

Sierra Leone

The Government of Sierra Leone participates in donor-funded social protection programs for the elimination of the worst forms of child labor. However, the worst forms of child labor continue to exist especially in agriculture, mining, fishing, and domestic work. Significant gaps remain in the enforcement of child labor laws.

Statistics on Working Children and School Attendance

Children	Age	Percent
Working	5-14 yrs.	58.5%
Attending School	5-14 yrs.	67.8%
Combining Work and School	7-14 yrs	44.0%



Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Children in Sierra Leone are exploited in the worst forms of child labor,⁴⁴⁸⁰ many of them in agriculture, mining, fishing, and domestic work. Children's work in agriculture may expose them to long working hours, dangerous tools, and arduous tasks.⁴⁴⁸¹

Children in Sierra Leone labor in alluvial diamond mining areas.⁴⁴⁸² Several thousand children, mainly boys, toil in an environment that threatens their health and safety. They work long hours, sometimes six to seven days a week, in harsh conditions. They are vulnerable to accidents and diseases and are exposed to collapsing mine pits.⁴⁴⁸³ The children report injury and illness due to the hazardous activities they perform.⁴⁴⁸⁴ Some children as young as age 10 transport heavy bags of gravel on their heads in the mining areas and work from dawn to dusk.⁴⁴⁸⁵ The majority of children laboring in a primary diamond mining area of Sierra Leone—the Kono district—are boys between ages 10 and 17. These boys work in dangerous conditions, with boys age 14 to 17 working in the mines collecting diamonds. Younger children age 5 to 13 generally engage in petty trade and perform other supportive roles around the mines for relatives without pay.⁴⁴⁸⁶ Children in Sierra Leone are also found crushing stones in granite quarries under unsafe and unhealthy

labor conditions, including carrying heavy loads and working long hours.⁴⁴⁸⁷

Children in Sierra Leone work in the fishing industry. Although evidence is limited, there is reason to believe that the worst forms of child labor are used in the production of snapper, mackerel and herring.⁴⁴⁸⁸ Fishing may expose children to the risk of drowning.

Children also engage in domestic work and petty vending.⁴⁴⁸⁹ Adults use street children to sell various items, steal, and beg.⁴⁴⁹⁰ Street children engage in commercial sexual exploitation in large cities like Freetown and Bo.⁴⁴⁹¹ Some are vulnerable to trafficking and other exploitive practices.⁴⁴⁹²

In various countries, including Sierra Leone, parents practice the tradition of sending children to Koranic teachers to receive education, which may include a vocational or apprenticeship component. While some boys receive lessons, others are forced to beg and surrender the money that they have earned or perform manual labor, including in agriculture.⁴⁴⁹³

Sierra Leone is a source, transit, and destination country for children and women trafficked for the purpose of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation.⁴⁴⁹⁴ The majority of the trafficked victims are children from rural provinces or refugee

communities who are trafficked to urban and mining areas.⁴⁴⁹⁵ Sierra Leonean women and children are also trafficked to other West African countries, notably Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, and The Gambia for forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. They are also trafficked to North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe for domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.⁴⁴⁹⁶ Children from Nigeria are also trafficked to Sierra Leone for forced begging, forced labor, and sexual exploitation.⁴⁴⁹⁷

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. In addition, children must be age 15 or have completed basic education (whichever is later) before entering into an apprenticeship in either the formal or informal sector. Children are also prohibited from performing night work, between the hours of 8:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.⁴⁴⁹⁸

The law also 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 specific activities as hazardous, including seafaring, mining and quarrying, carrying heavy loads, working in bars, operating machines, and working in environments where chemicals are produced or used.⁴⁴⁹⁹

Sierra Leone’s Child Rights Act contains provisions drawn from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child with some local adaptations. The National Child Rights Act supersedes all other existing national laws and adopts the international definitions of the child as any person below age 18.⁴⁵⁰⁰ Any person who violates the age restrictions within the Child Rights Act could face two years of imprisonment and/ or a fine.⁴⁵⁰¹

Forced and compulsory labor by children is prohibited by law.⁴⁵⁰² The Child Rights Act prohibits commercial sexual exploitation of children below age 18, but does not criminalize procuring or offering a child for the production of pornography. The Anti-Human Trafficking Act also criminalizes all forms of human trafficking.⁴⁵⁰³ The age for voluntary recruitment or conscription into the armed forces is 18.⁴⁵⁰⁴

