

In 2022, Sierra Leone made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government passed the Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act, which increased prison terms for sex trafficking and established a trust fund for survivors of human trafficking to pay for shelter, medical services, and legal aid. The government also launched a hotline to report trafficking crimes and established a National Migration Policy to promote the rights of migrants and increase public awareness of human trafficking. However, children in Sierra Leone are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and forced labor in mining. Children also engage in dangerous tasks in quarrying stone and fishing. Sierra Leone's light work provisions do not specify the activities and conditions in which light work may be undertaken or limit the number of hours of light work, which does not meet international standards. 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

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Sierra Leone. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

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 (%)		98.0

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2021, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2017. (2)

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, palm fruit, cocoa, coffee, peanuts, and rice, and processing garri flour (3,4)
	Fishing,† including artisanal fishing (3-8)
Industry	Mining† for diamonds, gold, and sand (5-9)
	Quarrying† and crushing stone, including granite, and shoveling gravel (4-9)
	Construction, including housing construction, and serving as laborers for contractors (3-8)
	Manufacturing,† activities unknown (5,6,8)
	Production of charcoal (4-7)
Services	Scavenging scrap metals and recyclable materials from dumpsites (4)
	Domestic work (5-7,10)
	Street work, including begging, trading, and selling goods (5-7,10)
	Portering, including carrying heavy loads† (8,9)
	Working as apprentices, including in auto repair shops and on transportation vehicles, including mini buses and motorbike taxis (3)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor†	Forced begging (7,8,11)
	Domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (7,8,11)

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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†	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (7,8,11,12)
	Forced labor in street hawking, mining, agriculture, scavenging for scrap metal, motorbike taxi driving, quarrying granite, rock breaking, and mining for alluvial diamonds (6,9,12-14)
	Cultivation of marijuana (6,7)

† 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 child trafficking for labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (4,15-18) Sierra Leone also has a form of internal child trafficking called *men pikin*, meaning foster care in Krio, in which family members send children to relatives in urban areas with promises of better educational opportunities. 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. (6-8,10,11,13,14,19) In addition, some children sent to Koranic schools are trafficked for labor exploitation. (8,10,18)

Despite government initiatives to make education free through secondary school, substantial barriers remain, including a lack of schools and teachers, the costs of uniforms and supplies, limited transportation to schools, and sexual and gender-based violence by teachers and other students. (5-8,20-22) In particular, one report indicated that teachers demanded sex from students in exchange for higher grades. (4,6) Research also found that unqualified teachers were removed from schools in several rural communities without being replaced, resulting in some schools closing. All of these factors contributed to a high dropout rate, especially among girls. (4,6)

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 (23)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (Cont.)

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
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		Sections 1 and 12–14 of the 2022 Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act; Section 19 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone (26,27)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Section 1, 12–14, and 17–19 of the 2022 Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act (27)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Sections 1, 12–14, and 17–19 of the 2022 Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act; Sections 26–34 of the 2012 Sexual Offenses Act (27,28)
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	Yes		Sections 1 and 12 of the 2022 Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act (27)
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 (23,26,30)

* Country has no conscription (31)

In April 2022, the Sierra Leone Parliament passed the Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act, which raised the prison term for trafficking from a maximum of 10 years to a minimum of 25 and established a Trafficking Victims Fund to provide shelter, medical services, and legal aid to trafficking survivors. (27,32) The Act also established an independent Trafficking in Persons Secretariat within the Ministry of Social Welfare. (14,27) However, even though the Child Right Act sets the minimum age for light work at age 13, 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, which is not in compliance with international standards. (23) In addition, although the Child Right Act identifies hazardous work prohibited for children, it does not cover scavenging for recyclable materials at dumpsites, an activity for which there is evidence that children in Sierra Leone are exposed to hazardous medical waste. (5,10,13,23,33)

