minister of Land, Water and Environment, H.E. Semere Russom, Minister of Education, and Ms. Tekea Tesfamichael, President of the National Union of Eritrean Women, for their visionary, decisive leadership, perceptive guidance, and strong, unwavering commitment. The MoFND is also immensely grateful for the constructive engagement and multifaceted support of the Office of the United Nations system in Eritrea.

Sincere thanks and many acknowledgements are additionally addressed to the Ministry of Information, and H.E. Yemane GebreMeskel, Minister of Information, for their tremendous assistance, particularly in the preparation of audiovisual materials and the provision of photographs.
MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

I am delighted to share the 2024 Voluntary National Review report with Eritreans, partners, and the international community. This report highlights progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, with a particular focus on SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 6 (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene).

Eritrea is the culmination of a long fight for human rights, independence, growth, and prosperity. The country remains unwavering in its commitment to promoting social justice, equitable development, and long-term sustainability, while meeting the population's growing demands.

In brief, Eritrea's development goals are as follows: 1) establishing and sustaining full employment for all working citizens through the use of modern production methods; 2) fair distribution of national income among citizens; 3) fair distribution of social service-providing institutions across all regions; 4) meeting the rising demands for population consumption needs through consistent and wide-ranging productive investment and price stability and; 5) promoting regional and global cooperation.

Eritrea's development policies, strategies, plans, and programs closely align with a number of global and regional development frameworks, including the SDGs and the 2063 Agenda, while the country continues to be committed towards their realization.

Eritrea has demonstrated extraordinary resilience in the face of several considerable challenges, including regional and global conflicts, sanctions and coercive economic measures, climate-related issues, and pandemic-related economic shocks. The consistent economic growth of recent decades has resulted in improved citizen well-being and general developmental progress, including an increase in life expectancy to about 67 years, poverty reduction, significant improvements in food and nutrition security, greater access to education and literacy, steps forward on gender empowerment, and improved access to water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Eritrea is among the few countries in Africa that achieved the Millennium Development Goals related to health, while in its first Voluntary National Review, submitted in 2022, it reported important progress on SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being). The preparation and submission of Eritrea's 2024 Voluntary National Review provides an excellent opportunity for the country to assess its progress towards implementation of SDGs 4, 5, and 6, as well as identify challenges and share lessons.

The Ministry of Finance and National Development appreciates the contributions of all stakeholders involved in the preparation of this Voluntary National Review, including public, private, and nongovernmental actors, as well as the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office in Eritrea, and encourages them to further enhance their commitment and efforts in assisting the Eritrean government in fulfilling its commitment to achieving the SDGs.

H.E. GIORGIS TEKLEMKAEL (PHD)
MINISTER OF FINANCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
GOVERNMENT OF THE STATE OF ERITREA
MESSAGE FROM UNITED NATIONS RESIDENT & HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

As the world enters the second half of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the need to accelerate implementation towards a more just, equal, and sustainable world has never been greater. Against this backdrop, I wish to heartily congratulate the Government of the State of Eritrea and its people on the presentation of their second Voluntary National Review at the High-Level Political Forum (2024). Concerted efforts to deliver on this global agenda are yielding tangible and transformational development results in Eritrea.

The 2030 Agenda encourages Member States to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven”. This report is a reflection of Eritrea’s commitment to regular, consultative and participatory reviews of its progress on SDGs. A good VNR is contingent upon timely, reliable, and disaggregated quality data to inform policy interventions.

The review process and results visibly demonstrate the leadership and commitment by the Government to deliver meaningful change in the lives of every Eritrean. The UN system in Eritrea, as a strategic partner to the Government, is proud to identify itself with these results, and proud that this partnership has leveraged a diversity of human, financial, and institutional resources to drive real change in the lives of Eritrean women, men, boys, and girls. Achieving the SDGs in Eritrea requires a whole-of-society approach, greater partnerships, and complementarity across development areas.

I am particularly pleased to note the increasingly strong enabling policy and institutional environment in Eritrea to accelerate on sustainable development. In spite of myriad risks that the country faces, including debilitating effects of climate change, repressive economic sanctions, and a fluid regional geopolitical context, Eritrea has achieved significant progress across the three goals highlighted in this report: namely Goals 4 (Quality Education); 5 (Gender Equality); and 6 (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene). This progress has been built upon targeted policy responses and efforts that have ensured that wider social, environmental, and economic dimensions of sustainable development are achieved and shared across the country focused in particular on reaching the furthest behind first and leaving no one behind.

For its part, the UN development system in Eritrea recommits to continue to contribute and scale up critical functions to the partnership, including integrated policy and normative support, capacity development, technical assistance, and leveraging new partnerships in support of national priorities consistent with the SDGs. The UN further pledges to support the Government in strengthening the institutional infrastructure, the national statistical system, and provision of disaggregated data to improve future monitoring and reporting of development results.

NAHLA VALJI
UNITED NATIONS RESIDENT AND HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR, ERITREA
In the years since first pledging its commitment at the United Nations in 2015, Eritrea has exerted extensive, multifaceted efforts towards nation-building, long-term inclusive growth and sustainable development, and realizing the 2030 Agenda. To date, it has continued to work to create a solid foundation and made tangible strides in a number of areas, while being fully cognizant that additional action and sustained efforts are necessary to drive ahead, achieve further improvements, and meet its lofty aspirations.

In addition to representing an important progressive milestone for the country, Eritrea’s second Voluntary National Review (VNR) reflects the country’s deep and enduring commitment to advancing the 2030 Agenda and its wide-ranging developmental priorities, as well as to meaningfully working with the international community towards achieving a better future for all. The review seeks to build upon the momentum, gains, and lessons accrued from the country’s inaugural VNR report, and it also offers deeper insight into and injects further impetus for its nation-building and developmental efforts.

Eritrea’s VNR preparation process is rooted in a strong commitment to inclusiveness, transparency, and a highly collaborative, participatory approach, serving as a clear reflection of its wider holistic, all-of-government and all-of-society view of nation-building and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Based on several different factors, such as the close interlinkages and tight synergies between the SDGs, availability of valid and accurate data to support evidence-based reporting and defined requirements, the country’s past VNR report, and Eritrea’s existing national framework and domestic general context, the review details progress on SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation).

The Government’s developmental policies and priorities, which harmonize focus and objectives across political, economic, social, and environmental dimensions, remain highly consistent with the guiding themes and central principles of the 2030 Agenda. This provides a robust foundation and conducive setting for transforming Eritrea into a more prosperous, inclusive, and resilient nation.

The principles of social justice, self reliance, equality, and leaving no one behind are deeply embedded within Eritrea’s pursuit of nation-building, its longstanding and broad development framework, and its concerted efforts toward improving the wellbeing and living standards of all its citizens. The country continues to take strong and positive action through a plethora of initiatives and programs to eliminate poverty and inequality, promote gender equality and empowerment, secure opportunities for all, eradicate all forms of stigma, discrimination, prejudice, and ostracization, create a more inclusive, fair, and just nation, and prioritize reaching those furthest behind first.

Despite being confronted by diverse challenges and a difficult regional socio-political climate characterized by significant insecurity, instability, and multiple overlapping crises, Eritrea has made important strides in a number of SDGs in general, and SDGs 4, 5, and 6, in particular. Making progress on the SDGs within such a challenging context is
contingent on the collective ability of the Eritrean people to address multidimensional challenges with a special focus on resilience-related targets and indicators.

Education is one of the pillars of Eritrea's development agenda and it is provided free-of-charge, from the primary to the tertiary level. Within both urban and rural areas, hundreds of new schools, learning centers, and libraries have been built, as older ones have been markedly renovated or upgraded. The number of schools at all levels has multiplied from just over 500 in 1991 to 1,930 in 2015 and to 2,351 last year, with many more currently under planning or in the process of being constructed. Accordingly, enrolments at the primary, middle, and secondary levels have increased from 353,859, 141,746, and 87,664 in 2015 to 398,090, 176,162, and 88,984 in 2023, respectively.

Parallel to these advances, the number of qualified teachers has been increased at all levels, and significant progress has been registered with regard to literacy. For adults, it has risen from 46 percent in 1990 to 77 percent in 2018, while for youth it has increased from 61 to 94 percent across the same period. Importantly, parity between girls and boys is fully achieved at middle level (1.0) and almost achieved at pre-primary and secondary levels (0.97 and 0.96, respectively), while it is slightly lower at primary level (0.92). Eritrea is also implementing multilingualism and aiming to expand access to education for students with disabilities. As well, national curricula are regularly updated and enhanced, while technical and vocational education and training is being expanded to help develop skills and provide youths with a viable avenue towards employment and sustainable livelihoods.

Highly prominent among the list of Eritrea's national priorities is advancing gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, and the promotion and protection of their inherent human rights. Recognizing the differing life conditions and experiences of women and girls, and seeking to redress past inequities and historical disadvantages or discrimination, progressive and affirmative action measures have been enacted, most notably within the spheres of education, employment, and public life. National proclamations on labor, nationality, citizenship, and land reform have been passed and are strictly enforced to guarantee women equal access to citizenship, employment, and fair pay, and allow them the opportunity to access and utilize land without discrimination. Rates of harmful traditional practices have been significantly reduced, while rates of literacy, enrolment, and labor participation have risen.
The review revealed that women account for marginally over half – about 51 percent – of the country’s total formal labor force, constitute about 46 percent of all employees holding managerial positions, and make up 22 and 29 percent of all members of the National Assembly and Regional Assemblies, respectively. In surveyed communities, the prevalence of female genital mutilation among girls under 15 years has substantially dropped from 18.2 percent in 2014 to 2.3 percent in 2020, with the practice almost nonexistent among girls under five, with prevalence falling from 6.9 percent to 0.54 percent during the same period. Girls and women are tangibly contributing within all areas of society and in many diverse, important ways, ultimately playing a vital role in families, communities, the nation’s socio-economic improvement, and its general development.

The proportion of the population with access to safe drinking water has been increased in both rural and urban areas. Within rural areas, where the large majority of the country’s people resides, approximately 79 percent of the total population has access to safely managed drinking water services, up from 72 percent in 2015, while access to within urban areas is approximately 95 percent – a 5 percent increase compared to the baseline year of 2015.

The nationwide access to improved sanitation and hygiene facilities has been steadily expanding, with 93 percent of the nation’s towns and villages declared and certified as open defecation free, up from 32 percent in 2015. A number of vital steps have been taken in order to protect and restore water-related ecosystems, as well as combat land degradation, deforestation, and climate change, including community afforestation and reforestation campaigns, the construction of thousands of kilometers of terraces and hundreds of dams, and the promotion of renewable energy sources for both households and institutions that provide social and economic services.

At the same time, a number of challenges remain within the areas of provision of quality education, women and girls’ empowerment, and access to improved water, sanitation and hygiene services. Moving forward, Eritrea reaffirms its commitment to consolidating improvements, addressing challenges, and driving forward progress towards forging a nation of sustainable growth and prosperity, social justice, harmony, and inclusion, dignity, peace, and environmental resilience, as well as accelerating achievement toward the SDGs while leaving no one behind.
I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 - Background and Outline

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by Eritrea and all other Member States of the United Nations (UN) during the 70th Session of the General Assembly in September 2015, is a transformative global initiative and crucial global milestone. As a universal commitment, the 2030 Agenda envisions a secure world free of poverty and hunger, with full and productive employment, access to quality education and universal health coverage, the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and an end to degradation of the natural environment.

At its fundamental core are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent collective and concrete call for action by all countries – large and small, developed and developing, and in all contexts – to address the world’s most pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. Building on the success, lessons, and experiences of the Millennium Development Goals, they recognize that eliminating poverty and other deprivations must go closely hand-in-hand with multifaceted strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur socioeconomic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to protect and preserve the world’s oceans and forests. The SDGs – ambitious, universal, interconnected, and indivisible – also represent a vital planning and follow-up tool for countries at the national and local levels. With their long-term, crosscutting approach, they offer countries useful, invaluable support on the path towards sustained, inclusive, and environmentally friendly development, through the formulation of public policies and budget, monitoring, and evaluation instruments.

