

Sierra Leone

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

UNICEF estimated that 71.6 percent of children aged 5 to 14 years in Sierra Leone were working in 2000. Two percent of these children were paid, while a large percentage performed unpaid work for someone other than a household member.³⁶⁰⁷ Children in Sierra Leone work in family businesses and as petty vendors, and on family subsistence farms.³⁶⁰⁸ Street children are employed by adults to sell, steal and beg. Children, some of whom are forced, also mine in alluvial diamond fields.³⁶⁰⁹ Child prostitution is an increasing problem.³⁶¹⁰

Trafficking in persons declined with the demobilization of child soldiers following the end of the civil conflict.³⁶¹¹ Children have been trafficked to Liberia as forced conscripts, and to Europe where they were exploited through fictitious adoption schemes.³⁶¹² Internally, children continue to be trafficked from rural areas to Freetown and to diamond mining areas for purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor.³⁶¹³

The law mandates primary school attendance, and government policy officially calls for free primary education.³⁶¹⁴ In 2000, the gross primary enrollment rate in Sierra Leone was 78.9 percent.³⁶¹⁵ Gross and net enrollment ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and therefore do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. Attendance rates are not available for Sierra Leone.³⁶¹⁶

³⁶⁰⁷ The provisional results of the census are now in – the estimated number of the entire Sierra Leone population is 4.9 million, which means that this number is grossly inflated. Gov't was still at war in 2000 – no way could the numbers have been accurate. Children who are working in some capacity include children who have performed any paid or unpaid work for someone who is not a member of the household, who have performed more than 4 hours of housekeeping chores in the household, or who have performed other family work. See Government of Sierra Leone, *The Status of Women and Children in Sierra Leone: A Household Survey Report (MICS-2)*, November, 2000, 60; available from <http://www.childinfo.org/MICS2/newreports/sierraleone/sierraleone.PDF> and <http://www.childinfo.org/MICS2/newreports/sierraleone/sierraleonetables.pdf>.

³⁶⁰⁸ Email. "FW: Worst Forms of Child Labor Report Clearance." U.S. Department of State. May 24, 2005.

³⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.* Section 6d.

³⁶¹⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2004: Sierra Leone*, Washington, D.C., June 13, 2004; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2003/21277.htm>.

³⁶¹¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Sierra Leone*. Section 6f. Email. "FW: Worst Forms of Child Labor Report Clearance." U.S. Department of State. May 24, 2005.

³⁶¹² *Ibid.* Section 6f.

³⁶¹³ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report: Sierra Leone*. available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2003/21277.htm>

³⁶¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Sierra Leone*, Section 5. See also Inaugural Address by His Excellency Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, First Session of the First Parliament of the Third Republic, July 12, 2002; available from <http://www.sierraleone.org/kabbah071202.html>. See also Government of Sierra Leone, *Letter of Intent and Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies*, Freetown, August 12, 2002; available from <http://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/2002/sle/02/index.htm>.

³⁶¹⁵ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2004.

³⁶¹⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

Schools throughout the country were looted or destroyed in the 11-year conflict that ended in 2002.³⁶¹⁷ While the majority of schools have been rebuilt, staffing problems continue.³⁶¹⁸ The lack of schools and teachers and the fact that schooling is not free in reality due to the imposition of administrative fees have made implementation of compulsory education impossible.³⁶¹⁹

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The minimum age for employment in Sierra Leone is 15. The employment of children is permitted in certain non-hazardous occupations, provided the child has parental consent.³⁶²⁰ The official workweek for a person of any age is 38 hours, but this guideline is not enforced.³⁶²¹ The use of forced and bonded labor, including children, is prohibited by the Constitution.³⁶²²

The “Prevention of Cruelty to Children” section of the Laws of Sierra Leone prohibits commercial sexual exploitation of children and defines a child as under the age of 16. Procuring a woman or girl for prostitution is punishable by up to 2 years in prison, and soliciting of prostitution is punishable by fine.³⁶²³ There is no law that specifically prohibits trafficking in persons, but traffickers may be prosecuted under anti-prostitution laws.³⁶²⁴

The U.S. Department of State reported that the Government of Sierra Leone lacks the resources to enforce existing labor laws.³⁶²⁵

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

The Government of Sierra Leone has established a National Commission for War-Affected Children whose goals are to provide support to demobilized child combatants, to develop and implement strategies to ensure that the needs of young girls are addressed, and to continue to provide services for children who are separated from their parents.³⁶²⁶ Efforts continue under Sierra Leone’s National Youth Policy, approved

³⁶¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Sierra Leone*, Section 5.

³⁶¹⁸ UNICEF, *At a glance: Sierra Leone*, UNICEF, [online] n.d. [cited October 27 2004]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone.html>.

³⁶¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Sierra Leone*, Section 5.

³⁶²⁰ Government of Sierra Leone, *Employers and Employed Act, Amendment No. 23*, (1962); available from http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.details?p_lang=en&p_country=SLE&p_classification=04&p_origin=COUNTRY. The U.S. Department of State reports that the minimum age is 18 years. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Sierra Leone*, Section 6d.

³⁶²¹ Email. “FW: Worst Forms of Child Labor Report Clearance.” May 24, 2005.

³⁶²² U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Sierra Leone*, Section 6c.

³⁶²³ The Protection Project, *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children: A Human Rights Report- Sierra Leone*, Washington, D.C., 2002; available from <http://209.190.246.239/ver2/cr/sl.pdf>.

³⁶²⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report: Sierra Leone*.

³⁶²⁵ . “FW: Worst Forms of Child Labor Report Clearance.” May 24, 2005.

³⁶²⁶ Government of Sierra Leone, *Sierra Leone: Post-Conflict Development Agenda: Strategies for Growth and Poverty Reduction*, Paris, November 13-14, 2002, 28; available from <http://www.undpsalone.org/files/Programmes/SIL%20Medium%20Term%20Post-conflict%20Agenda.pdf>.

in 2003, to target assistance to key groups such as young girls.³⁶²⁷

USAID, in coordination with UNICEF and the International Rescue Committee, completed two programs in 2004 aimed at reintegrating ex-child soldiers through community-based education and skills training.³⁶²⁸

In the area of trafficking, the government has formed a multi-sectoral Trafficking in Persons Action Committee to clarify and coordinate roles in combating trafficking, and has held anti-trafficking training for police officers.³⁶²⁹

The government has created a National Education Action Plan that emphasizes improving the quality and relevance of education, expanding access to primary education, especially for girls and the rural poor, and enhancing the planning and management capacity of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.³⁶³⁰ UNICEF is engaged in projects to renovate schools, distribute teaching materials and equipment, retrain teachers, and promote girls' education.³⁶³¹

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments	
Ratified Convention 138	
Ratified Convention 182	
ILO-IPEC Member	
National Plan for Children	✓
National Child Labor Action Plan	
Sector Action Plan	

³⁶²⁷ *Sierra Leone Approves National Youth Policy*, UNFPA, [online] n.p. 2004 [cited October 27, 2004]; available from <http://www.unfpa.org/parliamentarians/news/newsletters/issue20.htm>.

³⁶²⁸ *DCOF Country Programs: Sierra Leone*, USAID, [online] n.d. [cited October 27, 2004].

³⁶²⁹ U.S. Embassy- Freetown, *unclassified telegram no. 730*, August, 2004.

³⁶³⁰ Government of Sierra Leone, *Sierra Leone: Post-Conflict Development Agenda*.

³⁶³¹ UNICEF, *Sierra Leone: Donor Update*, July 14, 2004; available from <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/0/dd5e173e8571e21ac1256ed1003e7263?OpenDocument>.