

In 2012, Sierra Leone made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Special Court for Sierra Leone found former Liberian President Charles Taylor guilty of planning, aiding, and abetting crimes committed by rebel forces in Sierra Leone, including procuring and using child soldiers. The Government passed the Sexual Offenses Act, which includes penalties for child prostitution, pornography, and sex tourism. The Government also collected data on the number of street children in the country, provided temporary shelter and support to street children and victims of trafficking, and implemented a number of initiatives to improve school attendance. Despite these efforts, limited funding has been provided for enforcement and long-term support for victims of trafficking was unavailable. Children in Sierra Leone continue to engage in the worst forms of child labor, particularly in dangerous work in agriculture and in mining.

Statistics on Working Children and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working	5-14 yrs.	48.1 (872,561)
Attending School	5-14 yrs.	63.0
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, 2013.(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 in the mining sectors.(3) Reports indicate that child labor in agriculture is pervasive in rural areas, including the production of coffee, cocoa and palm oil, with children as young as age 5 working in the fields.(4-9) Children in Sierra Leone are engaged in dangerous activities in agriculture. Children working in agriculture may use dangerous tools, carry heavy loads, and apply harmful pesticides.(10)

Thousands of children in Sierra Leone, primarily boys ages 10 and 17, work in alluvial diamond mines.(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 6 days each week.(11) 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) Children break granite rocks into gravel and sell it for use in cement.(15) Children sustain injuries including broken bones from falls, leg and toe injuries from using mallets and hammers, and cuts and eye injuries from gravel shards.(15)

In large dumpsites in Freetown, children as young as age 10 are engaged in digging and gathering metal scraps and recyclable

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material, among other items.(3, 16-18) Reports indicate that children frequent dumpsites, in which they are exposed to unhealthy and dangerous labor conditions, including chemicals, and risk injury.(17)

Although the significance is unknown, 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.(19) 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.(19-22) Fishing exposes children to risks, including the risk of drowning and working in cramped and unsanitary shipping vessels.(23)

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

Sierra Leone is a source, transit, and destination country for children trafficked for the purpose of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation.(27) The majority of children are trafficked from rural provinces or refugee communities to urban and mining areas.(16, 28) Reports suggest that children from Nigeria, The Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea may be trafficked to Sierra Leone for forced begging, forced labor, and commercial sexual exploitation.(42)

Sierra Leone has a large number of street children as a result of the 11-year civil war that ended in 2002.(24, 25) There are reports of children working on the streets, but specific information on hazards is unknown.(16, 26) Some may be exploited into commercial sex work.(18)

Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

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

International Conventions and Selected Laws on Child Labor and Education

	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

activities as hazardous: seafaring; mining and quarrying; carrying heavy loads; and working in bars, in places in which machines are used, and in environments in which chemicals are produced or used.(29) The penalty for employing children in hazardous work or violating the age restrictions under the Child Rights Act is a fine or a prison sentence of up to 2 years.(18, 29) 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.(29)

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) Information was not available on whether there are laws specifically regulating the use of children in illicit activities such as drug trafficking.

In August 2012, the Government of Sierra Leone enacted the Sexual Offenses Act.(18) The Act criminalizes and assigns penalties for sexual acts involving children.(18) According to the Act, child prostitution, child pornography, and sexual tourism violations result in penalties of 10-15 years imprisonment. The Act also identifies a sexual offense against a child as an aggravating factor punishable by a maximum sentence.(18) The Government began carrying out prosecutions under the Act in January 2013.(32)

The age for voluntary recruitment into the armed forces is 18.(29, 33)

Labor laws including the Employers and Employed Act (1960) and Regulation of Wages and Industrial Relations Act of 1971 in Sierra Leone are outdated.(34-36) Fines prescribed in the laws do not reflect the present value of Sierra Leone's currency.(34-36) 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, 37) Though education is free, in some cases fees are charged for schools to pay the salaries of unregistered teachers.(38) In rural areas, some schools are too far away for children to attend.(37) Additionally, reports indicate that families may have difficulty losing the benefit of work the child may have provided during school hours.(37)

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 National Commission for Children to coordinate and exchange information, as mandated by the Child Rights Act, the Commission has yet to be established or funded.(18, 29) Research has not identified evidence that a mechanism to coordinate efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor is currently in place.(39)

The Ministry of Labor and Employment's Child Labor Unit (CLU) 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.(34) No information was available on the CLU's 2012 budget.(18) The Ministry of Labor and Employment employs 20 full time labor inspectors and 15 factory inspectors to conduct all labor inspections, including those on child labor.(3, 16, 18) Because of funding limitations, the inspectors lack adequate equipment and transportation.(3, 16, 18) Until inspectors are provided with sufficient resources, it is unclear whether the number of

inspectors is adequate. After gathering evidence in child labor investigations, inspectors refer cases to other agencies or the police for possible action.(3) Inspections for the worst forms of child labor are usually complaint driven and are referred to the Family Support Unit (FSU) of the Sierra Leone Police.(18) There were no inspections involving child labor in 2012.(18) Though inspectors are positioned to refer cases to other agencies for action, it remains unclear whether such action was taken during the reporting period. Information on whether citations or penalties were issued is unavailable.