In the years since first pledging its commitment at the UN in 2015, Eritrea has exerted extensive, multifaceted efforts towards nation-building, long-term inclusive growth and sustainable development, and realizing the 2030 Agenda. To date, it has continued to work to create a solid foundation and made tangible strides in a number of areas, while being fully cognizant that additional action and sustained efforts are necessary to drive ahead, achieve further improvements, and meet its lofty aspirations. Although it has been confronted by myriad diverse challenges and a difficult regional socio-political climate characterized by significant insecurity, instability, and multiple overlapping crises, it boldly endeavors to forge a nation of sustainable growth and prosperity, social justice, harmony, and inclusion, dignity, peace, and environmental resilience, while leaving no one behind.
Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are a critical element of implementing the 2030 Agenda. At both the sub-national, national, and global levels, effective follow-up and review is essential for improving action and accelerating progress in achieving the ambitious and interlinked SDGs. The present report, Eritrea’s second VNR of progress towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda, builds upon the momentum, progress, and lessons from the country’s inaugural VNR, focusing on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), which was conducted and submitted in 2022.

In addition to representing an important progressive milestone for the country, Eritrea’s second VNR reflects the country’s deep and enduring commitment to advancing the 2030 Agenda and its wide-ranging developmental priorities, as well as to meaningfully working with the international community towards achieving a better future for all. The report shares Eritrea individual experiences and offers an invaluable, detailed overview of SDGs progress, gaps and challenges, and lessons learned, while additionally helping to identify catalytic and transformative priorities and steps forward to enable and scale up SDGs progress in the country. In addition, the VNR preparation process has been an effective tool to raise awareness and deepen understanding about the 2030 Agenda within government, various institutions, other entities, and the wider public, and also to help strengthen active participation and evidence-based policymaking. Importantly, it has been conducted and developed in the positive spirit of constructive peer learning, mutual exchange, and promoting transparency, with a firm view towards strengthening solidarity, widening partnerships, and building synergies, accelerating improvements, and driving more effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In terms of its overall structure and general elements, Eritrea’s second VNR report is largely guided by and highly consistent with the practical steps and broad template outlined in the UN Secretary-General’s Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines for VNRs and the Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews (2024 Edition), developed by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA).

A brief snapshot of Eritrea and its general context is provided in the following section of this introductory chapter. Subsequently, Chapter 2 sets out the methodological approach adopted and process of preparing Eritrea’s second VNR, while the third chapter features an overview of the policy framework and environment for enabling and driving sustainable development in the country, including the institutional mechanisms and measures taken to provide every person with the opportunities that they need to prosper and ensure that no one is left behind. In Chapter 4, the progress made in achieving the SDGs in the country is presented, with a special emphasis on SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). The report ends with Chapter 5, which concludes and discusses several remaining gaps and challenges.

1.2 - Country Profile and General Context

Possessing a rich history, blend of beautiful cultures, and vibrant diversity, Eritrea is one of the world’s youngest countries, having won its de facto independence in 1991 and achieving its de jure independence in 1993. It is located in the Horn of Africa and strategically situated on the western shore of the Red Sea. The country’s total land area is approximately 124,320 square kilometers (km²) with a coastline spanning approximately 3,300 kms, inclusive of its 354 scattered islands, while its territorial waters within the Red Sea extend to cover a total area of about 55,000 km². Mainly arid and semi-arid, with little and erratic rainfall, Eritrea is administratively and fiscally organized into six main regions, locally called “zobas”, which vary substantially in terms of their respective size, population, biodiversity, geography, and socioeconomic conditions.
The current total population of Eritrea is estimated to be about 3.7 million, with a rate of natural increase of approximately 2.4 percent. Almost 40 percent of Eritreans are under the age of 15 years and about 72.5 percent under 35 years, indicating a young overall population and presenting significant potential for a demographic dividend in the future. About two-thirds of the country’s population lives in rural areas, while population density in the country currently stands at approximately 30 people per km² of land area. The rate of urbanization continues to increase nationwide, a transition that offers great opportunities but at the same time also poses significant challenges if it is not properly managed.

Among Eritrea’s most unique and beautiful features is its rich, colorful diversity, along with its high levels of internal peace, tolerance, and stability. The country’s population, which blends different sociocultural elements, is comprised of nine ethnolinguistic groups and nearly split evenly between two main religious faiths, specifically Islam and Christianity.

Despite the fact that Eritrea accounts for among the smallest shares of total global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, it remains extremely vulnerable to the variegated and adverse effects of climate change. Both the country’s marine and terrestrial ecosystems have been negatively affected. Across the past 60 years, it is estimated that the country’s average temperature has risen by approximately 1.7°C, at an average rate of around 0.37°C per decade, with far-reaching consequences and multilayered, multidimensional impacts related to biodiversity loss, sea level rise, coral bleaching due to an increase in sea water temperature, as well as the resilience of local ecosystems.

Eritrea has underpinned its long-term development strategy on the principle of self-reliance to achieve rapid, balanced, home-grown and sustainable economic growth with social equity and justice. It is currently classified as a low-income country, and although economic growth during recent years has been characterized by considerable volatility and dramatic swings, there is a potentially favorable outlook for the near future. Modest growth is projected moving forward, driven by several different factors.

A critical part of Eritrea’s economy, communities, and broader societal framework is rainfed agriculture and pastoralism. Farming, animal herding, and fishing account for about one third of the economy and are the mainstay of livelihoods for approximately 65-70 percent of the population. With the country’s significant agricultural potential remaining largely untapped, further development through critical interventions can help to unlock a wealth of positive outcomes. While still in the relatively early stages of development, the country’s manufacturing sector holds great promise and potential to facilitate industrialization, attract investment, drive sustainable and inclusive growth and development, and create decent employment opportunities. While economic diversification has received considerable attention from the government and development partners, progress in this area, as with many other countries in Africa, has not been as desired. The export basket contains a limited number of goods, such as zinc ores and concentrates, copper ores and concentrates, and gold unwrought or in semi-manufactured forms, which account for approximately 90 percent of all exports. Progress and improvement in the manufacturing sector may also serve to promote diversification, which can reduce vulnerability to the negative effects of economic, climate, and exogenous shocks and fluctuating prices for raw material exports.

Eritrea’s long, pristine shoreline on the Red Sea offers significant potential for the establishment of a dynamic and thriving blue economy. To date, the country’s wide-ranging and substantial marine resources have remained relatively underexploited. Furthermore, Eritrea’s geostrategic location, positioned along one of the world’s busiest and most important international maritime shipping routes, presents boundless opportunities to become a major regional and global transshipment and logistics hub, while the country’s rich biodiversity, abundance of unique socio-cultural and historical sites, untouched

---

3. NSO 2024; UNFPA 2023
4. MoFND 2022; MoLWE 2021; World Bank 2021
5. FAO 2021; MoFND 2022
6. BACI 2021
islands, and favorable climate, combined with Eritrea’s peace and security and the general warm hospitality of its people, raise substantial possibilities for a thriving tourism sector. Forestry, too, provides wide opportunities for green growth.

During recent years, mining (particularly of copper, gold, zinc, silica, marble, granite, and potash) has emerged as an increasingly significant sector. It now accounts for the vast majority of exports and foreign direct investment (FDI). The government has established favorable terms and a strong regulatory framework that is broadly consistent with global best practices. There is substantial and growing foreign interest and investment, with engagement by multinational companies on exploration and mining. As well, a series of past geological surveys conducted across different parts of the country have also confirmed the presence of oil and natural gas reserves in commercial quantities. Given the country’s large natural resource endowment, strong vigilance against corruption, and attractive regulatory regime, there are tremendous prospects and abundant potential for further growth and expansion.

As a part of its domestic political-legal framework, Eritrea has enacted numerous policies, regulations, and laws pertaining to nationality, monetary and banking systems, the fiscal and financial system, transport and communications, health, national security, education, social welfare, land tenure, mining and energy, management, wildlife and the environment, and water, sanitation, and hygiene. This is in addition to its decentralized indigenous local governance systems that remain in operation nationwide with competitive local and administrative elections taking place regularly. As well, there are a number of registered national unions and civic organizations, including for women, youth and students, veterans, and workers, along with several registered civil society organizations, expert groups, and associations for teachers, doctors, lawyers and other professionals, those living with disabilities, and religious groups.

Eritrea has established cooperative frameworks and cultivated close partnerships with a range of international organizations and specialized agencies, and it has also maintained multifaceted cooperation and steady relations with a wide variety of partners. Regionally, Eritrea is actively engaged with countries across the continent, and it is a member of various organizations, including the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD), while it is an active participant in a range of regional and global meetings, summits, conferences, and other fora.

Although in November 2018, the UN Security Council unanimously agreed to lift a nearly decade-long international sanctions regime on Eritrea, a major impediment for the country’s nation-building, development, and achievement of the 2030 Agenda continues to be the imposition of unilateral, illegitimate sanctions, as well as a broad array of hostile economic, financial, and trade restrictions and measures as a means of political and economic coercion. Not only do these contravene the UN Charter and the core tenets of international law, they also violate Eritrea’s sovereignty and right to development, lead to a plethora of significant direct and indirect negative impacts on the realization of justice and fulfillment of all human rights, and considerably hinder the country’s efforts to improve standards of living and attempts to promote sustainable development.

Additionally, while several major conflicts, a series of humanitarian crises, considerable political tensions, an array of violent extremist threats, and various other security issues in recent years have posed serious challenges for the entire region, Eritrea has attempted to play a proactive, constructive role. It has called for peace in Sudan and hosted both factions separately in an effort to establish a dialogue and promote peace, met with regional and international officials to express its recommendations, extend political backing, and offer moral support, and welcomed thousands of civilians fleeing conflicts in neighboring countries. Notably, in mid-2023, following an extended hiatus, Eritrea reactivated its membership within the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an East African regional
body based in Djibouti. As well, it has strengthened and expanded its bilateral cooperation with a number of countries, both in the Horn of Africa and further beyond.

Continued progress toward durable regional peace and long-term stability and security will provide Eritrea with significant policy space and immense opportunities to reallocate public resources to inclusive socioeconomic development, update its national development strategies and frameworks, create much-needed jobs and income-generating opportunities for its population, especially the youth, and expand regional and international cooperation.
2.1 - Process of Preparation of the VNR

Regular and effective follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda is a fundamental element of improving action and accelerating progress in achieving the ambitious and interlinked SDGs. At the fundamental core of this process are VNRs, which provide an essential source of lessons learned and an excellent basis for experience and knowledge sharing, strengthening cooperation, and accelerating implementation. As declared in paragraph 84 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, regular reviews in the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) are to be voluntary, state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.7

Eritrea conducted and presented its first VNR report at the HLPF in 2022, providing it with a critical baseline and robust foundation for more effective monitoring and strengthened implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Its second VNR seeks to build upon the momentum, gains, and lessons accrued from the country’s inaugural VNR process, and it also offers deeper insight into and injects further impetus for its nation-building and developmental efforts. Eritrea recognizes the far-reaching importance of multilateralism, creating effective partnerships and synergies at the regional and international level, and collective action toward the achievement of common goals, and the country remains unavering in its staunch commitment to Agenda 2030 and its wider national development aims. Underlying Eritrea’s current VNR process is the genuine desire to remain actively engaged, facilitate productive dialogue, and contribute positively within the framework of mutual exchange, learning, and cooperation.

