

In 2019, Sierra Leone made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. In early 2020, the government officially overturned a 10-year-old policy that prohibited pregnant girls from attending regular public schools or taking secondary and post-secondary school entrance exams. The government also published a report on the results of a 2018 household-level survey on child labor and employment. However, children in Sierra Leone engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in the mining sector and in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in quarrying stone and fishing. The types of hazardous work prohibited for children do not cover all sectors where child labor is known to occur, and the government does not have a sufficient number of labor inspectors to adequately enforce labor laws throughout the country. In addition, Sierra Leone lacks a national policy and social program to address all relevant worst forms of child labor.



### I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Sierra Leone engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in the mining sector and in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in quarrying stone and fishing. (1) In 2019, the government published a report based on household-level survey data collected in 2018, which included a discussion of child labor in Sierra Leone. (1,2) Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Sierra Leone.

**Table 1. Statistics on Children’s Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	35.1 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	78.2
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	32.2
Primary Completion Rate (%)		81.8

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2018 published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. (3)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization’s analysis of statistics from the Demographic and Health Survey, 2017. (4)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children’s work by sector and activity.

**Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity**

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Cultivation of cassava, coffee, cocoa, palm oil, peanuts, and rice (1,5)
	Fishing, including deep-sea fishing,† mending nets, and working on boats in the open sea† (1)
Industry	Mining† for alluvial diamonds, sand, and gold, including loading gravel in sacks or basins, carrying sacks on their heads, washing, and sieving (1)
	Quarrying† and crushing stone, including granite, and transporting gravel (1)
	Construction, activities unknown (1)
	Manufacturing,† activities unknown (1,2,6)
Services	Scavenging scrap metals and recyclable materials from dumpsites (1,7-9)
	Domestic work (1,9)
	Street work, including begging, trading, and selling goods (1,9,10)
	Portering, including carrying heavy loads† (1)
	Working as apprentices, including in auto repair shops and on transportation vehicles, including mini buses and motorbike taxis (9,11)

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**Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (Cont.)**

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor†	Forced begging, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,12)
	Forced domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,12)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,12)
	Forced labor at street hawking, domestic work, mining, agriculture, scavenging for scrap metal, and motorbike taxi driving, granite and alluvial diamond mines, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,11,12)

† Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.




Sierra Leone is a source, transit, and destination country for children trafficked for forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (13-15) Sierra Leone has a form of internal child trafficking called “*men pikin*,” meaning foster care in Krio, in which family members send children with promises of better educational opportunities to relatives in urban areas. However, some children are instead subjected to forced labor, including in street hawking, domestic work, mining, agriculture, scavenging for scrap metal, and motorbike taxi driving. Some children sent to Koranic schools are trafficked for labor exploitation. (9) In addition, LGBTQI children are at a higher risk for human trafficking. (16) There are also reports that children, mostly boys ages 5–17, are forced to mine for diamonds for long hours in hazardous conditions, sometimes without pay. (13-15)

In December, the Economic Community of West African States ruled that Sierra Leone’s policy, which prohibited pregnant girls from attending regular public schools or taking secondary and post-secondary school entrance exams, was illegal. Since that time, the government has allowed pregnant girls to take secondary and post-secondary school entrance exams, and on March 30, 2020, the government officially overturned its policy that prevented pregnant girls from attending school and taking entrance exams. (1,17,18) Despite government initiatives to make education free through secondary school, substantial barriers remain, including a lack of schools and teachers, limited transportation to schools, and sexual abuse by teachers. (1,19-21) However, the government enacted the Sexual Offenses Amendment Act in 2019, which provides harsher punishments for offenders, which may lessen a barrier to education. (22) The government also conducted a survey of household data throughout the country; however, the data were not disaggregated to illustrate the level of child labor found in Sierra Leone. (2)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Sierra Leone has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

**Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor**

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Sierra Leone’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the lack of specific provisions on light work.

**Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor**

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	15	Section 125 of the Child Right Act; Section 52 of Chapter 212, Employers and Employed Act (23,24)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Section 128 of the Child Right Act; Sections 47–56 of Chapter 212, Employers and Employed Act (23,24)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Section 128 of the Child Right Act; Sections 47–56 of Chapter 212, Employers and Employed Act; Sections 164 and 170 of the Mines and Minerals Act (23-25)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Part II, Section 2, and Part IV, Sections 14–15 and 21 of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act; Section 19 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone (26,27)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Part II, Section 2, and Part IV, Sections 14–15 and 21 of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act; Section 60 of the Child Right Act (23,26)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Sections 19–34 of the Sexual Offenses Act; Part II, Section 2, of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act (22,26,28)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Sections 7 and 13 of the National Drugs Control Act (29)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Section 28 of the Child Right Act (23)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15	Section 3 of the Education Act; Section 125 of the Child Right Act (23,30)
Free Public Education	Yes		Section 3 of the Education Act; Section 9 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone; Section 11(c) of the Child Right Act (23,27,30)