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) By the end of the reporting period, hundreds of village child welfare committees had been established to monitor children.(18) Chiefdom child welfare committees support these committees, and a ward committee system is being established to link villages together to reduce the current number of committees.(18) Information on the level of coordination between these committees was not available.

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.(40) 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.(36, 40) 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, 40, 41)

The National Trafficking in Persons Task Force, co-chaired by the Ministry of Justice and the MSWGCA, meets regularly and addresses the issue of child labor.(4, 18) It includes the Ministries of Labor, Education, Internal Affairs, Information, Health, Foreign Affairs, Local Government, Youth, and Tourism.(4, 34) 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. Currently, long-term shelters and other

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services are unavailable.(42) The Task Force drafted guidelines for identifying trafficking in persons victims and a 3-year anti-trafficking action plan.(16) Information was not available on whether these guidelines have been issued.

The FSU of the Sierra Leone Police is tasked with investigating and prosecuting various crimes, including child trafficking. The unit also investigates and prosecutes child labor cases identified by government monitors.(4, 16, 18) During the reporting period, seven alleged human trafficking offenders faced prosecution. All seven defendants remained on trial in February 2013; however, information on whether these cases include the trafficking of children is not available.(18)

In 2004, the Government of Sierra Leone 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.(16, 43) Research has not identified the effectiveness of the Commission on child labor issues or any related activities undertaken during the reporting period.

The Government of Sierra Leone continued to support the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which in 2012 found former Liberian President Charles Taylor, guilty of numerous charges of planning, aiding, and abetting crimes committed by rebel forces in Sierra Leone, including the procurement and use of child soldiers.(44-47)

Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

There is no policy or plan specifically addressing the worst forms of child labor.(18) However, the Government's 2008-2012 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper II (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.

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, 41) The report found a total 49,698 children living and working in the streets of Sierra Leone.(48)

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.

In addition, the Government of Sierra Leone has an Education Sector Plan (2007-2015) and the Primary Education Policy of 2001 implements education law.(3, 37, 49) There have been no assessments on the impact 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

The Government of Sierra Leone has a number of programs to address child labor. The Government, with support from UNICEF and USAID, has prioritized programs to improve the retention rate of girls in secondary school. The gender enrollment gap at the primary school level has narrowed as a result of these programs.(50) To improve access to education, the Government of 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.(51) The Government trained primary school teachers and developed a code of conduct to improve ethical standards in schools. Teachers in all districts of the country are now familiar with the code.(52) A task force was established to oversee the effective delivery of school materials, including textbooks.(52) The Government, with WFP, implements a school feeding program that targets 300,000 children.(52) Research on the direct impact of these programs on child labor was not identified.

The MSWGCA partners with World Hope International on a program to combat child trafficking and forced child labor in Sierra Leone.(32) The Government is also raising public awareness on child trafficking. The Government supports shelters that house child victims of forced labor and trafficking.(16, 53) However, these shelters do not provide victims with long-term support, and child victims may live with social workers.(53)

The Government supports centers for street children to receive psychological support, medical care, vocational training, and help in locating their families.(53)

The Government of Sierra Leone continues to participate in the 4-year, \$21.1 million, EU-funded TACKLE Project.(3, 18, 54, 55) 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.(54, 55)

The Government supports the UNDP-funded Youth Employment and Empowerment Program that seeks to strengthen national policy, strategy, and coordination for youth employment. The Youth Employment Network, which includes a partnership between the UN, ILO and the World Bank, manages the Youth to Youth Fund for youth-led organizations to pilot innovative, small-scale youth entrepreneurship projects.(56)

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.(3)

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 dangerous activities 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, 2012
	Clarify laws to prevent the use of children in illicit activities such as drug trafficking.	2011, 2012
Coordination and Enforcement	Establish a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor.	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Fully establish the National Commission for Children.	2010, 2011, 2012
	Issue anti-trafficking guidelines.	2012
	Fully fund and staff the Child Labor Unit of the Ministry of Labor and increase efforts to enforce worst forms of child labor laws.	2011, 2012
	Establish branch offices to monitor child labor in remote areas of the country.	2012
	Provide information on the budget of the Child Labor Unit.	2012
	Provide inspectors adequate equipment and transportation.	2012
	Ensure the Ministry of Mineral Resources revokes the licenses of operators who employ child labor.	2010, 2011, 2012
	Publish data on worst forms of child labor inspections and prosecutions.	2010, 2011, 2012
Policies	Assess the impact of Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper II and the education plan on child labor.	2011, 2012
	Make child labor data available, including the data from the National Child Labor Survey.	2010, 2011, 2012
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, 2012
	Assess the impact of the youth employment, education, and agriculture programs on reducing the worst forms of child labor.	2011, 2012

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