The coordination and compilation of the country’s present VNR and report was spearheaded by a multi-institutional National SDGs Taskforce (NST). Working under the close guidance and overview of a ministerial-level committee, composed of ministers from the Ministry of Finance and National Development (MoFND), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Land, Water and Environment (MoLWE), and the President of the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), the NST was led by the National Statistics Office (NSO), and composed of senior experts from the MoFND, MoE, MoLWE, NUEW, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Country Office, and United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator. (See Figures 2.1-2.2)

7 Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 2015
As a key component of the planning and preparation phase of the second VNR, a series of preliminary meetings were convened under the auspices of the NST in order to inform and raise awareness among national ministries and various institutions about the VNR and HLPF, outline potential contributions from key entities to ensure success of the VNR process, and thoroughly review and comprehensively design the national review
process and report submission modalities. With the vital input, constructive feedback, and active, meaningful participation of an array of stakeholders, the NST went on to prepare and approve an exhaustive concept note, a detailed roadmap and structured work plan, the terms of reference, guiding outlines of the report, and all other operational, logistical, and technical issues related to the entire review process.

The structure and format of the present report is strongly guided and informed by the official UN VNR preparation guidelines. Likewise, special emphasis and consideration was given to the expectations expressed in regional preparatory meetings organized by UNDESA. At the same time, the report leverages the country’s experience and builds upon its previous VNR process and report. Based on the country’s prioritization of coverage and assessment of SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), the NST designated three separate thematic working groups to comprehensively review and fully assess the country’s overall progress and challenges within each of the selected development areas. The working groups were led by senior officials and technical experts from the MoE, MoLWE, and NUEW, respectively, and composed of experts from different relevant government ministries, agencies, and other institutions. Throughout the preparation process, they were provided with regular, strong backing and multifaceted support from the NST.

Eritrea’s VNR preparation process was rooted in a strong commitment to inclusiveness, transparency, and a highly collaborative, participatory approach, serving as a reflection of its broader holistic, all-of-government and all-of-society view of the SDGs. Consultations were convened by the NST at frequent, regular intervals, and they additionally included the active participation of and substantive contributions from a wide spectrum of stakeholders at the national and sub-national levels. Due to the inherent tight interlinkages and indivisible nature of the SDGs, ensuring streamlined efforts and close cooperation between and among the NST, the individual thematic working groups, and a range of other stakeholders and entities was a central point of focus. Importantly, members of the NST, as well as from the individual thematic working groups, participated in a number of formal preparation and training activities, including local technical and skills development workshops, as well as a series of multi-day regional and global gatherings. Collectively, these served to build and reinforce capacity, while also providing vital opportunities and spaces to foster a network of contacts with VNR focal points and various UN agencies, share experiences, exchange valuable lessons, and positively collaborate toward ultimately strengthening and enriching the country’s VNR.

2.2 - Data and Scope

The collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination of high-quality, robust, disaggregated, and relevant data are a critical plank for realizing Agenda 2030, key to evidence-based planning, policy formulation, decision-making, and reforms, and remain vital to the process of conducting accurate, in-depth explorations, measurements, and analyses of national and global progress on the SDGs.

In the early stages of the VNR process, the NST, alongside the various thematic working groups, conducted a series of preliminary assessments in order to, inter alia: closely examine the general availability, accuracy or quality, and timeliness or relevance of data; identify possible sources and mechanisms for collection or estimation, including through comprehensively mapping particular data with relevant sources and providers at national ministries, departments, agencies, or other entities; and address a range of other technical or logistical issues.

Furthermore, under the direct guidance and overview of the NSO, detailed data collection and reporting instruments and procedures were developed, with the aim of raising levels of consistency and promoting harmonization across thematic working teams, maintaining a high degree of overall quality and rigor, and ensuring that the data gathered covered as many relevant areas as possible.

The basic overarching purpose of the VNR process
is to assess progress made in the achievement of the SDGs set out in the 2030 Agenda. Broadly consistent and in accordance with the general proposals and expectations defined in the UN Secretary-General’s *Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines for VNRs*, as well as UNDESA’s *Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews (2024 Edition)*, the present report assesses the status of implementation of the large majority of goals, while particular focus is given to reviewing SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). This is based on several different factors, such as the close interlinkages and tight synergies between these and the other SDGs, results of assessments of the availability of valid, accurate data to support evidence-based reporting and defined requirements, the country’s past VNR report, and Eritrea’s existing national framework and domestic general context.

Alongside closely reviewing and reporting on Eritrea’s national progress and challenges with specific regard to the SDGs, detailed information is additionally provided about the country’s laws, regulations, and policies, national programs, initiatives, and interventions, planning frameworks, regional and international cooperation, and other enabling elements with significant bearing upon and of substantial relevance to the goals.

### 2.3 - Development of the VNR

The process of developing Eritrea’s VNR report was locally-owned, inclusive and highly collaborative, and transparent. During several preparatory meetings, the NST came together to confirm the specific priority areas for coverage and assessment, design the basic structure and general outline of the VNR report, finalize the sections for inclusion in the document, and approve other content or material.

Subsequently, preliminary drafts of the reports for the three focus SDGs were developed by the three thematic working groups. The draft reports from the thematic working groups were reviewed and consolidated into the national VNR draft report by a small group appointed from within the NST. As the substantive sections of the report were written and progressively developed, working drafts were disseminated to all members of the NST, as well as relevant other stakeholders, at frequent and regular intervals.

In addition to enriching the report and larger VNR process through providing space for critical feedback and the incorporation of input and diverse perspectives, the open and collaborative approach aided in reinforcing common understanding, helped promote transparency and accountability, facilitated the maintenance of a high degree of accuracy and consistency, and played a positive role in ensuring steady progress and adherence to established timelines. Furthermore, the process of continuous review and periodic exchange provided vital opportunities to quickly identify and remedy potential issues that arose, as well as contributed to the timely integration of interventions and the addition of new material reflecting emerging developments.

Upon the completion of a draft VNR report, the NST convened a validation workshop for open review and final endorsement. The gathering, attended by individual experts from government ministries, institutions, as well as a diverse set of other stakeholders and entities, allowed participants to offer further insights, critical input, and important recommendations towards strengthening the overall VNR report.
3.1 - Incorporation of Agenda 2030 into the National Framework

Highly ambitious and transformative, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a universal framework for action to end extreme poverty, fight inequality, combat injustice, and protect our planet. Effective national ownership, implementation, review, and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda and the associated SDGs requires a genuine whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, with the broad mobilization and deep, active, and meaningful participation, as well as mutual support and cooperation, of all dimensions of society – individual citizens and groups, civil society and interest groups, industry and the private sector, and academia and the scientific community, among other stakeholders.

Ultimately, however, it is explicitly recognized that promoting progress on and ensuring achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2030 is primarily a national responsibility, with governments – at the national, regional, and local levels – remaining chiefly responsible for taking ownership, establishing priorities, setting goals and aims, and driving sustainable development outcomes.

Pushing forward tangible progress on and ensuring the full realization of Agenda 2030 demands the cultivation of a conducive and enabling environment. This comprises, inter alia: strong high-level political will, commitment, and leadership; multisector coherence and coordination; sound public policies, programs or initiatives and government planning firmly grounded in robust evidence; and the close alignment and tight interlinkages of all dimensions of governance with Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

Eritrea’s broad vision of and general approach towards development, which is farsighted, integrated, holistic, and people-centered, while harmonizing focus and objectives across political, economic, social, and environmental dimensions, remains highly consistent with the guiding themes and central principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. Even prior to the international community’s formal establishment and adoption of the 2030 Agenda in the year 2015, Eritrea had already been taking tangible actions toward creating a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable nation, based on the foundational principles of equality, social justice, inclusion, self-reliance, and broad-based participation where all individuals, groups, and communities, irrespective of any particular characteristics or distinction, are able to contribute, thrive, and achieve their full potential.
Over the years, the country has formulated and implemented a comprehensive set of laws, policies, initiatives, strategic frameworks, and sector plans that align closely with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGS, as well as provide a strong foundation and conducive setting for transforming Eritrea into a more prosperous, inclusive, and resilient nation. In addition, Eritrea has undertaken a number of steps to foster a favorable national environment for sustainable development that promotes inclusive, whole-of-society approaches, leverages the country’s rich ethnolinguistic and social diversity and wealth of local, indigenous knowledge systems, and catalyzes collective actions and contributions from all regions, communities, and groups.

3.2 - Partnerships and Cooperation

The transformative promise of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs can only be effectively achieved with a strong commitment to collaborative partnerships, close coordination, and mutual cooperation between governments, the private sector, civil society, and a diverse range of other sectors and stakeholders. High-impact and meaningful multistakeholder partnerships, cooperation, and engagement at all levels provide critical opportunities for exploiting complementarity and devising robust, innovative solutions to complex developmental challenges and multilayered crises that impact all nations and all people. They additionally remain crucial to leveraging broad interlinkages and synergies, addressing the key drivers of systemic change, collectively scaling up impact, and holistically accelerating progress toward Agenda 2030.

Eritrea has consistently endeavoured to cultivate productive partnerships and cooperation across all levels and within multiple spheres in order to establish the suitable conditions and appropriate environment to promote sustainable development. As a fundamental component of its nation-building efforts and development agenda, it has forged cooperative frameworks and close relationships with a wide range of international partners, organizations, and specialized agencies, as well as worked closely with the private sector, an array of community-based organizations and groups, and diaspora communities located in countries across North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

For Eritrea, meaningful engagement and effective cooperation with partners has been built on the pillars of mutual commitment to common principles and values, openness and transparency, trust and understanding, and complementarity, while being informed by and directly responsive to the country’s prevailing context, locally-defined development priorities, and specific needs. In late 2021, the Eritrean government and the UN jointly developed and agreed to a Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which is to cover the period from 2022–2026 and prioritizes human development and well-being, as well as the creating of an inclusive, diversified, and climate-resilient economy, among other cross-cutting themes. As well, the country has continued to reinforce bilateral cooperation and build stronger ties with a range of partners from across the world. In recent years, Eritrean high-level officials have traveled to or hosted officials from Egypt, Somalia, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Italy, China, and Russia, among other nations. The country is unwavering in its dedication to promoting greater collaboration and forging deeper, more effective partnerships locally, regionally, and globally as it resolutely strives to accelerate progress, support capacity building, bridge existing gaps, and further drive forward positive development outcomes, nation-building, and implementation of the SDGs.

Eritrea remains a staunch proponent of international law, the multilateral system, and the UN Charter, which serve to strongly buttress realization of the 2030 Agenda and its concomitant SDGs. Importantly, the country is party to numerous bilateral, regional, and multilateral treaties or agreements and it has also ratified the majority of the core international treaties and conventions, including those specifically pertaining to sustainable
development, human rights, and the environment.

In addition, the country continues to be highly involved and actively engaged within an array of bilateral and multilateral fora and bodies, and it staunchly advocates for equality and justice, policy space, and a real voice and genuine participation for developing regions within international frameworks and the global governance architecture. Eritrea’s international participation, various commitments, and general willingness to constructively engage in multilateral, cooperative approaches to common challenges and emerging issues help to reinforce its implementation of the 2030 Agenda and also create a favorable framework for the country’s nation-building efforts.

3.3 - Leaving No One Behind

In unanimously adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all 193 Member States of the UN agreed that “As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognising that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.”

As a central transformative promise and one of the foundational principles of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, leaving no one behind represents the unequivocal commitment of all UN Member States to take explicit steps and tangible actions to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end stigma, discrimination, and exclusion, substantively reduce inequality – both within and amongst nations, and address the deep, systemic vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the inherent potential of individuals, communities, and humanity as a whole. Leaving no one behind entails recognizing that every person counts and deserves fair opportunities, regardless of any particular characteristic or distinction, and understanding that Agenda 2030 and the SDGs cannot be truly met and fully achieved unless they are realized for all individuals, groups, and nations.