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 enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MLSS)	Enforces labor laws in the formal sector via its District Labor Officers. Through its Child Labor Unit, formulates, implements, and monitors compliance with child labor regulations. (7)
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. (7)
Ministry of Internal Affairs' Police and Transnational Organized Crime Unit	Leads the investigation and prosecution of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse through Police Family Support Units, which are mandated to minimize and eradicate the incidence of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse. Through its Transnational Organized Crime Unit, enforces human trafficking laws and provides statistical data and general information on cases of human trafficking. (5,7) Refers cases for prosecution to the Ministry of Justice's Director of Public Prosecution. (7)

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Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Sierra Leone took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MLSS) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient financial and human resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (7)	\$30,000 (4)
Number of Labor Inspectors	29 (7)	29 (4)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (24)	Yes (24)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	N/A (7)	Yes (4)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (7)	Unknown (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (7)	Unknown (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A (7)	Unknown (4)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (7)	Unknown (4)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (7)	Yes (4)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (7)	Yes (4)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (24,34)	Yes (25,34)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (7)	Yes (4)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (7)	Yes (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (4)

Reporting suggests that the Ministry of Labor conducted more labor inspections in 2022 than in previous years and identified at least one child labor violation in the gold mining industry during the reporting period. However, the government did not publish its labor enforcement data, and available records were inconsistent. (4) Research indicates that Sierra Leone does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (4,35,36) There is a significant lack of resources for labor inspections because the MLSS does not have the necessary funding, and has only one vehicle for inspections. (5-7) In addition, very few inspections are conducted in the informal sector, where child labor is known to occur. (7,8) Although the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources can conduct inspections on mining concessions and revoke licenses from employers who are found to be using child labor, research found that a limited number of inspectors, a lack of funding, and the practice of notifying employers in advance may have hindered enforcement efforts. (15,37,38)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Sierra Leone took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including insufficient allocation of financial resources.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Unknown (7)	Unknown (4)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (7)	Unknown (4)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (7)	Unknown (4)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (7)	Unknown (4)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (7)	Unknown (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (4)

In February 2022, the government launched a hotline to report trafficking crimes. During this first year of operation, the hotline did not receive reports leading to victim identification or criminal investigation. (14,39) Sierra Leone's Family Support Units reported 24 child trafficking cases during the reporting period. From April

to December of 2022, a civil society organization also reported identifying 31 child trafficking survivors, who were then provided with trauma-informed care. (14) The government, in cooperation with other organizations on the National Task Force on Human Trafficking, trained 16 paramount chiefs in the Kenema district on trafficking identification during the reporting period as part of the launch of its Prevention and Response to Child Trafficking in Persons project. (14) In addition, 55 district-level social workers in Kambia, Kono, Kailahun, and Kenema districts were given training on trauma-informed care in the context of human trafficking. However, research found that criminal law enforcement in Sierra Leone, particularly efforts to address human trafficking, is hampered by limited funding, lack of training of law enforcement personnel and the judiciary, and poor data sharing between the Director of Public Prosecution and the Family Support Units. (4,5,18)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

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

Table 8. Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Technical Steering Committee on Child Labor	Coordinates efforts to address child labor. Led by MLSS and the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MGCA) and includes representatives from 10 other government agencies, international organizations, and NGOs. (4) 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. In 2022, the steering committee facilitated the operations of the Child Welfare Committees alongside MGCA and NGOs, mainly at the district level. (4)

The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs was also active during the reporting period, conducting consultations alongside the First Lady to raise awareness on child labor and other issues affecting women and children across the country. (4,8) The Child Right Act requires the establishment of a Child Welfare Committee in every village and chiefdom (the third level of administrative subdivision, below districts and provinces); however, research indicates that these committees do not function in every chiefdom and may lack effectiveness. (4,8,23)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including covering all worst forms of child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2021–2023)	Promotes cooperation between NGOs, international organizations, and government agencies to address human trafficking. (41) Establishes strategic objectives to ensure the thorough investigation of trafficking cases. (42) Following the adoption of the Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act 2022, the Trafficking in Persons Secretariat worked to establish implementation and awareness plans for the new law as well as capacity-building events for law enforcement personnel. (14)
National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools (2021–2026)	Ensures that schools throughout Sierra Leone are accessible to all children, especially those typically marginalized or excluded, including children with disabilities, children from low-income families, children in rural and underserved areas, and girls who are currently pregnant or already parents and in school. (7,43) In March 2022, the government approved an implementation plan for the policy through 2026. (43)
National Migration Policy†	Aims to protect the right of migrants, with specific reference to trafficking survivors, asylum seekers, and children. Also seeks to increase public awareness of human trafficking and build the capacity of law enforcement personnel to detect and prevent trafficking, especially child trafficking. (44) Established by the government with support from the EU, the Africa Regional Migration Program implemented by IOM, and the United States Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. (44,45)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (5)