	C138, Minimum Age	No
	C182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	No
	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	14
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18
	Compulsory Education Age	15
	Free Public Education	Yes

Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

Research has found no evidence that the Government of Sierra Leone has established a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor specifically; however, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs’ (MOSWGCA) Child Protection Unit has the primary responsibility for protecting children. The Government has established a task force, lead by the Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts and an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Trafficking co-chaired by the Ministry of Justice and MOSWGCA.⁴⁵⁰⁵ It includes the Ministries of Education, Internal Affairs, Information, Labor, Health, Foreign Affairs, Local Government, Youth, and Tourism.⁴⁵⁰⁶ District labor officers are responsible for initial investigations and enforcement of child labor provisions in The Child Rights Act at the district level, and the District Councils are responsible for the enforcement in the informal sector.⁴⁵⁰⁷ These district-level labor officers and District Councils have limited punitive powers. However, many local community leaders and chiefs have enacted their own bylaws to punish and deter violations with varying success.⁴⁵⁰⁸

At the national level, the Ministry of Labor enforces child labor laws and employs 10 labor inspectors to

investigate child labor abuses.⁴⁵⁰⁹ The Ministry of Mineral Resources is also charged with enforcing regulations against the use of child labor in mining activities.⁴⁵¹⁰ By law, the Ministry of Mineral Resources is supposed to refuse and revoke the licenses of those in the sector using underage labor. It has never used the revocation provision of the law. The Ministry of Mineral Resources has 300 to 400 monitors in the field, who, while not specifically tasked, sometimes intervene if child labor is found.⁴⁵¹¹

According to USDOS, the Government did not effectively enforce laws against child labor, as well as forced and bonded child labor. However, according to NGOs and government officials, there is a noticeable decline in the prevalence of child labor due to the passing of the Child Rights Act.⁴⁵¹² Reports indicate that child labor remains pervasive in the artisanal mining sector.⁴⁵¹³

No information has been identified regarding mechanisms of criminal law enforcement with respect to the worst forms of child labor. During the reporting period, there were no prosecutions for child labor violations; instead, mediation is generally conducted at the time of the violation.⁴⁵¹⁴

Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

In 2007, the Task Force set up by the Government of Sierra Leone created a National Plan of Action, which is currently in force, and, in 2009, the Government signed the regional Policy on the Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons approved by ECOWAS.⁴⁵¹⁵

Sierra Leone is one of 24 countries to adopt the Multilateral Cooperative Agreement to Combat Trafficking in Persons and the Joint Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, in West and Central African Regions.⁴⁵¹⁶ As part of the regional Multilateral Cooperation Agreement to Combat Trafficking in Persons, the Government agreed to investigate and prosecute trafficking offenders, to rehabilitate and reintegrate

trafficking victims, and to assist fellow signatory countries to implement these measures under the Agreement.⁴⁵¹⁷

Social Programs to Eliminate or Prevent the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government of Sierra Leone has participated in programs to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.⁴⁵¹⁸ Since 2005, the Government has participated in the 4-year, \$6 million DOL-funded regional project in Sierra Leone and Liberia, which aims to withdraw 8,243 children and prevent an additional 21,647 children in both countries by improving access to quality education.⁴⁵¹⁹ The project works with the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MEYS) to support marginalized and disaffected children and youth by providing them with educational or skills training opportunities, school materials, uniforms, and tuition vouchers. The program also mobilizes and sensitizes communities to child labor.⁴⁵²⁰

With support from international organizations, the Government of Sierra Leone continued to participate in training sessions and awareness-raising campaigns on trafficking during the reporting period.⁴⁵²¹

The Government of Sierra Leone also continued to participate in a 2-year, \$324,000 project funded by USDOS to provide training on trafficking and to strengthen victim referral networks.⁴⁵²² In addition, the Government is participating in a 4-year, \$23.8 million project, funded by the EU to combat child labor through education in 11 countries, including Sierra Leone.⁴⁵²³ One of the project's key objectives is strengthening the capacity of national and local authorities to implement and enforce child labor policies.⁴⁵²⁴

The Government's investment in social programs is minimal, and it relies heavily on donor funding to address the worst forms of child labor. These programs are too limited to address the scope of child labor in Sierra Leone, particularly among children working in agriculture, mining, fishing, and domestic work.

Based on the reporting above, the following actions would advance the reduction of the worst forms of child labor in Sierra Leone:

IN THE AREA OF LAWS AND REGULATIONS:

- Amend the Child Rights Act to include child laborers in industrial undertakings in commerce and agriculture.

