

# Sierra Leone

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

The Government of Sierra Leone has started a program to introduce universal free primary education (classes 1 to 6) in all government-owned and government-assisted schools and is receiving assistance for the program from the World Bank and other donors.<sup>2259</sup> UNICEF is engaged in projects to renovate schools, distribute teaching material, and provide equipment for schools.<sup>2260</sup>

## Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2000, UNICEF estimated that 71.6 percent of children between ages 5 and 14 in Sierra Leone were working.<sup>2261</sup> The same survey estimated that 2 percent of children between ages 5 and 14 perform paid work, while 48 percent of children in Sierra Leone perform unpaid work for someone other than a household member.<sup>2262</sup> Teenage prostitution has reportedly become a significant problem because of migration from rural areas to Freetown during the civil war.<sup>2263</sup> Other children in Sierra Leone work on a seasonal basis on family subsistence farms, in family businesses, and as petty vendors.<sup>2264</sup>

Rebel forces of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and other military groups have forced children into their ranks, where they have served as porters, soldiers, sexual slaves, or have been forced to dig for diamonds in mines.<sup>2265</sup> In 2000 the ILO estimated that 5,400 children served

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<sup>2259</sup> International Monetary Fund and International Development Association, *Sierra Leone: Joint Staff Assessment and the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, July 16, 2001, at <http://www.imf.org/external/np/jsa/2001/sle/eng/071601.pdf> on 10/18/01.

<sup>2260</sup> Integrated Regional Information Networks, *Sierra Leone: Army Recruits Trained in Child Protection*, November 3, 2000.

<sup>2261</sup> Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2 (MICS2), “Understanding Children’s Work,” Sierra Leone, 2000.

<sup>2262</sup> Most of this is domestic work such as cooking, shopping, cleaning, washing clothes, getting water, and caring for children. See Government of Sierra Leone, Ministry of Development and Economic Planning, Central Statistics Office, *The Status of Women and Children in Sierra Leone: A Household Survey Report*, MICS2, Final Report, November 2000, 61.

<sup>2263</sup> Swedish International Development Agency, *Looking Back, Thinking Forward: The Fourth Report on the Implementation of the Agenda for Action Adopted at the First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Stockholm, Sweden, on 28 August 1996, 1999-2000*, at <http://www.ecpat.net/Blueboo2000/index.html> on 10/28/01.

<sup>2264</sup> *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000—Sierra Leone* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2001) [hereinafter *Country Reports 2000*], Section 6d, at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/af/index.cfm?docid=755>.

<sup>2265</sup> *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6c, Child Soldiers Global Report, Republic of Sierra Leone, at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/af/index.cfm?docid=755>. See also Douglas Farah, “Rebels in Sierra Leone Mine Diamonds in Defiance of UN Captured Children and Conscripts Used as Laborers,” *Washington Post*, August 19, 2001, p. A1.

as soldiers.<sup>2266</sup> Child soldiers forced into military service by the RUF were given cocaine and amphetamines; were armed with pistols, rifles, and machetes; and were forced to engage in combat, massacres, and other acts of brutality.<sup>2267</sup> In May 2001, following reconciliation talks between the Government and the RUF, the RUF began to release child soldiers.<sup>2268</sup>

The law requires mandatory primary school education, but a shortage of schools and teachers has made implementation impossible.<sup>2269</sup> According to the International Monetary Fund, the civil war resulted in the destruction of 1,270 primary schools, and 67 percent of all school-age children are currently out of school.<sup>2270</sup>

## Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

Sierra Leone sets the minimum age for employment at age 18, although children between the ages of 12 and 18 may be employed in some non-hazardous occupations with the consent of their parents. The law is not enforced in practice, as there is no government agency charged with enforcement.<sup>2271</sup> The Constitution prohibits forced and bonded labor, including that performed by children; however, under the Chiefdom's Council Act, individual chiefs may impose compulsory labor and may require village members to work to improve common areas. This practice exists only in rural areas.<sup>2272</sup> Sierra Leone has not ratified ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment or ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.<sup>2273</sup>

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<sup>2266</sup> ILO, *Sierra Leone: The Terrible Price of Poverty and Unemployment*, World of Work, no. 33 (February), 2000 [hereinafter *The Terrible Price of Poverty and Unemployment*], at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inf/magazine/33/sleone.htm> on 10/17/01. Human rights groups estimate that 4,500 to 10,000 children under 16 years of age were forcibly abducted into military service during the war. See Douglas Farah, "Children Forced to Kill," *Washington Post*, April 10, 2000 [hereinafter "Children Forced to Kill"].

<sup>2267</sup> "Children Forced to Kill."

<sup>2268</sup> UNICEF, "UNICEF Encouraged by the Release Today of 150 Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone," press release, Freetown, New York, June 4, 2001, at <http://www.unicef.org/newsline/01prjune4cs.htm> on 10/17/01. During 2001, armed groups released more than 3,800 child soldiers and camp followers. According to UNICEF, as of October 2001, approximately 1,500 children reported as missing during the war had yet to be located. See Electronic correspondence, U.S. Department of State Official, Eric Barboriak, to U.S. Department of Labor Official, April 22, 2002.

<sup>2269</sup> *Country Reports 2000* at Section 5.

<sup>2270</sup> Enrollment and attendance rates for Sierra Leone are unavailable. See Republic of Sierra Leone, *Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, Freetown, June 2001, 18-19, at <http://www.imf.org/external/np/prsp/2001/sle/01/063101.pdf> on 10/18/01.

<sup>2271</sup> *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6d.

<sup>2272</sup> *Ibid.* at Section 6c.

<sup>2273</sup> ILOLEX database: Sierra Leone at <http://ilolex.ilo.ch:1567/english/>.