The principles of social justice, self-reliance, equality, and leaving no one behind are deeply embedded within Eritrea’s pursuit of nation-building, its longstanding and broad development framework, and its concerted efforts toward improving the wellbeing and living standards of all its citizens. The country continues to take strong and positive action to eliminate poverty and inequality, promote gender equality and empowerment, secure opportunities for all, eradicate all forms of stigma, discrimination, prejudice, and ostracization, create a more inclusive,
fair, and just nation, and prioritize reaching those furthest behind first.

In particular, the country’s laws, regulations, and policies, which are underpinned by longstanding socio-cultural values and draw upon its rich history and traditions, establish a robust platform for inclusive socio-political and economic development, while guaranteeing that individuals and groups are able to exercise a wide range of basic and fundamental rights. Discrimination, exclusion, restriction, or preference that is based on the grounds of disability, age race, ethnicity, color, religion or belief, socio-economic status, region, language, opinion, gender, or other similar distinctions are strongly prohibited and punishable by national law. The country is also highly vigilant against all forms of radicalism or extremism, violence, intolerance, bigotry, and hatred, ensuring a sense of peaceful, respectful coexistence and that everyone is treated equally before the law.

As well, Eritrea has crafted a broad spectrum of policies, adopted a variety of legal instruments, and launched several progressive programs to protect, help address the specific needs of, and catalyze progress for vulnerable, marginalized, underserved, and deprived groups, such as the poor, persons living with disabilities, nomadic populations, those residing in geographically remote or hard-to-reach areas, and migrants or refugees. These multifaceted interventions play a positive and substantive role in cultivating peace and promoting unity, tolerance, and solidarity within Eritrea’s multi-ethnic, multicultural society. They also aim to mitigate disparities and create a level playing field on which all Eritreans have a genuine opportunity to excel, and seek to ensure that each and every individual is able to freely and fully participate in, contribute to, and benefit from inclusive and sustainable socio-economic growth and development.

The government has also offered frequent, regular encouragement and extended substantial backing to an array of national unions and civic organizations, including those for women, youth and students, veterans, and workers, which contributes significantly to the country’s nation-building and developmental ambitions, as well as plays a positive role in promoting inclusion, expanding broad-based participation, and leaving no one behind.
This chapter reports on Eritrea’s SDG progress. In the first sub-section a detailed review of the country’s progress for SDG 4 is presented. The second sub-section reviews progress achieved for SDG 5, while the third sub-section appraises progress for SDG 6.
Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was already far off-track from achieving its education targets. If no additional measures are taken, only one in six countries will meet SDG 4 and achieve universal access to quality education by 2030. An estimated 84 million children and young people will still be out of school and an estimated 300 million students will still not have the basic numeracy and literacy skills that they critically need to succeed in life. To fully deliver SDG 4, education systems must be re-imagined, and education financing must become a priority national investment.10

4.1.1 - SDG 4 in Eritrea

**Target 4.1:** By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

4.1.1: Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex

Eritrea’s MoE regularly conducts the Monitoring Learning Achievement Survey to help assess the progress of students and their basic learning competency within several subject areas, including mother language, English, and mathematics, at the third and fifth grade levels. In total, five separate rounds of the survey have been conducted nationally: in 2001, 2008, 2015, 2018, and 2023.

For the third grade, values for English, mother tongue, and mathematics fell between 2001 and 2015, before rising again in 2023. For the fifth grade, values for the three subject areas similarly dropped between 2001 and 2015, and then increase in 2023. The MoE recognizes that there is considerable room for improvement, and it has taken important steps to develop more focused and targeted investments and interventions to further strengthen and consolidate gains in literacy and numeracy within early learning.

Notably, at both the third and fifth grade levels, female students have consistently outperformed their male counterparts within all three subject areas. These encouraging results call for the MoE and other stakeholders to build on these foundational achievements and sustain them within the higher levels of middle and secondary education by establishing effective mechanisms for close follow-up, incentive schemes for female learners, and empowering female teachers as role models.

---

Figure 4.1: Grade 3 Results on Monitoring Learning Achievement Survey

Source: Ministry of Education, Report on Monitoring Learning Achievement Surveys

10 Sachs et al. 2023; UNDESA 2023b
Within the Eritrean education system, the Eritrean Secondary Education School Leaving Certificate Examination (ESELCE), administered at the twelfth grade, helps to appraise the quality of education and permits admission to post secondary study.

The percentage of students that passed the ESELCE with scores qualifying for diploma or degree levels has shown a general increase from about 24 percent in 2016/17 to about 33 percent in 2023/24. In 2022, the ESELECE was not conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

---

11 In 2022, the ESELECE was not conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
4.1.2: Completion rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)

Utilizing the dropout percentage as a proxy for completion, at the elementary and middle levels the dropout percentage has been quite low and even dropped slightly from 6.1 percent in 2015/16 to 4.1 percent in 2021/22, while at the secondary level it has declined significantly from about 28 percent to about 9 percent across the same time period. In terms of promotion rate, at the elementary level it rose from 85 to 89 percent, at the middle level it was sustained at about 77 percent, and at the secondary level it jumped from 57 to 78 percent.

Target 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

4.2.2: Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex

For Eritrea, pre-primary education is integral to the country’s efforts to advance the rights of children, alleviate poverty and reduce inequality, and promote inclusive sustainable development. The country’s policy for early childhood care and education, developed in 2010, provides early learning development standards for young children (aged between 4 – 6 years). Importantly, it recognizes the value and importance of parents, caregivers, and the community, encouraging their active engagement and participation in all aspects of child education.

The official age of entry for pre-primary education in Eritrea is 4 years. Pre-primary is provided in a comprehensive and integrated learning program that extends for 2 years. Pre-primary can take one of 2 forms: formal kindergartens and non-formal community care-giving centers or rural community children’s centers. The pre-primary curriculum aims to lay a strong foundation for physical, intellectual, language, and conceptual development, the creation of social relationships, and holistic growth, including basic life skills.

In total, the number of formal pre-primary schools in the country has increased from 483 in 2012/13 to 506 in 2015/16 and 709 in 2022/2023. Gross enrolment increased from 46,488 in 2012/13 to 55,627 in 2021/22, the gross enrolment ratio dropped slightly from about 25 percent to around 22 percent, while the net enrolment ratio was sustained at about 21 percent. As well, there continues to be little variation or discrepancy in the gross and net enrolment ratios for boys and girls.

Towards developing a more holistic approach to early childhood development, the MoE began a parenting education initiative through the adult

Figure 4.4: Pre-Primary Gross Enrolment Ratio

Source: Essential Education Indicators, Ministry of Education
education program in 2017. The initiative seeks to widen and strengthen knowledge, skills, and attitudes of parents, families, and communities to promote services that meet children's basic needs in the areas of healthcare, nutrition, social protection, and early psychosocial development. Importantly, the MoE, with the support of developmental partners, has scaled up the initiative and raised delivery in disadvantaged areas of the country. It has also established pre-primary classes and facilities within the premises of existing primary schools.

Figure 4.5: Pre-Primary Net Enrolment Ratio

Source: Essential Education Indicators, Ministry of Education
By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

4.3.1: Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex

Between 2015/16 and 2021/22, participation in elementary, middle, and secondary levels of education increased from 353,859, 176,162, and 87,664 to 398,090, 141,746, and 88,984, respectively. At the tertiary level, between 2016/17 and 2023/24, enrolment within degree programs increased by almost 89 percent from 1,672 to 3,155, while enrolment within diploma programs fell by about 27 percent from 1,991 to 1,455. Enrolment at the tertiary level among males and females has remained almost equal, with enrolment for males slightly higher than females in all years except for 2018/19.

In addition, Eritrea has established several technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, with students enrolling following the completion of the tenth grade. At present, there are seven institutions providing TVET in different fields and areas, including electronics, carpentry, drafting, auto mechanics, agriculture, and music, among others. TVET has provided a great platform for young people who aspire to learn but may experience challenges with traditional academic programs. Ultimately, it has helped to expand opportunities and provide youths with a viable avenue towards employment and sustainable livelihoods.

In total, since 2015, more than 10,000 students in 20 fields of study have graduated from TVET institutions. Upon completion, many graduates have been able to secure steady, secure, and dignified employment in jobs directly related to their specific skills training, thus allowing them to practically apply their learning, increase their earnings, and take concrete steps to positively change their lives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Degree Male</th>
<th>Degree Female</th>
<th>Diploma Male</th>
<th>Diploma Female</th>
<th>Total Degree</th>
<th>Total Diploma</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Gender parity (Female/Male*100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>834</td>
<td>1035</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>1672</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>3663</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>1090</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>2032</td>
<td>4005</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>971</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>1793</td>
<td>1703</td>
<td>3496</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019/20</td>
<td>1123</td>
<td>1166</td>
<td>985</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>2289</td>
<td>1781</td>
<td>4070</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020/21</td>
<td>1141</td>
<td>1157</td>
<td>972</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>2298</td>
<td>1815</td>
<td>4113</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021/22</td>
<td>1315</td>
<td>1038</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>2353</td>
<td>1386</td>
<td>3739</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023/24</td>
<td>1658</td>
<td>1497</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>3155</td>
<td>1455</td>
<td>4610</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eritrea Institute of Higher Education and Research
While enrolments within TVET are steadily increasing, with female enrolments standing at about 46 percent (and continuing to rise), access to TVET schools remains relatively limited. Enrolments comprise only about 5 percent of total enrolment of the secondary level. The MoE has developed short-and medium-term plans to increase enrolments to 20 percent through expanding capacity of existing institutions, constructing new ones, and facilitating the provision of evening courses.

Alongside programs delivered by TVET institutions, many government ministries, as well as a variety of national organizations, such as the National Confederation of Eritrea Workers (NCEW), the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS), the NUEW, the MoLWE, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MoLSW) provide short-term technical and vocational training or courses. These initiatives, delivered free-of-charge for all participants and focused on the development of skills and competencies within a variety of fields, strengthen human capital formation while sustainably and efficiently supporting employment and productivity.

In 2023, the MoLSW trained 428 individuals, focusing on enhancing their employment opportunities and ensuring a skilled labor force, while the MoLWE trained 879 individuals, emphasizing the importance of environmental sustainability and the development of a green economy. As well, the NUEYS trained 1,383 individuals, fostering the next generation of skilled professionals and leaders, the NCEW provided vocational training to 3,574 individuals, promoting labor rights and enhancing workers' capacity to contribute to the economy, and the NUEW trained 492 young women, promoting their empowerment and active participation in the workforce.
Target 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

4.5.1: Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated.

In Eritrea, education is regarded as an essential element for inclusive, sustainable development, a central pillar of society, and a fundamental right to which all individuals are entitled. National policy in the country provides for access to education free-of-charge to all Eritreans, extending from the primary to the tertiary level, while basic education until the eighth grade is compulsory by law.

The Eritrean government has continued to make considerable efforts to enhance the participation of girls in education. This includes the enactment and enforcement of strong legislation prohibiting child, underage, and forced marriage, harmful practices which historically have disproportionately impacted girls, as well as the construction of gender-segregated toilet and latrines, the development of community-based communication and sensitization programs, and the establishment of boarding and para-boarding schools.

In recognition of the differing life conditions and experiences of women and girls, and seeking to redress past inequities and historical disadvantages or discrimination, progressive and affirmative action measures have been developed within higher education to increase enrolments, strengthen retention and promote completion, and raise overall levels of performance and achievement. Additionally, in several parts of the country, the NUEW and NUEYS have organized tutorial programs and other educational support initiatives, delivered free-of-charge for students, to enhance and improve the participation and achievement of girls within middle and secondary schools.

Across all levels, female enrolment continues to steadily grow and the historically huge gender gap is being progressively narrowed. Parity between girls and boys has been achieved within middle education and it is almost fully achieved in pre-primary and secondary education. At the primary and tertiary levels, however, participation was higher among boys than girls. The Gender Parity Index values for the primary, middle, and secondary levels moved from 0.89, 0.88, and 0.90 in 2015/16 to 0.917, 1.00, and 0.96 in 2022/23. For pre-primary and tertiary levels, however, it slightly decreased from 0.99 and 0.96 to 0.97 and 0.93, respectively, across the same period.

