

Sierra Leone

In 2011, Sierra Leone made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government ratified ILO Conventions 138 and 182 and established a Child Labor Unit within the Ministry of Labor and Employment. The Government also awarded grants to girls and the disabled attending secondary school and increased the number of teachers. Moreover, the Government prosecuted Ministry of Education staff for corruption. Despite these efforts, the Government has yet to implement any of the child labor provisions in the Child Right's Act, and limited funding has been provided for enforcement. The worst forms of child labor continue to exist, particularly in dangerous work in the agriculture and mining sectors.

Statistics on Working Children and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working	5-14 yrs.	48.1 (872,561)
Attending School	5-14 yrs.	85.3
Combining Work and School	7-14 yrs.	35.7
Primary Completion Rate		74.4

Sources:

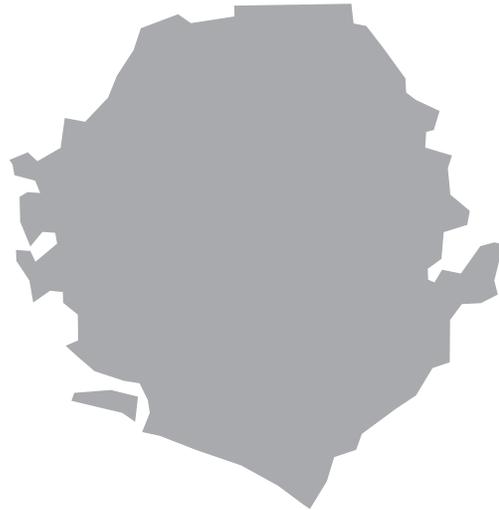
Primary completion rate: Data from 2011, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012.(1)

All other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from DHS Survey, 2008.(2)

Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Children in Sierra Leone are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, particularly dangerous activities in the agriculture and mining sectors.(3) Reports indicate that child labor in agriculture is pervasive in rural areas, including in the production of coffee, cocoa and palm oil, with children as young as age 5 working in the fields.(4-9) Children working in agriculture may be exposed to chemicals, injured by dangerous machinery or tools and suffer physical harm from repetitive motions and carrying heavy loads.(10)

Thousands of children in Sierra Leone, primarily boys ages 10 and 17, work in alluvial diamond mines.(6, 11) Alluvial diamond mining relies on labor-intensive methods to locate diamonds, such as digging and sifting through mud and sand.(12) The mining is usually performed by informal and small-scale mining operations that operate outside the regulatory framework.(13)



Children engaged in alluvial diamond mining undertake hazardous activities, such as repeatedly shoveling and transporting gravel, and are exposed to infectious and mosquito-borne diseases that thrive in alluvial mining areas.(13) The children suffer back and chest pain and fatigue as a result of the activities they perform. Children also risk injury and death from mine pits collapsing.(11) One study found that nearly half of all child miners in the Kono District, the hub of Sierra Leonean diamond mining, work 8 to 10 hours per day, while more than half work at least six days each week.(11, 13) Although mine owners and operators typically do not employ girls or children under age 10 in direct mining activities, the mining sector utilizes these two groups in support roles. Young boys in this group generally provide food and water and take responsibility for less strenuous mining activities, while girls in support roles often work as vendors, hawking items such as drinks and cigarettes.(11, 13)

Children in Sierra Leone are also engaged in stone crushing in granite quarries in unsafe and unhealthy labor conditions, including carrying heavy loads and working long hours.(14) In large dumpsites in Freetown, children as young as age 10 are engaged in digging and gathering metal scraps, among other items.(3, 15, 16) Reports indicate that children frequent dumpsites, where they are exposed to unhealthy and dangerous labor conditions, including chemicals, and risk injury.(16)

Children are also engaged in the fishing industry.(3, 14) Limited evidence suggests that the worst forms of child labor are used in the production of particular types of fish, including snapper, mackerel and herring. Reports note that in addition to performing tasks, such as mending nets, children engaged in the fishing industry also work on boats to fish in the open

sea for several days in a row.(17-20) Fishing exposes children to risks, including the risk of drowning and working in cramped and unsanitary shipping vessels.(21)

Sierra Leone was engaged in an 11-year civil war that ended in 2002, which left many children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. One of the side effects of the war is that a large number of street children engage in the worst forms of child labor.(22, 23)

Sierra Leonean children are also engaged in street vending. Street children steal or beg, in some cases by force.(6, 24, 25) Children working on the streets may be exposed to multiple dangers, including severe weather, vehicle accidents and crime.(15) Street children are engaged in commercial sexual exploitation in cities such as Freetown and Bo.(6)

Some reports indicate that children are engaged in domestic labor, which commonly involves long hours and exposure to physical and sexual exploitation by their employers.(3, 6)