IN THE AREA OF COORDINATION AND ENFORCEMENT:

- Establish a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor.
- Increase Ministry of Labor efforts to enforce worst forms of child labor laws.
- Task the monitors of the Ministry of Mineral Resources to enforce child labor laws in artisanal mining.
- Prosecute offenders of violations of the child labor laws.

IN THE AREA OF POLICIES:

- Fund and implement the National Plan of Action on the worst forms of child labor.

IN THE AREA OF PROGRAMS:

- Develop and provide funding for specific social programs to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in agriculture, mining, fishing, and domestic work.

⁴⁴⁸⁰ Data provided in the chart at the beginning of this country report are based on UCW analysis of ILO SIMPOC, UNICEF MICS, and World Bank surveys, *Child Economic Activity, School Attendance, and Combined Working and Studying Rates*, 2005-2010. Data on working children and children combining working and schooling are from 2005. Data on school attendance are from 2006. Reliable data on the worst forms of child labor are especially difficult to collect given the often hidden or illegal nature of the worst forms. As a result, statistics and information on children's work in general are reported in this section, which may or may not include the worst forms of child labor. For more information on sources used, the definition of working children, and other indicators used in this report, please see the "Children's Work and Education Statistics: Sources and Definitions" section of this report.

⁴⁴⁸¹ International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), *Internationally Recognized Core Labour Standards in Sierra Leone: Report for the WTO General Council Review of the Trade Policies of Sierra Leone*, Geneva, 2005; available from <http://www.icftu.org/www/pdf/clssierraleone2005.pdf>.

⁴⁴⁸² U.S. Department of State, "Sierra Leone," in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2009*, Washington, DC, 2010, section 7d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/index.htm>. See also A. Hatløy M. Bøås, *Living in a material world*, Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science, Oslo, 2006, 49; available from <http://www.faf.no/>

pub/rapp/515/515.pdf. See also L. Gberie, *War and Peace in Sierra Leone: Diamonds, Corruption and the Lebanese Connection*, Partnership Africa Canada, Ottawa, November 2002, 20; available from http://action.web.ca/home/pac/attach/sierraleone2002_e.pdf. See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention: Sierra Leone second report*, CRC/C/SLE/2, Geneva, September 8, 2006, articles 88, 320, and 322; available from [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/0d28ce8b8d49b955c12572610029584b/\\$FILE/G0644130.pdf](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/0d28ce8b8d49b955c12572610029584b/$FILE/G0644130.pdf).

⁴⁴⁸³ Afrol News, "Child labour affects 72% of Sierra Leone's Children," *Afrol News*, February 9, 2010.

⁴⁴⁸⁴ U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports- 2009: Sierra Leone," section 7d. See also M. Bøås, *Living in a material world*, 56-59, 61-63, 65. See also International Rescue Committee, *Child Labor and Education in Sierra Leone: Needs and Resource Assessment in Targeted Communities*, New York, June 2006, 12. See also UN, *Economic and Social Council: Advisory Services and Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights*, E/CN.4/2006/106, February 15, 2006, section 10.

⁴⁴⁸⁵ Lansana Fofana, "Sierra Leone: Child Miners - Legacy of Conflict", *Allafrica.com* May 7, 2009 [cited May 20, 2010]; available from <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200905080020.html>.

⁴⁴⁸⁶ M. Bøås, *Living in a material world*, 50, 63, 70. See also Office of the UN Secretary General, *Children and*

Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General, A/58/546, Geneva, October 30, 2003, section 40; available from http://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story_id/000161.pdf. See also U.S. Embassy- Freetown official, E-mail communication to USDOL official, July 14, 2009.

⁴⁴⁸⁷ MACRO International, *In-Country Research: Summaries of Goods Researched*, In-Country Research and Data Collection on Forced Labor and/or Child Labor in the Production of Goods, 2008.

⁴⁴⁸⁸ MACRO International, *In-Country Research: Site Visit Notes*, In-Country Research and Data Collection on Forced Labor and/or Child Labor in the Production of Goods, 2008. See also MACRO International, *In-Country Research: Summaries of Goods Researched*. See also MACRO International, *In-Country Research: Interview Type 2*, In-Country Research and Data Collection on Forced Labor and/or Child Labor in the Production of Goods, 2008. See also U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2009: Sierra Leone,” section 7d.