Eritrea has also devised and implemented a broad array of other programs and measures that aim to comprehensively promote inclusion and equal opportunities for all. These include the provision of highly subsidized and free learning materials for those in need, financial and material assistance to vulnerable households to keep children enrolled in and attending school, adult extension and outreach learning programs, and literacy and skills programs for the incarcerated. The mother language policy, which mandates multilingual education based on the mother language from pre-primary until the end of elementary level, developed by the MoE, has not only played a key role in preserving heritage and culture, it has meant more equitable access for all ethnolinguistic groups and greater enrolment, retention, and comprehension.

Table 4.2: Gender Parity Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pre-Primary</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Tertiary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>0.989</td>
<td>0.893</td>
<td>0.882</td>
<td>0.897</td>
<td>0.956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>0.983</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>0.947</td>
<td>0.872</td>
<td>1.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022/23</td>
<td>0.972</td>
<td>0.917</td>
<td>1.008</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.933</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Essential Education Indicators, Ministry of Education; Eritrea Institute of Higher Education and Research
Additionally, selected schools in some parts of the country offer regular meals to students, an important social protection tool that leads to multiple health and learning benefits. With the expansion of the national roads network, public transportation services have been greatly improved, helping to ease travel and attendance for students. As well, in remote regions characterized by difficult terrain, the government has provided donkeys to many youths living with disabilities to help them reach school, while bicycles have been extended to other students that must walk considerable distances.

Nomadic populations and other hard-to-reach groups have also received opportunities to learn, the majority for the first time, through the establishment of boarding facilities and mobile schools in remote areas. In the year 2021/22, a total of 65 schools served nomadic communities, with 10 being boarding schools. The number of students enrolled in these schools was 9,109, out of which 2,088, nearly a quarter, were females. Through close cooperation with elders and community leaders, the MoE has developed special academic schedules that are specifically tailored to align with nomadic groups’ lifestyles and migratory patterns.

There are also formal education services for children with disabilities, such as the vision and hearing impaired. Two institutions exist for those who are deaf, while one has been established for the vision impaired. The institutions, funded by the government and located in Asmara and Keren, collectively enrol a total of about 180 students from communities across the nation. The government is also progressing on plans to establish another school for the deaf in the near future. Efforts also continue to be made to integrate children with developmental disabilities into mainstream schools, through the creation of special classrooms. In 2015/16, these classrooms enrolled more than 300 students in 15 schools within two regions. Work is required, however, to raise the quality of education in these facilities and better respond to the particular needs and demands of special education students.
Target 4.6: By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

4.6.1: Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex.

It is estimated that in 1990, on the verge of Eritrea's independence, the adult literacy rate in the country was 46 percent, with male literacy standing at 59 percent and female literacy at 35 percent. By 2018, adult literacy had improved to about 77 percent, with male literacy moving to 84 percent and female literacy increasing to 69 percent. During the same period, even steeper increases were achieved in youth literacy, indicating that the country's efforts to strengthen the supply and quality of basic education programs have largely been successful. In 1990, youth literacy was about 61 percent, with male literacy at 73 percent and female literacy lagging behind at 49 percent. However, in 2018, youth literacy had climbed to approximately 93 percent, with male literacy rising to 94 percent and female literacy jumping to 93 percent.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics states that Eritrea has achieved one of the largest increases in youth literacy anywhere in the world over the past 50 years.

Figure 4.6: Adult Literacy Rate

Figure 4.7: Youth Literacy Rate

Source: UIS 2021; UNESCO 2002
largest increases in youth literacy anywhere in the world over the past 50 years.\textsuperscript{13}

**Target 4.7:** By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development

4.7.1: Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment

Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and many of their themes – such as rights, tolerance and understanding, peace, respect, inclusion, equality and social justice, sustainability, ethics, citizenship, and responsibility in a global and local context – are mainstreamed and tightly integrated within different aspects of Eritrea’s national education system: in national education policies and guidelines, being measured at approximately 0.81; in teacher education (0.72); in curricula (0.76); and in student assessment (0.73).

In Eritrea, education is regarded as a strong foundation for sustainable development and recognized as a critical component in building a more just, peaceful society and world. GCED and ESD themes are prioritized within the national legal framework and core educational policies, as reflected in the National Charter, several legal proclamations and notices, the National Education Policy, the National Curriculum Framework, the National Policy and Strategy on Inclusive Education, the National Adult Education Policy, the Implementation Guideline for Child Friendly Schools, and the National Guideline on Admission Criteria for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Students. In addition, an array of GCED and ESD themes are embedded within several other important guiding documents, such as the Guidelines for Students’ Campaign for Development and the School Emergency and Disaster Preparedness Policy.

Teachers and educators in Eritrea are distinguished as key persons in society and integral to establishing a conducive learning environment. They are widely recognized as having the potential to help students develop the general knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors needed to thrive, spark innovation and positive transformation, and address complex local, national, and global challenges. Initial and in-service preparation and training programs for teachers and educators incorporate ESD and GCED topics and themes, while seeking to build their competencies and provide them with information, resources, activities, and initiatives that they can utilize and adapt in daily teaching practice. Teachers and educators also receive training to understand and integrate complementary and intertwined dimensions of learning (e.g., cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral).

As a multicultural, ethnolinguistically diverse nation, particular emphasis is placed on peace, tolerance, mutual understanding, and knowledge of indigenous history, groups, languages, lifestyles, and cultures across the curriculum. Regular reviews of curricula and assessments are conducted to update

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extent to Which GCED and ESD Are Mainstreamed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policies</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Education</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricula</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Assessment</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Land, Water and Environment
or reorient content, ensure appropriate coverage of critical and developing issues, and further integrate GECD and ESD themes and concepts. A range of extracurricular, community-based, volunteer, and other non-formal learning activities provide students with unique, invaluable opportunities for holistic development, growth, and deeper understanding, and also directly lend themselves to the themes of sustainability and global citizenship.

**Target 4a:** Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all students.

While Eritrea has significantly expanded the number of schools nationwide, challenges remain in terms of ensuring the availability of services. Between 2015/16 and 2021/22, the percentage of schools at the pre-primary level with access to safe water decreased from about 54.2 percent to 44.5 percent, while the percentage of schools with toilets and latrines fell from around 53.2 percent to about 44.9 percent. Similarly, at the elementary level, the percentage of schools with access to safe water increased from 63.3 percent to 65.1 percent while it almost remained the same at middle level at 75 percent. In terms of toilets and latrines, the percentage of schools at the elementary and middle levels with facilities has shown a slight decrease.

**Figure 4.8: Access to Safe Water in Schools (percentage)**

**Source:** Management Information System, Ministry of Education

**Figure 4.9: Access to Toilets and Latrines in Schools (percentage)**

**Source:** Management Information System, Ministry of Education
decline, dropping from 54.3 and 78.7 percent to 52.6 and 76.1 percent, respectively. Across the same period, the percentage of secondary schools with access to safe water rose from 83.7 to 85.3 percent, while the percentage of schools with toilets and latrines decreased slightly from 88.5 to 87.2 percent.

**Target 4.b:** By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

**4.b.1: Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships by sector and type of study**

The total volume of official development assistance (ODA) flows for scholarships increased from about $US0.1 million in 2010 to approximately $US5.4 million in 2017, before subsequently falling to about $US0.7 million in 2021. ODA for scholarship opportunities augments Eritrea’s efforts to strengthen human capital formation, which remains among the country’s foremost national priorities.

![Figure 4.10: Official Development Assistance Flows for Scholarships, 2010-2021](source: Eritrea Institute of Higher Education and Research)

As well, scholarship opportunities are an important and effective means of ensuring that more individuals are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experiences to help drive positive change. They also represent a key tool for increasing innovation, attracting investment, raising productivity, and boosting growth, ultimately helping to promote sustainable development and build a prosperous society.

**Target 4.c:** By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

**4.c.1: Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications, by education level**

Encouragingly, considerable investments and focus are increasingly being directed to teacher recruitment, training, and support systems, in order to raise standards, enhance quality, and promote positive learning outcomes. At the elementary level, the number of teachers increased dramatically from 8,524 in 2015/16 to 12,110 in 2022/23.

Across the same period, the proportion of qualified teachers rose slightly from about 76 percent to approximately 81 percent. From 2015/16 to 2022/23, at the middle level, the number of teachers rose from 3,507 to 5,507, with the percentage of qualified teachers increasing from 83.9 to 84.3 percent. For the same period, the number of teachers at the secondary level jumped from 2,567 to 3,472, while the percentage of qualified teachers increased from about 80.7 percent to 89.1 percent.
As well, scholarship opportunities are an important and effective means of ensuring that more individuals are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experiences to help drive positive change. They also represent a key tool for increasing innovation, attracting investment, raising productivity, and boosting growth, ultimately helping to promote sustainable development and build a prosperous society.

Target 4.c: By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries

4.c.1: Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications, by education level

Encouragingly, considerable investments and focus are increasingly being directed to teacher recruitment, training, and support systems, in order to raise standards, enhance quality, and promote positive learning outcomes.

At the elementary level, the number of teachers increased dramatically from 8,524 in 2015/16 to 12,110 in 2022/23. Across the same period, the proportion of qualified teachers rose slightly from about 76 percent to approximately 81 percent. From 2015/16 to 2022/23, at the middle level, the number of teachers rose from 3,507 to 5,507, with the percentage of qualified teachers increasing from 83.9 to 84.3 percent. For the same period, the number of teachers at the secondary level jumped from 2,567 to 3,472, while the percentage of qualified teachers increased from about 80.7 percent to 89.1 percent.

Figure 4.11: Qualified Teachers (percentage), 2015/16–2022/23

![Figure 4.11: Qualified Teachers (percentage), 2015/16–2022/23](image)

Source: Essential Education Indicators, Ministry of Education
With the end point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development drawing ever nearer, the world is still failing to achieve gender equality, making it an increasingly distant goal. At the global level, not one of the 18 indicators “met or almost met” has met the targets and only one is “close to target”. Based on recent rates of progress, it is estimated that it will take nearly three centuries to close gaps in legal protection and remove discriminatory laws, 140 years for women to be represented equally in positions of power and leadership in the workplace, and 47 years to achieve equal representation in national parliaments. What is more, recent trends suggest that more than 340 million women and girls around the world will still be living in extreme poverty by 2030, and close to 25 percent will experience moderate or severe food insecurity.14

Unfortunately, no country in the world is within reach of eradicating intimate partner violence, and women’s share of workplace management positions will remain below parity even by 2050. A number of global crises have powerfully highlighted and served to exacerbate existing gender inequalities, such as unequal access to healthcare, education, social services, and economic opportunities. Strong political leadership and a comprehensive set of policy and regulatory reforms are greatly needed in order to dismantle the structural and systemic barriers to the full and comprehensive achievement of SDG 5.15

4.2.1 - SDG 5 in Eritrea

**Target 5.1:** End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

5.1.1: Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex

Highly prominent among the list of Eritrea’s national priorities is advancing gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, and the promotion and protection of their inherent human rights. Attesting to this, it has ratified the core regional and international rights agreements, including those pertaining to women’s and girls’ rights, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (the Banjul Charter), and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, among others.

Additionally, it has signed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Millennium Declaration, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and has frequently and actively participated at international conferences and gatherings on women. Eritrea has also regularly submitted periodic reports under the framework of the CEDAW, consistent with its obligations and reflecting its genuine commitment and concrete actions to prohibit all forms of discrimination against women and bring tangible progress on equality and empowerment. Preparation of the periodic reports was based on all-inclusive consultation processes that involved line ministries, national unions and associations, and community-based organizations. This ascertained ownership and collective responsibility in the mainstreaming of women’s equality and empowerment, as well as the follow-up on the CEDAW recommendations.