Sierra Leone is a source, transit and destination country for children and women trafficked for the purpose of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation.(6, 26) The majority of trafficked victims are children trafficked from rural provinces or refugee communities to urban and mining areas.(15, 27)

Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

On June 10, 2011, Sierra Leone ratified ILO Convention 182 concerning the Worst Forms of Child Labor, and ILO Convention 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment.(28)

The Child Rights Act, enacted in 2007, sets the minimum age for employment at 15. The Act also states that children must either be age 15 or have completed basic education (whichever is later) before entering into an apprenticeship in either the formal or informal sector.(29) Children are also prohibited from performing night work between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m.(29)

The law allows children ages 13 and older to engage in light work and prohibits children under age 18 from being employed in hazardous work, defined as work that is dangerous to a child's health, safety or morals. The law identifies the following activities as hazardous: seafaring; mining and quarrying; carrying heavy loads; and working in bars, in places where machines are used, and in environments where chemicals are produced or used.(29) Any person who violates the age restrictions within the Child Rights Act could face 2 years of imprisonment and/or a fine.(29)

	C138, Minimum Age	✓
	C182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
	CRC	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	No
	Minimum Age for Work	15
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18
	Compulsory Education Age	15
	Free Public Education	Yes

The Constitution of Sierra Leone prohibits forced and compulsory labor.(30) The Anti-Human Trafficking Act criminalizes all forms of human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children, including profiting from child pornography and prostitution.(31) The Child Rights Act stipulates that the Government will intervene to protect children who are forced to beg or are exposed to moral or physical danger. The age for voluntary recruitment into the armed forces is 18.(29, 32) Information was not available on whether there are laws regulating the use of children in illicit activities such as drug trafficking.

Labor laws including the Employers and Employed Act (1960) and Regulation of Wages and Industrial Relations Act of 1971 in Sierra Leone are outdated.(33-35) The laws do not include descriptions for hazardous work for children outside of the mining and shipping industries.(34) Fines prescribed in the laws do not reflect the present value of Sierra Leone's currency.(33-35) Therefore, their prescribed penalties may not be commensurate with the severity of the crimes.

The Constitution establishes free and compulsory primary and secondary education, or until the age of 15.(30, 36). Though education is free and the Government of Sierra Leone provides some free textbooks, some families cannot pay for uniforms, extracurricular activities, exercise books and supplies. In some cases, fees are charged for schools to pay the salaries of unregistered teachers.(37) In rural areas, some schools are too far away for children to attend.(36) Additionally, reports indicate that families may have difficulty losing the benefit of work the child may have provided during school hours.(36)

Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

The Child Protection Unit of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) has the primary responsibility for protecting children. Though the Ministry submitted plans and a budget to establish the inter-agency Commission for Children to coordinate and exchange information, as mandated by the Child Rights Act, it has yet to be established or funded.(29) Research has not identified evidence that a mechanism to coordinate efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor is currently in place.(38)

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Labor and Employment established a Child Labor Unit (CLU), which is responsible for enforcing child labor law and monitoring compliance with child labor regulations. The unit is staffed by a focal person, a factory inspector and a labor inspector. These staff members, however, are not solely dedicated to working on child labor issues. They staff the CLU on a part-time basis. According to the Government, the CLU lacks resources to establish branch offices to monitor child labor in remote areas of the country.(33) The Ministry of Labor and Employment employs 20 full time labor inspectors and 15 factory inspectors, including the two inspectors who work in the CLU. Inspectors conduct all labor inspections, including those on child labor.(3, 15) Because of funding limitations, the inspectors lack adequate equipment and transportation.(3, 15) After gathering evidence in child labor investigations, inspectors refer cases to other agencies or the police for possible action.(3) The penalty for violating prohibitions against employing children in hazardous work is a fine or a prison sentence of up to two years.(3)

At the district level, the Government employs labor officers that are responsible for all labor issues in the district.(29) In addition to inspections conducted by labor inspectors, district labor officers are responsible for initial investigations and enforcement of child labor provisions in the Child Rights Act and district councils are responsible for enforcement in the informal sector.(29) Following an investigation, labor officers and district councils refer cases to the police for possible prosecution.(29) Although they have not been established in many villages and chiefdoms, child welfare committees also monitor children.

The Ministry of Mineral Resources, charged with enforcing regulations against the use of child labor in mining activities, has a few hundred monitors in the field who sometimes intervene if child labor is found.(39) Many local community leaders and chiefs have enacted mechanisms to punish and

deter violations in the mining sector—with varying levels of success, including enacting by-laws to prohibit children from dangerous activities such as carrying heavy loads.(35, 39) Although they have the authority to do so, the Ministry of Mineral Resources has not suspended the licenses of mining operators who engage in child labor.(11, 39, 40)

No inspections or prosecutions for child labor violations were reported.