\* No conscription (29)

Although Sierra Leone’s Child Right Act identifies areas of hazardous work prohibited for children, such as portage of heavy loads, going to sea, and working in places in which machines are used, the types of hazardous work identified do not include, among others, street work. (15,23,24,) Furthermore, children may be exposed to hazardous conditions while working in agriculture and domestic work. (15,23,24,31)

The Child Right Act sets the minimum age for light work at age 13; however, it is not specific enough to prevent children from involvement in child labor because it does not limit the number of hours per week for light work, determine the activities in which light work may be permitted, or specify the conditions in which light work may be undertaken. (32)

### III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MLSS) that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

**Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MLSS)	Formulates, implements, and monitors compliance with child labor regulations through its Child Labor Unit. (1) MLSS District Labor Officers enforce labor laws in the formal sector. (1) In October 2019, the Ministry of Labor embarked on nationwide sensitization and popularization of the labor migration policy, impacting child labor. (33)
Ministry of Justice’s Director of Public Prosecution	Responsible for undertaking criminal proceedings, including enforcement of criminal laws against forced child labor; child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, recruitment and use of child soldiers, and use of children in illicit activities. (1)

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**Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (Cont.)**

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources	Enforces regulations against the use of child labor in mining. Authorized to suspend licenses of mining operators found using child labor. (1,24)
Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MGCA)	Serves as the umbrella agency to oversee child protection issues, including child labor. (1,31) In November 2019, President Bio announced the split of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children Affairs (MSWGCA) into the Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) and the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MGCA). (1,33)
Ministry of Internal Affairs' Police and Transnational and Organized Crime Unit	The Sierra Leone Police lead the investigation and prosecution of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse through Family Support Units, which are mandated to minimize and eradicate the incidence of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse. (1) Transnational Organized Crime Unit (TOCU) enforces human trafficking laws and provides statistical data and general information on particular cases of human trafficking. (1)

The Child Right Act requires the establishment of a Child Welfare Committee in every village and chiefdom, however, research indicates that these committees have been established in only a few parts of the country due to budgetary constraints. (33,35,36) The Ministries of Social Welfare and Justice lead the TIP Task Force. (33)

### Labor Law Enforcement

In 2019, labor law enforcement agencies in Sierra Leone took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the MLSS that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including labor inspector training.

**Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (13)	\$475,600 (1)
Number of Labor Inspectors	27 (15)	30 (1)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (13)	Yes (1)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (13)	Yes (1)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A (1)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (13)	No (1)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	350 (13)	450 (1)
Number Conducted at Worksite	350 (13)	450 (1)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (13)	0 (1)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (13)	N/A (1)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A	N/A (1)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (13)	Yes (1)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (13)	Unknown (1)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (13)	Yes (1)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (13)	Yes (1)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	No (13)	No (1)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (13)	No (1)

The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Sierra Leone's workforce, which includes more than 2.9 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in least developed economies, Sierra Leone would employ about 75 inspectors. (37,38) In addition to the insufficient number of inspectors, enforcement of child labor laws remains challenging due to insufficient training and the lack of resources for inspections. (1) Although the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources can conduct inspections of mines and revoke licenses from license holders who are found to be using child labor, reports indicate that a limited number of inspectors and a lack of funding may have hindered the enforcement of these laws in the diamond-mining sector. (13,16,24,32) Routine inspections were conducted only in the formal sector. The MLSS inspected the construction, agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and fishing industries. Labor inspections were not conducted in the informal economy in which most child labor is known to occur. (1)

**Criminal Law Enforcement**

In 2019, criminal law enforcement agencies in Sierra Leone took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including lack of data on criminal law enforcement efforts.

**Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (13)	Yes (1)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	No (1)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (13)	No (1)
Number of Investigations	0 (13)	0 (1)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (13)	Unknown (1)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (13)	Unknown (1)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (13)	Unknown (1)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (15)	Unknown (1)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (13)	Yes (1)

Reports indicate that criminal law enforcement in Sierra Leone, particularly efforts to address human trafficking, is hampered by a lack of coordination, limited funding, and a lack of training of law enforcement personnel and the judiciary. (1) The government does not provide information on the number of violations found, prosecutions initiated, convictions, or whether it imposed penalties for violations related to the worst forms of child labor. (1,15) On February 11, 2020, and for the first time in 15 years, the High Court of Sierra Leone convicted perpetrators of human trafficking. (39)

**IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR**

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8). However, gaps may exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

**Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor**

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Technical Steering Committee on Child Labor	Coordinates efforts to address child labor. (1) Led by MLSS and MGCA and includes representatives from 10 other government agencies, international organizations, and NGOs. As part of the National Technical Steering Committee on Child Labor, the National Commission for Children advises the government on ways to improve child welfare. (1)
National Trafficking in Persons Task Force	Coordinates the needs and requirements of agencies that provide shelter and services for human trafficking victims, gathers data on reported human trafficking cases, and meets regularly to develop policies related to child trafficking. During the reporting period, the Government of Sierra Leone made efforts to increase funding to fight human trafficking. (1)
Child Welfare Committees	Promote awareness of children's rights and report child welfare concerns to officials responsible for children's issues. Provide recommendations on the support of village children and address complaints and concerns by village inhabitants. (1,34,35)

During the reporting period, Child Welfare Committees in all district capitals across the country were active monitoring mining sites.

**V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR**

The Government of Sierra Leone has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including the lack of policies that cover all worst forms of child labor.

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**Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor**

Policy	Description
National Action Plan on Human Trafficking (2015–2020)	Includes strategies to address human trafficking through prevention efforts, victim identification, protection and referral of victims to services, training of personnel, and government coordination and monitoring. (1,14) In 2019, this plan was implemented. Among the activities during the reporting period include providing temporary housing to TIP survivors and training social welfare personnel in TIP caregiving and police in victim identification. (33)

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (1,19,40)

Although the Government of Sierra Leone has adopted the National Action Plan on Human Trafficking, research found no evidence of a policy on other worst forms of child labor.

## VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2019, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the adequacy of programs to address the problem in all sectors.

**Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor**

Program	Description
Child Trafficking Shelters†	Government-funded program that refers child trafficking victims to privately run shelters that house child victims of forced labor and human trafficking. (41) In 2019, the government provided World Hope International with a building to be used as a recovery and rehabilitation shelter for human trafficking victims. (1)
Free Quality School Education (2018–2023)	Program that covers the costs of school tuition and fees, food programs in remote communities, textbooks, and some teaching materials. (1) In 2019, 21 percent of the national budget was allocated to implement this program, which increased access to primary, secondary, vocational, and university education. (1) President Bio, Vice President Jalloh, and other government officials each donated 3 months of their salaries to establish a government program to pay for textbooks, eliminate school fees, and train teachers in an effort to support free public primary and secondary education for more than 2 million students. (13,17,18,42,43) Immediately after implementation, school enrollment at the primary and secondary school levels increased. (33)

† Program is funded by the Government of Sierra Leone.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (44,45)

Sierra Leone has insufficient and under-funded shelters and safe houses for children who have been withdrawn from working on the streets or in forced labor. (6,14,25)

Although the Government of Sierra Leone has implemented programs to assist child trafficking survivors, research found no evidence that it has carried out programs specifically designed to assist children working on the streets, in agriculture, and in domestic work. (1)

## VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Sierra Leone (Table 11).

**Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2019
	Ensure that children are protected from hazardous work in sectors that have dangerous conditions and in which child labor is known to occur, including in agriculture and domestic work.	2014 – 2019
	Ensure that the law's light work provisions are specific enough to prevent children's involvement in child labor.	2015 – 2019
	Establish a complaint and reciprocal referral mechanism for labor law enforcement efforts.	2015 – 2019
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet ILO's technical advice.	2011 – 2019
	Provide labor law and criminal law enforcement officials with sufficient resources to adequately enforce labor laws throughout the country.	2012 – 2019
	Enforce laws prohibiting child labor in mining, particularly in the diamond mining sector.	2015 – 2019

**Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (Cont.)**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Publish information on the number of labor law violations found and routine inspections targeted as well as criminal violations found, prosecutions initiated, convictions obtained, and whether penalties were imposed for the worst forms of child labor.	2011 – 2019
	Improve coordination between criminal law enforcement agencies and provide sufficient training to enforcement personnel and the judiciary to ensure that violations are adequately investigated and prosecuted.	2014 – 2019
Coordination	Ensure that the National Trafficking in Persons Task Force, and all government bodies, are active and able to adequately coordinate anti-child labor efforts.	2018 – 2019
	Ensure that Village Child Welfare Committees are established and operational in all areas.	2014 – 2019
	Adopt policies to address child labor in relevant sectors, such as mining, quarrying, and commercial sexual exploitation.	2019
Social Programs	Ensure that data for household surveys are disaggregated so the prevalence of child labor in Sierra Leone is known.	2019
	Institute programs to address child labor in the education sector by providing transportation, increasing the number of schools, and eliminating abuse by teachers.	2013 – 2019
	Increase the availability of and funding for shelters and safe houses for victims of forced labor and for children removed from street work.	2009 – 2019
	Institute programs to address child labor in the sectors of agriculture, domestic work, and street vending.	2019

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