Importantly, Eritrea has established relevant institutional and policy frameworks, as well as detailed gender action plans, for achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment, with a particular focus on reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized, in line with international and regional gender equality
standards and obligations. The National Charter, adopted in 1994 and which lays out the guiding vision and aspirations for the country, recognizes the fundamental importance of gender equality and sets a robust foundation for driving progress and ending discrimination on the basis of sex.

“A society that does not respect the rights and equality of women cannot be truly liberated.”

— National Charter

Recognizing the differing life conditions and experiences of women and girls, and seeking to redress past inequities and historical disadvantages or discrimination, progressive and affirmative action measures have been enacted, most notably within the spheres of education, employment, and public life.

After independence, Eritrea repealed all colonial laws that discriminate against women on the basis of sex. Thus, Proclamation 2/1991 stipulates that every person shall enjoy the rights of personality and liberties guaranteed in the laws, without discrimination based on race, sex, religion, or color. Subsequent proclamations on nationality and citizenship (21/1991), access to land (58/1994), public, political, and communal participation (86/1996), labor (118/2001), and engaging in business activities (128/2002) promote equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex. Emphasizing the need for harmonious and respectful marital bonds, Eritrean laws obligate mutual respect, support, and assistance within marital relationships. Hence, national laws and their strict enforcement measures further protect women and girls from violence, ensure equal rights to divorce, child custody, alimony, and inheritance, and also prohibit harmful, traditional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International Agreement</th>
<th>Ratification (R) or Accession (A)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</td>
<td>2002 (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</td>
<td>2001 (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
<td>1995 (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination</td>
<td>2001 (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime</td>
<td>2014 (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children</td>
<td>2014 (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment</td>
<td>2014 (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
<td>1994 (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict</td>
<td>2005 (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights</td>
<td>1999 (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child</td>
<td>1999 (R)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), child or under-age marriage, bride price, dowries, and kidnapping.

With the comprehensive backing and full cooperation of the government, a series of interventions significantly contributing to women's equality and empowerment have been carried, including the establishment of a number of national organizations, such as the NUEW and the NUEYS. These bodies frequently conduct nationwide programs and initiatives to assist poor or disadvantaged women's economic activities, strengthen livelihoods, and also improve access to finance and basic services, such as education, housing, and health. They also mobilize against violence and harmful, traditional practices, conduct public awareness and sensitization campaigns, and help ensure that women's specific needs, concerns, and perspectives are taken into account and addressed.

**Target 5.2:** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

5.2.1: Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age

5.2.2: Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence

Eritrea has promulgated and heavily enforces a broad collection of robust, comprehensive laws which aim to eliminate all forms of violence against and exploitation of girls and women. Rape, sexual assault, violence against a marriage partner, and the trafficking or sexual exploitation of women or children are all legally prohibited. They all constitute grave criminal offences and are punishable by considerably large financial penalties and extended prison sentences.

Results from a series of Lot Quality Assurance Surveys, conducted regularly by the MoH, show that the percentage of women and girls aged 15 to 24 years that experienced either physical or sexual violence, or both, in the past year declined slightly from 0.6 percent in 2017 to 0.4 percent in 2022. For women aged 15 to 49 years, the corresponding figure was 0.7 percent in 2022, a small reduction from 0.8 percent in 2017.16

Furthermore, Eritrea has been actively participating in a variety of initiatives at regional, continental, and international levels to combat illegal migration, human trafficking, and migrant smuggling. It has consistently engaged with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to combat human trafficking and smuggling, while the country’s ratification of the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (along with supplementary protocol) and participation in the Valetta Summit, the Khartoum Process, and the Better Migration Management Programme, reflects its deep commitment to fostering meaningful dialogue and cooperation focused on the root causes of the complex problems, improving migration management, fighting against transnational crimes, and capacity building.

**Target 5.3:** Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

5.3.1: Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18

Historically, child, underage, and forced marriage have been considerable challenges in Eritrea. Results from the 1995 Eritrean Demographic Health Survey, 2002 Eritrean Demographic Health Survey, and 2010 Eritrean Population Health Survey show that among women aged 20-49, the proportion married under the ages of 15 and 18 years had declined. For example, the percentage of women married by age 15 declined from 23 percent in 1995 to 20 percent in 2002 and 19 percent in 2010, while the percentage of women married by 18 declined from 59 percent in 1995 to 48 percent in 2002 and 41 percent in 2010.17

---

16 MoH 2022
17 EDHS 1997; EDHS 2003; EPHS 2013
Additionally, taking into account cooperation and renewed efforts by the government, development partners, and communities, alongside recent and longer-term trends, the NSO estimates that the proportion of women married under age 15 fell to 18 percent in 2015 and 16 percent in 2023, while the percentage married by 18 fell to 36 percent in 2015 and 30 percent in 2023.\footnote{NSO 2024}

Importantly, in order to consolidate and build upon past progress, numerous multipronged initiatives have been conducted. The Eritrean government has demonstrated strong political commitment and leadership, both enacting and enforcing a strong and comprehensive legal framework that completely bans child, underage, and forced marriages. Religious communities, with their leaderships, have provided support through publicly backing the prohibitions and refusing to approve for partners below the legal age of consent (18 years).

As well, committees have been established in communities nationwide to support the monitoring and enforcement of laws prohibiting child, underage, and forced marriages, while public awareness campaigns and national organizations, such as the NUEW and NUEYS, seek to combat the deeply-rooted traditions, stereotypes, and cultural values that have driven child, underage, and forced marriages historically. Marriages require official approval from local authorities, with requests requiring original supporting documents (e.g., vaccination cards) to verify age of potential couples. The determination of whether to grant or deny marriages is completed by local government authorities, alongside child and women's rights committees. These procedures have been amended to include five sub-zone, an increase from the baseline of one.

5.3.2: Proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age

FGM/C is legally banned in Eritrea, with stringent criminal penalties, comprising a combination of substantial fines and extended prison terms, in place for practitioners, including traditional practitioners or medical professionals who may potentially perform the procedure. In addition to providing a clear, comprehensive definition, the law criminalises and sets out associated punishments for any individuals or groups requesting, inciting, promoting, arranging, or assisting acts of FGM/C (such as by providing tools, instruments, or other means), as well as the failure to report incidents of the practice to the relevant authorities.

Alongside robust legal measures, the Eritrean government, in concert with several national organizations, a number of international development partners, and the mass media, has organized

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure412}
\caption{Women Aged 20-49 Years Married Before 15 and 18 Years (percentage)}
\end{figure}
and conducted a wide range of public programs, community campaigns, and other initiatives focused on FGM/C. These efforts, taking place nationwide and bringing together government ministries, individuals and communities, student and youth groups, teachers, counselors, and health workers, and religious leaders, as well as other stakeholders, have aimed to counter myths and misconceptions while raising basic awareness and critical understanding about FGM/C and its broad array of detrimental impacts. They have also sought to increase general knowledge about the law and the inherent rights of all citizens, and effect durable, long-term change in individual and community perceptions, norms, and behaviors.

As well, with the close, unwavering support of local residents, committees to combat FGM/C have been established in communities across the country, and various forms of support, including psychosocial counseling and needs-sensitive sexual and reproductive health care, are provided to survivors. Additionally, lessons about FGM/C have been integrated into school curricula and youth health or life skills programs, while an array of anti-FGM/C information materials and advocacy tools have been developed in all national languages and disseminated through schools, health facilities and pharmacies, local media, public spaces, and various other channels. Numerous government officials, religious and community leaders, respected elders, former practitioners, and survivors have also frequently attended public gatherings organized by government ministries or national organizations and delivered powerful statements advocating for zero tolerance of FGM/C.

As an integral part of Eritrea’s wide-ranging, multi-pronged efforts to reduce and ultimately eradicate FGM/C, since 2014 the Ministry of Health (MoH), MoLSW, and the NUEW, with the close support of UNICEF, have cooperated to conduct a series of FGM/C community mapping studies in different parts of the country in order to better understand FGM/C trends, explore general attitudes toward and knowledge about the practice among individuals and communities, and critically assess the level of readiness of communities to make public declarations to completely abandon the practice. Although the studies did not cover all of the communities within the country, and thus cannot be regarded as nationally representative, they do offer extremely valuable insights and provide compelling, encouraging evidence that the prevalence of FGM/C in the country – which historically has been extremely high – has been significantly reduced in recent years.

In particular, the studies showed that the prevalence of FGM/C among girls under 15 years of age in the communities investigated was approximately 2.3 percent in 2020, representing a substantial drop from 18.2 percent in 2014. For girls aged under five years of age, the prevalence dropped from about 6.9 percent in 2014 to approximately 0.54 percent in 2020. Although the 2014-2020 FGM/C community mapping studies are not nationally representative and their results are not directly comparable with the 2010 Eritrean Population and Health Survey, the latter estimated that 33.2 percent of girls under 15 and 12.4 percent of girls under five years of age had been subjected to the practice.19

Furthermore, there has been a steady rise in the number of public commitments by communities to abandon FGM/C, and the substantially lower prevalence reported among younger cohorts within the series of mapping studies indicates the continuing decline of the practice. Results also reveal increasingly strongly held views against FGM/C, irrespective of gender and various socio-demographic characteristics, steadily rising levels of understanding about the negative physical and mental health consequences of FGM/C, and widespread awareness about the national laws and penalties tied to the practice. What is more, ongoing mapping activities are set to determine the FGM/C-free status of 16 more sub-regions within the country.

The recent and swift reduction in FGM/C across the board, alongside the considerably raised public awareness, substantially increased understanding and knowledge, and dramatic shift in attitudes, is an encouraging, positive reflection of progress towards

19 EPHS 2013
the eventual complete elimination of the practice in Eritrea. Not only does it demonstrate the deep, genuine commitment towards protecting women's and girls' basic rights, inherent dignity and bodily integrity, and equality, it also reflects the integrated, coordinated efforts exerted by the government, communities nationwide, various organizations, and other stakeholders.

**Target 5.5:** Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

5.5.1: Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments

By national law, Eritrean women are reserved 30 percent of all seats within regional and national parliament, with the possibility of gaining more through the process of electoral competition. Within the National Assembly (*Hagerawi Baito*), the sole legislative authority and highest-level representative body of the people, women constitute 22 percent of all members, holding 33 out of a total of 150 seats.

In addition, women’s representation in regional assemblies has been sustained at approximately 29 percent across the period from 2017 to 2022. However, there are considerable variations by region, ranging from a high of 40 percent in the Gash Barka Region in 2022 to a low of 23 percent within the Southern Red Sea Region. As well, women represent about one-fifth of all sub-regional administrators and 37 percent of all local administrators in the country.

Importantly, the representation of women in other positions of leadership or decision-making and areas of public life is encouraging and rising. Within the judiciary, women make up 22 percent of high court judges, 14 percent of regional court judges, about 36 percent of public prosecutors, and 37 percent of elected community court judges, while in the executive, the percentage of female ministers increased from 18 percent in 2002 to 24 percent in 2017. As well, the percentage of women serving as director generals and directors has risen from zero in 2002 to 26 and 10.6 percent in 2017, respectively. Of Eritrea’s six regional governors, one is a woman.

Eritrea continues to conduct work to dismantle the deep-rooted, structural barriers to women’s political
participation and facilitate women’s active, direct engagement in decision-making and leadership at all levels as a means of ensuring a more just, equitable society and promoting sustainable development. A collection of community-based programs and public initiatives aim to build and strengthen the capacity of women leaders and groups at the national and local levels to fully participate in the process of development and nation-building.