The Government has established a task force to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts and an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Trafficking co-chaired by the Ministry of Justice and the MSWGCA.(4) It includes the Ministries of Labor, Education, Internal Affairs, Information, Health, Foreign Affairs, Local Government, Youth and Tourism.(4, 33) The task force coordinates the needs and requirements of agencies involved in providing shelter and services for victims, and gathers some data on reported trafficking cases. The Task Force drafted guidelines for identifying trafficking in persons victims and in 2011 began to draft a 3-year anti-trafficking action plan.(15)

The Family Support Unit (FSU) of the Sierra Leone Police is tasked with investigating and prosecuting various crimes, including child trafficking. According to USDOS, four cases of child trafficking were reported in 2011.(4, 15)

In 2004, the Government of Sierra Leone also established the Human Rights Commission, which aims to coordinate efforts to protect and promote human rights through awareness raising; monitor and investigate complaints regarding human rights violations and produce and publish annual reports.(15, 41) Research has not identified the effectiveness of the Commission or any activities undertaken during the reporting period.

The Government of Sierra Leone continued to support the Special Court of Sierra Leone. The Court was established by the Government of Sierra Leone, and the UN and was mandated to try human rights violations cases that occurred since 1996.(42, 43) In 2011, oral arguments in the trial of Charles Taylor, the former President of Liberia and leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia rebel group concluded. The list of charges included the procurement and use of child soldiers in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In 2012, Charles Taylor was convicted and sentenced to a jail term of 50 years.(44, 45)

Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Child Rights Act expresses the Government's formal policy on child labor. The Government's 2008-2012 Poverty

Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP II), *An Agenda for Change*, includes policies to fight child labor by achieving universal primary education. The latest report on the progress of the PRSP II noted that child labor continues to be a serious challenge for the Government due to lack of resources.

In addition, the Government of Sierra Leone has an Education Sector Plan (2007-2015) and a UN Development Assistance Framework (2008-2010).^(3, 36, 46) The Primary Education Policy of 2001 implements education law.⁽³⁶⁾ There have been no assessments on the effects of these policies on the prevalence of the worst forms of child labor.

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

During the reporting period, the Government's statistics office, Statistics Sierra Leone, collaborated with the ILO on finalizing the National Child Labor Survey.⁽³⁾ Data and a final report from this survey have not been released. The MSWGCA completed a survey of Sierra Leone's street children, in partnership with Street Child of Sierra Leone and Help a Needy Child International.^(3, 40)

The Government of Sierra Leone continues to participate in the 4-year, \$21.1 million EU-funded, TACKLE Project.^(3, 47, 48) The Project aims to combat child labor through education in Sierra Leone, along with 10 other countries. The TACKLE Project also has the objective of strengthening the

Government's capacity to implement and enforce policies to prevent child labor.^(47, 48)

The Government supports shelters, which house child victims of forced labor and trafficking.⁽¹⁵⁾

The Government supports the UNDP-funded Youth Employment and Empowerment Program, which seeks to strengthen national policy, strategy and coordination for youth employment. The Youth Employment Network, which includes a partnership between UN, ILO and the World Bank, manages the Youth to Youth Fund for youth-led organizations to pilot innovative, small-scale youth entrepreneurship projects.⁽⁴⁹⁾

To improve access to education, Sierra Leone increased the number of teachers and awarded grants to girls and the disabled attending secondary school and university; it also investigated and prosecuted Ministry of Education personnel engaged in corrupt practices.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The Government also has a program to commercialize the agriculture sector.⁽³⁾ The youth employment, education and agriculture programs may reduce the prevalence of child labor; however, no assessments of the impact of these programs on child labor have been identified.

Despite these programs, the Government's investment in social programs continues to be insufficient to address the scope of child labor in Sierra Leone, particularly among children working in agriculture, mining, fishing and domestic labor.

Based on the reporting above, the following actions would advance the elimination of the worst forms of child labor in Sierra Leone:

Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Laws and Regulations	Update labor laws to ensure that penalties are commensurate with the severity of violations.	2010, 2011
	Clarify laws to prevent the use of children in illicit activities such as drug trafficking.	2011
Coordination and Enforcement	Establish a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor.	2009, 2010, 2011
	Fully establish the National Commission for Children.	2010, 2011
	Fully fund and staff the Child Labor Unit of the Ministry of Labor and increase efforts to enforce worst forms of child labor laws and appropriately fund labor inspectors.	2011
	Ensure the Ministry of Mineral Resources revokes the licenses of operators who employ child labor.	2010, 2011
	Publish data on worst forms of child labor inspections and prosecutions.	2010, 2011

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Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Social Programs	Develop and provide funding for social programs to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in agriculture, mining, fishing and domestic labor.	2009, 2010, 2011
	Make child labor data available, including the data from the National Child Labor Survey.	2010, 2011
	Assess the impact of the youth employment, education and agriculture programs on reducing the worst forms of child labor.	2011

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