⁴⁴⁸⁹ ICFTU, *Core Labour Standards* sections III. See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Report: Sierra Leone*, sections 88, 320, and 322.

⁴⁴⁹⁰ U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2009: Sierra Leone,” section 7d. See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Report: Sierra Leone*, sections 88, 320, and 322. See also International Rescue Committee IRC, *Countering Youth and Child Labour through Education (CYCLE)*, Project Document, New York, August 2007, 9.

⁴⁴⁹¹ U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2009: Sierra Leone,” section 6.

⁴⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹³ Peter Easton, Mark Peach, Ibrahima Lalya Bah, ElHadj Bella Doumboula, and Mohammed Lamine Barry., *Research Studies Series no. 8, International Working Group on Nonformal Education of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa*, International Working Group on Nonformal Education of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, May, 1997; available from <http://www.adeanet.org/wgnfe/publications/abel/abel2.html> [hard copy on file]. See also Peter. Easton, “*Education and Koranic Literacy in West Africa*,” August, 1999; available from <http://www.worldbank.org/afr/ik/iknt11.pdf>.

⁴⁴⁹⁴ U.S. Department of State, “Sierra Leone (Tier 2),” in *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2009*, Washington, DC, June 16, 2009; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2009>.

⁴⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹⁸ Government of Sierra Leone, *Child Rights Act 2007*, (June 7, 2007), sections 125-127, 128, 134-135; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2007-7p.pdf>.

⁴⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰⁰ UNICEF, *Sierra Leone Approves the National Child Rights Bill*, Freetown, June 7, 2007; available from http://www.unicef.org/media/media_39951.html?q=printme.

⁴⁵⁰¹ Government of Sierra Leone, *Child Rights Act 2007*, part VIII, 131(1), 54.

⁴⁵⁰² U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2009: Sierra Leone,” section 7c.

⁴⁵⁰³ Government of Sierra Leone, *The Anti-Human Trafficking Act*, Vol CXXXVI, No 44, (August 18, 2005), Part II 2.1; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2005-7p.pdf>.

⁴⁵⁰⁴ Government of Sierra Leone, *Report on the Implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of Children in Armed conflicts*, Freetown, August 2007, article 2; available from www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story_id/000811.doc.

⁴⁵⁰⁵ U.S. Embassy- Freetown, *reporting*, February 12, 2010, para 14.

⁴⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰⁷ U.S. Embassy- Freetown, *reporting*, January 27, 2009.

⁴⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰⁹ U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2009: Sierra Leone,” section 7d. See also U.S. Embassy- Freetown, *reporting, February 12, 2010*, para 5.

⁴⁵¹⁰ U.S. Embassy- Freetown, *reporting, January 27, 2009*.

⁴⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹² Ibid.

⁴⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹⁴ Ibid., para 10.

⁴⁵¹⁵ U.S. Embassy- Freetown, *reporting*, April 7, 2010, para 5D.

⁴⁵¹⁶ Catholic Relief Services official, E-mail communication to USDOL official, October 2, 2006.

⁴⁵¹⁷ ECOWAS and ECCAS, *Multilateral Cooperation Agreement to Combat Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, in West and Central Africa*, Abuja, July 7, 2006, 5-13; available from http://www.ceac-eccas.org/img/pdf/Multilateral_Agreement_Trafficking-1184251953.doc.

⁴⁵¹⁸ U.S. Embassy- Freetown, *reporting, February 12, 2010*.

⁴⁵¹⁹ IRC, *CYCLE, Project Document*, 1-2, 23.

⁴⁵²⁰ International Rescue Committee, *Countering Youth and Child Labour through Education (CYCLE)*, Technical Progress Report, New York, September 2008.

⁴⁵²¹ U.S. Embassy- Freetown, *reporting, February 12, 2010*.

⁴⁵²² U.S. Embassy- Freetown, *reporting, September 30, 2008*, para 1. See also U.S. Department of State, *Fiscal Year 2008 Anti-Human Trafficking Programs*, Washington, DC, November 3, 2008; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/rpt/111540.htm>.

⁴⁵²³ ILO-IPEC Geneva official, E-mail communication to USDOL official, December 15, 2008. See also ILO-IPEC, *Tackle Child Labor through Education: Moving Children from Work to School in 11 Countries*, Geneva, 2008; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ipecinfo/product/viewProduct.do?productId=8511>.

⁴⁵²⁴ ILO-IPEC, *Tackle Child Labor through Education: Moving Children from Work to School in 11 Countries*