5.5.2: Proportion of women in managerial positions

According to the National Labor Force Survey (published in 2018), women in Eritrea comprise marginally over half (approximately 51 percent) of the country’s total formal labor force (totalling slightly over 1.4 million).20 In addition to their primary responsibility of family care, food processing and preparation, along with community activities, women contribute significantly to crop production and subsistence farming, while also being highly prominent and influential within a range of industries and sectors.

Employed women constitute about 45.5 percent of the all employees holding managerial positions, which makes up approximately 1.1 percent of all female employees.21 As well, a series of annual surveys of manufacturing establishments conducted by the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI) shows that the estimated percentage of women employed in administrative positions within the surveyed establishments has increased modestly from about 37 percent in 2015 to 38 percent in 2022.22

---

20 MoLSW 2018
21 MoLSW 2018
22 MoTI 2022
Previous Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) have shown that women predominantly made decisions alone or jointly with their husbands regarding their health care with 80.2 percent and 85.5 percent of women in 2002 and 2010, respectively, reporting that they made decisions on their own for healthcare-related matters and another 7.3 percent and 8.8 percent, respectively, reporting that they made the decision jointly their husbands or partners.  

Based on continued expansions in women’s participation in education and general improvements in their socioeconomic status, the NSO estimates that the proportion of married women who made decisions regarding their own health care alone increased to 89 and 92.9 percent in 2015 and 2023, respectively.

Contraceptive use to space or limit births has historically been low in Eritrea. The proportion of women aged 15 to 49 years using any method decreased slightly from 5.8 percent in 2002 to 5.5 percent in 2010, while the use of modern contraceptive means increased from 3.8 to 4.7 percent across the same period. Among married women during the period, the use of any method rose from 8 to 8.4 percent, with the use of modern methods increasing from 5.1 to 7.1 percent.

Estimates from the NSO indicate that the use of any contraceptive method by women was about 5.3 percent in 2015 and about 5.0 percent in 2023, while use of modern methods was about 5.4 percent in 2015 and 6.6 percent in 2023. Similarly, for currently married women, the use of any method was estimated to have risen to 8.7 percent in 2015 and 9.1 percent in 2023, with the use of modern methods estimated to have risen to 8.7 percent in 2015 to 12.2 percent in 2023.

23 EDHS 2002; EPHS 2013
24 NSO 2024
25 EDHS 2002; EPHS 2013
26 NSO 2024
Regarding women’s participation in decision-making when it comes to contraceptive use, 62 percent and 8.5 percent of women stated that they decided to use contraceptive by themselves and jointly with their husbands or partners in 2002, respectively, which increased to 69.4 percent and 10.7 percent in 2010. NSO estimates suggest that the percentage of women who made decisions alone rose to about 74.5 percent in 2015 and 80.4 percent in 2023, while the percentage making decisions jointly with their husbands increased to 12.4 percent in 2015 and 14.6 percent in 2023.27

The MoH aims to ensure universal access to reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health. Sexual and reproductive health services are provided free of charge throughout the country, with priority given for integrated service delivery for women, newborns, children and adolescents including antenatal care, integrated community case management, integrated sexual and reproductive health services, and adolescent health.

Source: EDHS 2003; EPHS 2013; NSO 2024

27 EDHS 1997; EDHS 2002; EPHS 2013; NSO 2024
Notably, the NUEW and NUEYS have developed several programs and initiatives to raise the knowledge and awareness of young adults, especially girls, about support services and sexual and reproductive health.

**Target 5.a:** Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

5.a.1: (a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure

5.a.2: Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women’s equal rights to land ownership and/or control

Within Eritrea, land has historically been a foundational pillar of social, cultural, political, and economic life. Through its numerous and tight interlinkages to agriculture, natural resources, and an array of other important land-based activities, land continues to be a critical element for creating dignified income-generating activities, ensuring sustainable livelihoods and supporting social mobility, overcoming poverty and inequality, and achieving food production and security.

Shortly following the achievement of Eritrea’s formal independence, the Land Proclamation (58/1994) was enacted. Inter alia, the measure aimed to reform historical land tenure systems in the country and established that all land is property of the State. Under the proclamation, all Eritreans, regardless of any particular distinction, such as sex, race, belief, or clan, are guaranteed the right to access, control, and utilize land for housing or agricultural and business purposes.

Importantly, the government, alongside several national organizations, such as the NUEW, the NUEYS, and media outlets, continues to conduct public programs, legal workshops, and various other community activities in order to raise general awareness and societal understanding about land rights and legally address potential issues.

**Target 5.b:** Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

5.b.1: Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex

The Eritrea Telecommunications Services Corporation (EriTel), the nation’s telecommunications operator, provides fixed and mobile telecommunications services. The country is presently covered by a national 3G network which extends to reach almost all regions, including remote, rural areas and many of the country’s constellation of islands. Evidence from EriTel revealed that mobile service coverage reached 85 percent at national level. Moreover, 50.2 percent and 20 percent of the total mobile and fixed telephone subscribers, respectively, are women. In addition, women accounted for 33 percent of the privately owned Internet cafe services in Eritrea.

**Target 5.c:** Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

5.c.1: Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women’s empowerment

Ensuring adequate and appropriate financing and allocations for gender equality and women’s empowerment is a key part of Eritrea’s efforts to effectively meet the needs of women and girls. The government has sought to promote gender-responsive budgeting and also made efforts to ensure the coherence of national planning, costing, and budgeting processes with its various gender equality and empowerment objectives. The country’s commitment to gender-responsive participation mechanisms, which encourage the active engagement and contributions of women in planning and budgeting processes in different sectors and at the national and sub-national level, help to more effectively direct available resources to address gender inequalities.
Notwithstanding considerable progress and improvements over the years, billions of people in countries around the world still lack access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene. Water scarcity is a growing problem in many parts of the world, with conflicts, climate change, and other crises serving to exacerbate the issue. In addition, water pollution is a significant challenge which affects both human health and the environment in many countries.28

Achieving universal coverage by 2030 will require a six-fold increase in current global rates of progress on drinking water, a five-fold increase for sanitation, and an eight-fold increase for hygiene. Boosting infrastructure investment, improving cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation, and addressing climate change is key to getting SDG 6 back on track.29

With a large swathe of its territory falling within the wider Sahel Belt, Eritrea is an arid and semi-arid country. It is not particularly endowed with rich water resources and rainfall continues to be low and erratic, averaging less than 350mm annually. Rates of evapotranspiration are also relatively high.

Against this backdrop, water continues to be one of the country’s leading national priorities.
and as a result of important national investments in water infrastructure and conveyance systems, constructive partnerships and cooperation with development partners, a strong policy and regulatory framework, and other efforts, a number of important improvements have been registered.

Within rural areas, where the large majority of the country’s people resides, approximately 79 percent of the total population has access to safely managed drinking water services, up from 72 percent in 2015, while within urban areas it is 95 percent, a 5 percent increase from 2015.

Additionally, access to water has progressively risen in schools, offices, and other public spaces. At present, the percentage of elementary, middle, and high schools with access to safe and clean water has increased to 65.1, 74.9, and 85.3 percent, respectively, from 60, 69, and 76.9 percent in 2015/16. As well, all health facilities in the nation have access to clean, safe water, which has played a significant and positive role in helping to promote infection prevention and control, supporting healthy deliveries, and helping to reduce neonatal mortality risk.

Importantly, nationwide access to basic sanitation and hygiene facilities has been steadily expanding in recent years. Following a sustained public campaign that extended to all regions of the country, 93 percent of the nation’s 2,779 total villages have now been declared and certified as open defecation free, up from about 32 percent in 2015. Additionally, 52.6 percent of elementary schools, 76.1 percent of middle schools, and 87.2 percent of secondary schools, along with all of the country’s colleges and other institutions of higher learning, and 90 percent of health facilities, are now equipped with improved toilets or latrines.

Moreover, about 70 percent of all public institutions now have improved water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities. Ongoing popular campaigns have focused on constructing and refurbishing toilets, latrines, and other vital hygiene infrastructure in communities and villages across the country, while more and more schools, offices, and other public spaces are in the process of installing or dramatically improving access to WASH facilities.

Notably, through an array of public awareness campaigns, as well as programs and initiatives conducted within schools, health facilities, and other public spaces, there are also greater levels of public awareness and general understanding of good sanitation and hygiene practices and their critical role in promoting health, ensuring wellbeing, reducing the spread of disease, and significantly reducing the early childhood, adult, and maternal mortality levels in the country. In schools, more youth continue to

**Target 6.2:** By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.

**6.2.1:** Proportion of population using (a) safely managed sanitation services and (b) a handwashing facility with soap and water.

*Figure 4.19: Percentage of Villages Nationwide Certified as Open Defecation Free*

*Source: MoH 2023*
learn how to improve good sanitation and hygiene practices, such as proper use of toilets or latrines and handwashing with water and soap. The Community-led Total Sanitation program, initiated years ago, involves community groups and leaders working in tandem with residents to raise awareness of the importance of eliminating open defecation and adopting better sanitation and hygiene practices.

In close cooperation with UNICEF, a longstanding national development partner, Eritrea’s MoLWE, MoE, and MoH jointly developed and continue to implement the 2019-2030 One WASH Strategy and One WASH Investment Plan, which aims to substantially bolster and actualize the government’s vision of ensuring universal access to safe drinking water, as well as sanitation and hygiene for all Eritreans by 2030.

**Target 6.4:** By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity

6.4.2: Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources

Preliminary domestic assessments of the water resources potential of the country estimate a total of 11,631.40 MM, with surface water estimated at 9,967 MM and groundwater at about 1664 MM. The total freshwater withdrawal for agricultural, industrial, and domestic purposes is estimated at nearly 1,140 MM, indicating an overall low level of water stress in the country.

**Target 6.5:** By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate

6.5.1: Degree of integrated water resources management

...Eritrea’s degree of integrated water resources management (IWRM) implementation is estimated at 37. This falls within the medium-low category and indicates that the rate of national progress must be accelerated considerably in the years ahead in order to fully achieve SDG target 6.5 by the 2030 target date.

**Table 4.5: Available and Utilized Water Resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Renewable Water Resources</th>
<th>Total Freshwater Withdrawn</th>
<th>Environmental Flow Requirement (percent of available resources)</th>
<th>Water Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11,631.40 MM</td>
<td>1,139.95 MCM</td>
<td>1,163.14 MCM</td>
<td>10.89 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Land, Water and Environment, Water Resources Department
For Eritrea, the water sector remains critical for promoting sustainable development and it plays a significant role in socioeconomic growth, poverty alleviation, food security, and environmental sustainability. It also assumes great significance in enhancing modernization, industries, tourism, and agricultural activities.

Reflecting strong high-level political will and long-term effort, the Eritrean government has sought to put in place viable institutions and a comprehensive policy and legal framework for the effective and sustainable management of the water sector. Some of the important legal and policy documents include the Water Resources Proclamation (2010), Water Policy (2008), Water Sector Institutional Framework (2008), the Water Sector for Human Development (2004), and the Eritrean Integrated Water Resources Management Plan (2008).

Collectively, these instruments set out and promote the principles of integrated water resources management as a means to ensure sustainable and environmentally positive management and utilization of water resources for all users in Eritrea, ranging from residents, either within urban or rural areas, to agriculture, business and industries, institutions, and natural ecosystems. They also promote the full, equal inclusion of all individuals, communities, population groups, and national sectors in the country's water management, usage, and development activities.

The planning, development, and implementation of all national policies, laws, and strategies related to the use, management, protection, and conservation of water-related resources is guided by the MoLWE-WRD, with branches located in each regional administration. There is close coordination and strong cooperation across different levels and with a range of stakeholders, including various government ministries, different civic organizations and academic institutions, and a number of longstanding international partners. The important potential role of the private sector has increasingly been recognized, and initial steps have been explored to establish formal mechanisms to improve the private sector’s involvement in the development, management, and use of water resources.