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Although the Government of Sierra Leone has a National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, research found no evidence of a policy on other worst forms of child labor, including child labor in mining, quarrying, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (14)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, 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 inadequate efforts to address child labor in all sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Child Trafficking Shelters†	Refer children to privately run shelters that house child survivors of forced labor and human trafficking. During the reporting period, World Hope International operated a shelter for trafficking survivors, which provides mental health services, medical services, tracing, and reintegration assistance. (14,18)
Free Quality School Education‡	A Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education program that covers the costs of school tuition and fees and provides meals, textbooks, and some teaching materials in remote communities. (5,6,46) In 2022, the program remained active, complemented by additional educational inclusion efforts initiated under the National Strategy for Out-of-School Children and the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools. (47-49)
U.S. Government-Funded Projects	USDOS Program to End Modern Slavery funded a study to research the prevalence, methods, and impacts of child trafficking and child labor in Kono, Kenema, Kailahun, and Kambia districts of Sierra Leone. (3) The research, published during the reporting period by the Center on Human Trafficking Research and Outreach at the University of Georgia in conjunction with the African Programming and Research Initiative to End Slavery, established a baseline prevalence, and identified gaps in policies and services aimed at preventing and addressing child trafficking in the country. This evidence base helped highlight the issues to policy stakeholders in support of legislative advances in the area of human trafficking. (8,32)

For information about USDOL's projects to address child labor around the world, visit <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/ilab-project-page-search>

† 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. (8)

Sierra Leone has too few and underfunded shelters and safe houses for children who have been withdrawn from working on the streets or in forced labor. (4,13) 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. (5)

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 Child Right Act's light work provisions specify the activities and conditions in which light work may be undertaken and limit the number of hours of light work.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that hazardous work occupations prohibited for children are comprehensive, including by prohibiting scavenging at dumpsites.	2020 – 2022
Enforcement	Increase the number of labor inspectors from 29 to at least 70 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 2.8 million people.	2011 – 2022
	Provide labor and criminal law enforcement officials with sufficient funding and additional vehicles to adequately enforce labor laws throughout the country, including in the informal sector.	2012 – 2022
	Ensure that the Ministry of Mines has adequate funding and resources to carry out enforcement efforts.	2015 – 2022
	Publish information on labor law enforcement efforts, including the number and type of inspections conducted, the number of violations found, and penalties imposed and collected.	2011 – 2022

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Ensure that unannounced inspections are conducted and cease the practice of informing employers ahead of time.	2020 – 2022
	Provide additional training to criminal law enforcement personnel and the judiciary to ensure that violations are adequately investigated and prosecuted.	2014 – 2022
	Publish information on criminal law enforcement efforts, including training for criminal investigators, the number of investigations undertaken, prosecutions initiated, convictions obtained, and penalties imposed for the worst forms of child labor.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that the Director of Public Prosecution and the Family Support Units share data to adequately enforce criminal violations including child trafficking.	2022
Coordination	Ensure that village-level and chiefdom-level Child Welfare Committees are established and operational in all areas.	2014 – 2022
Government Policies	Adopt policies to address child labor in relevant sectors, such as mining, quarrying, and commercial sexual exploitation.	2019 – 2022
Social Programs	Remove barriers to education by providing transportation to school, increasing the number of schools and qualified teachers, reducing school-related costs, and eliminating abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence by teachers and other students.	2013 – 2022
	Increase the availability of and funding for shelters and safe houses for survivors of forced labor and children removed from street work.	2009 – 2022
	Institute programs to address child labor in agriculture, domestic work, and street vending.	2019 – 2022

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