At present, there are 25 gauging stations to support tracking and river flows, groundwater, levels, water quality, and use in locations nationwide, with plans in place to develop several more. In order to strengthen national management of water resources, several initiatives have been developed, including the Eritrean groundwater assessment, aquifer mapping, and well development project. Additionally, the MoLWE-WRD is in the latter stages of developing the national Water Information System, which will serve as a central hub for local and national water-related data and information.

The government has allocated a budget for the water sector’s development and management, with further financing and investment provided through support and backing from a range of multilateral partners. All six of the country’s regions receive budgetary assistance to deliver services, develop infrastructure, implement programs and initiatives, and conduct research.

Target 6.6: By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes

6.6.1 Change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time

Over the years, a number of vital steps have been taken in order to protect and restore Eritrea's water-related ecosystems. Through the enactment of government directives, large enclosures have been established and several priority areas for protection
have been delineated and mapped. The latter include large areas in Semienawi and Debubawi Keih Bahri (covering approximately 106,000 hectares [ha]), Buri-Irori-Hawakil (about 867,000 ha), the Berasole estuary (13,100 ha), and the Gash-Setit Elephant Sanctuary (44,000 ha).

Additionally, the cutting of live trees is legally prohibited and actively enforced, while afforestation and reforestation programs, which involve the active participation of government ministries and institutions, local communities, student and youth groups, and other entities, have been frequently and regularly conducted in all regions of the country.

As a key component of these initiatives, more than 45 million tree seedlings of different types have been planted since 2006, with a high survival rate. As well, an improved, more efficient, and safer stove was designed by experts from the MoEM and MoA. The stove, known locally as “Adhanet”, is more energy efficient compared to those traditionally used – decreasing consumption by an estimated 50 percent. Through programs initiated by the MoA, more than 170,000 stoves have been installed in households nationwide and its uptake has helped to reduce the use of wood for fuel significantly.

Alongside these strong efforts, thousands of kilometers of terraces have been constructed and reinforced, while numerous water diversion schemes have been developed in all six of the country’s administrative regions, particularly within rural areas.

Together, these initiatives have significantly helped to combat land degradation, tangibly contributed to the restoration of ecologically damaged forests and other areas, and maximized land use within extremely difficult and considerably challenging terrain. They have also played a tremendously positive role in reducing soil erosion and increasing soil quality, while also tangibly helping to promote water conservation and combat the widespread destruction associated with flooding.

As a result of considerable national investments and financial outlays, and the collective efforts of the government, local communities, the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), several development partners, and various other groups and national institutions, the
number of large and medium dams in Eritrea has been increased from 138 at independence to nearly 800 at present. Several hundred more small dams have also been built. Crucially, the national distribution of these structures has been vastly improved, so that more are now located in regions and communities where there historically have been none. Several dozen more dams of varying sizes are currently in different stages of development and projected to be fully completed across the period 2024 and 2025.

Eritrea’s territorial waters within the Red Sea extend to cover a total area of about 55,000 km², while the country has more than 350 islands of varying sizes, with most of them concentrated within the Dahlak archipelago, east of Massawa. About 102 km² of the Eritrean mainland and island coastlines are covered by mangrove forests, with three of the seven main mangrove species present within the Red Sea found along the Eritrean coast, while seagrasses also form an integral part of the coastal biodiversity.

Recognizing the vital and multifaceted importance of mangroves for people and the environment, the Eritrean government has remained firmly committed to their restoration, sustainable use, and conservation. Through several programs organized and implemented by the MoMR, with the backing of other ministries and institutions, a large number of trees have been planted, including many salt-tolerant varieties. Eritrea is one of the few countries in the world that has seen an increase in its mangrove coverage. Between 2018 and 2023, approximately 3230 salt-tolerant trees were planted and mangrove seeds/fruit have been planted across an area of about 3.75 km² within four sub-zones. Additionally, wetland coverage across the nation has increased slightly over the years, rising from about 0.1 percent in 2002 to approximately 0.3 percent in 2020.

Raising general awareness among the public has also been a critical part of Eritrea’s holistic, well-rounded approach to protecting and preserving mangroves. The MoMR has organized regular open meetings with local coastal communities in order to raise understanding about the helpful, consequential role that mangroves play for local ecosystems, species, and communities. Additionally, national media outlets have frequently broadcast detailed messages and programs in all national languages, helping to promote beneficial practices.

**Figure 4.22: Mangrove Plantation (Area in Km²)**

![Mangrove Plantation Graph]

*Source: Ministry of Land, Water and Environment, Water Resources Department*
Target 6.a: By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies.

6.a.1: Amount of water- and sanitation-related official development assistance that is part of a government-coordinated spending plan

ODA and the strong backing of development partners are a critical element in supporting the country’s realization of its ambitious WASH-related targets through using a multifaceted approach. They supplement the government’s national budget, facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and other programmatic work, and play a catalytic role in driving positive outcomes. ODA for WASH has historically fluctuated significantly, with a general decline in recent years. In 2021, IDA was approximately $US1 million, a modest rise from 2015.

Figure 4.23: Official Development Assistant for WASH, 2000-2021

Source: Ministry of Finance and National Development

Target 6.b: Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management

6.b.1: Proportion of local administrative units with established and operational policies and procedures for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management

In rural areas, community-based WASH management committees have been established in about 49 percent of villages and suburban areas. The proportion of committees is highest within the Maekel region (92 percent) and lowest in the Northern Red Sea region (28 percent).

At the national level, the proportion of functional community-based WASH management committees is about 89 percent. While all of the committees within the Maekel and Gash Barka regions are active and operational, between 8 to 21 percent of the committees within the Anseba, Debub, and Northern Red Sea and Southern Red Sea regions are not active.

Related WASH management institutions (i.e., WASH Management Committees) are only available at the village level. Relevant similar WASH management institutions or committees, with a mandate of monitoring and evaluation of management, have not yet been established at regional, sub-regional, and kebabi administration levels. In the case of urban areas, the existing management institutions or committees are inadequately empowered and have insufficient capacity to provide the intended outcomes.
as to WASH management and water safety. Most of the management units are embraced as subordinate actors within the municipal and sub-regional administration and hence, they fail to effectively prepare plans and make decisions as required in relation to WASH systems and water safety.

Community participation in demanding, planning and designing, implementation, management, and upgrading or extending systems and services is also evaluated at both the regional and national levels. Community involvement and participation in demanding WASH facilities is high, while it is low in terms of systems and services upgrading and extension activities. Levels of community participation are moderate with regard to planning and designing, implementation, and management.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WASH Facility Demand</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Design</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WASH Management</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System and Services Upgrading and Extension</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to meet the institutional and capacity requirements of the management system should be updated and strengthened to address existing gaps/challenges by further empowering WASH management system through adoption of water safety planning approaches. The ongoing WASH management committees will be embraced into the proposed management system. However, additional members from relevant stakeholders will be appropriately represented to have strong Water Safety team and WASH management committee.
CONCLUSION AND STEPS FORWARD

In addition to representing an important progressive milestone for the country, Eritrea’s second VNR reflects the country’s deep and enduring commitment to advancing the 2030 Agenda and its wide-ranging developmental ambitions, as well as to meaningfully working with the international community towards achieving a better, more sustainable future for all. The review seeks to build upon the momentum, gains, and lessons accrued from the country’s inaugural VNR process, completed in 2022, and it also offers deeper insight into and injects further impetus for its nation-building and developmental efforts.

Eritrea’s VNR preparation process is rooted in a strong commitment to inclusiveness, transparency, and a highly collaborative, participatory approach, serving as a clear reflection of its wider holistic, all-of-government and all-of-society view of nation-building and the SDGs. Based on several different factors, such as the close interlinkages and tight synergies between them and the other SDGs, availability of valid, accurate data to support evidence-based reporting and defined requirements, the country’s past VNR report, and Eritrea’s existing national framework and domestic general context, the review details progress on SDGs 4, 5, and 6.

As highlighted in the present report, Eritrea has achieved significant and notable progress over the years, helping it to establish a strong foundation for the future. At the same time, however, challenges remain and there is considerable room for improvements in the years ahead. Continued resolve and additional tangible actions are necessary in order to sustain positive momentum, further accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and strengthen progress on the country’s pursuit of its ambitious aims.

In addition to the challenges posed by several destructive conflicts, a series of humanitarian crises, and an array of violent extremist threats across the region, a major impediment for Eritrea’s nation-building, development, and achievement of the 2030 Agenda continues to be the imposition of unilateral, illegitimate sanctions, as well as a broad array of hostile economic, financial, and trade restrictions and measures as a means of political and economic coercion. Collectively, these flagrantly contravene the UN Charter and the core tenets of international law, are contrary to the fundamental ethos of multilateralism, and remain inconsistent with the basic principles of the global trading system. They also violate Eritrea’s sovereignty and right to development, have a plethora of significant direct and indirect negative impacts on the realization of justice and fulfillment of all human rights, and considerably hinder the country’s
efforts to improve standards of living and attempts to promote sustainable development.

With specific regard to SDG 4, Eritrea aims to raise general educational quality, incorporate ICT, digital learning, and innovative methods, and substantially enhance teacher training, qualifications, and professional development across all levels. Additionally, the government will continue to emphasize increasing access to comprehensive early childhood learning, care, and development, as well as raising retention rates, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Widening access to and participation in technical and vocational education and training will help to provide more youth and adults with the broad range of vital skills and critical knowledge needed for decent, dignified employment and entrepreneurship. Renewed efforts are also required to improve access to education for learners with special needs and to better integrate them into the mainstream educational system.

Gender equality and empowerment remains a national priority for Eritrea and the country will continue to support women and girls to exercise autonomy, agency, and control over their own lives, help them actively engage and fully participate as decision-makers in their homes, communities, and all spheres of life, and foster an inclusive, enabling environment to allow them to equally contribute to and benefit from sustainable development and prosperity. Continued vigilance is required to enforce the country’s legislative framework and sustain reductions towards achieving the ultimate elimination of harmful traditional practices, including child, underage, and forced marriage and FGM/C.

For SDG 6, it is imperative to take targeted and progressive steps to improve the supply, reliability, and quality of water and sanitation, including expanding infrastructure and facilities, particularly within rural areas, as well as enhancing access to and practice of improved hygiene among the population. Strategic investment in and focus on enhancing integrated water resources management is also critical to sustainably meet the country’s increasing pressures and competing demands, as well as improve water-use efficiency nationwide.

Furthermore, Eritrea will strive to strengthen the national statistical system and build capacity with regard to domestic data collection, collation, processing and analysis, and dissemination, as well as establishment of a national SDGs database or platform. In addition to helping improve routine SDGs monitoring and reporting, the establishment of a strong and efficient national statistical system and SDGs data portal, as well as the reliable provision of adequate, disaggregated, and high-quality data, will play an important role in guiding and supporting evidence-based planning, policy formulation, decision-making, and resource allocation towards the achievement of Agenda 2030 and Eritrea’s broader nation-building and developmental aspirations. Additionally, the production of robust and disaggregated data will help to promote transparency and accountability, significantly enhance the monitoring infrastructure for tracking and assessing progress in various developmental areas, and support the timely delivery of results.

Importantly, forging strong partnerships and effective collaboration will continue to be an integral element of Eritrea’s multifaceted approach to development and advancing the 2030 Agenda. Consolidating and further strengthening strategic cooperation among various domestic entities, international partners, and a diverse range of other stakeholders will help the country build capacity, more effectively mobilize crucial finances and technical resources, and scale up successful interventions.

Notwithstanding the various challenges and obstacles that it has encountered, Eritrea remains resolute and steadfast in its commitment to consolidating its past gains, addressing outstanding gaps, and driving forward progress towards forging a nation of sustainable growth and prosperity, social justice, harmony, inclusion, dignity, peace, and environmental resilience, while leaving no one behind.
REFERENCES


Ministry of Finance and National Development
Asmara, Eritrea
© 2024