

In 2017, Sierra Leone made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Despite new initiatives to address child labor, Sierra Leone is receiving this assessment because it continued to implement a policy that delayed advancement in eliminating the worst forms of child labor. A government policy continued to prohibit girls who were pregnant from attending regular public schools or taking secondary and postsecondary school entrance exams during the reporting period, making them more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. Children in Sierra Leone engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in diamond mining and in commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. Sierra Leone's laws do not adequately protect children from involvement in hazardous work, and the country has not implemented its national action plan on child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Sierra Leone engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in diamond mining and in commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. (1; 2; 3) 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	51.3 (897,142)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	67.0
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	43.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		66.5

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2016, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018. (4)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from the Demographic and Health Survey, 2013. (5)

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	Production of cassava, coffee, cocoa, palm oil, peanuts, and rice (6; 7; 8; 9)
	Fishing, including deep-sea fishing, † mending nets, and working on boats in the open sea † (1; 3)
Industry	Mining † for alluvial diamonds, sand, and gold, including loading gravel in sacks or basins, carrying sacks on their heads, washing, and sieving (1; 8; 10; 11; 12; 13)
	Quarrying † and crushing stone, including granite, and transporting gravel (1; 3; 14)
	Construction, activities unknown (1; 2; 8; 13)
	Manufacturing †, activities unknown, and metallurgy (2; 15)
Services	Scavenging scrap metals and recyclable materials from dumpsites (1; 16; 17)
	Domestic work (1)
	Street work, including begging, trading, and selling goods (1; 2; 3; 8; 18; 13)
	Portering, including carrying heavy loads † (1)
	Working as apprentices, including in auto-repair shops and on transportation vehicles (<i>poda podu</i>) (1)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor ‡	Forced begging, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1; 19; 20)
	Forced domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (19; 21)

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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 stealing (1)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1; 8; 13)
	Forced labor at granite and alluvial diamond mines, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1; 19; 20)

† 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 in domestic work, granite and diamond mining, and begging; trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation also occurs. (3; 8; 20; 22)

Research indicated that the government continued to implement a policy to prohibit pregnant girls from attending regular public schools and taking secondary and postsecondary school entrance exams, which makes them vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. (23; 24; 25; 13) In addition, despite the legal right to free basic education, many children do not complete primary school because of the high costs of uniforms, books, and fees charged by school authorities. (1; 26) Children’s access to education is also limited by a lack of schools and teachers, distance from schools, and sexual abuse by teachers. (1; 8; 23; 27; 28) Further, despite legal protections, children with disabilities are less likely to attend school due in part to discrimination and school facilities that are not adequately accessible. (23; 28; 29) NGOs also reported that children were denied access to school because of their HIV status. (23)

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 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: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	15	Section 125 of the Child Right Act; Section 52 of Chapter 212, Employers and Employed Act (30; 31)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 126 and 128 of the Child Right Act; Sections 47–56 of Chapter 212, Employers and Employed Act (30; 31)
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 (30; 31; 32)
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 (33; 34)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
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 (30; 34)
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 (34; 35)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Sections 7 and 13 of the National Drugs Control Act (36)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment			
State Compulsory	N/A*		
State Voluntary	Yes	18	Section 28 of the Child Right Act (30)
Non-state	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15	Section 3 of the Education Act; Section 125 of the Child Right Act (26; 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 (26; 30; 33)

* No conscription (37)

In 2015, the government developed a list of hazardous work prohibited for children under age 18; however, it remains with the Cabinet for review and has not yet been approved. (8; 37) Currently, the types of hazardous work prohibited for children do not comprehensively cover children's work in a number of sectors in which child labor is known to occur, including in agriculture, construction, domestic work, transportation, street work, auto repair shops, and dumpsites, all areas of work in which there is evidence of work in an unhealthy environment, and work with dangerous machinery, equipment, and tools. (1; 23; 30; 31; 32)

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. (30)

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 Child Welfare Committees that may hinder adequate child labor enforcement.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MLSS)	Formulate, implement, and monitor compliance with child labor regulations through its Child Labor Unit. (8; 38) MLSS District Labor Officers are responsible for enforcing labor laws in the formal sector. (19) Operate regional offices in Bo, Kenema, Makeni, in addition to an office in the diamond-producing district of Kono. (8)
Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources	Enforce regulations against the use of child labor in mining. Authorized to suspend licenses of mining operators engaged in child labor. (23; 32)
Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA)	Serve as the umbrella agency to oversee child protection issues, including child labor. (1; 19) Head the National Trafficking in Persons Secretariat. (19)
Sierra Leone Police	Investigate and prosecute child labor crimes identified through Family Support Units, which are mandated to minimize and eradicate the incidence of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse by leading the investigation and prosecution of related offenses. (19; 39)
Transnational Organized Crime Unit	Enforce human trafficking laws and provide statistics and information on cases of human trafficking. (40)
Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development	Enforce child labor laws in the informal sector through its district councils. (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. (30; 39)

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The Child Right Act requires the establishment of a Child Welfare Committee in every village, chiefdom, and district; however, these committees have been established only in a few parts of the country due to budgetary constraints. (19; 25; 30; 37)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2017, labor law enforcement agencies in Sierra Leone took actions to combat 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 with labor inspector training.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (8)	Unknown (13)
Number of Labor Inspectors	6 (8; 25)	30 (13)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (41)	Unknown (37)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	No (8)	No (13)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	No (8)	No (13)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (8)	No (13)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	350 (8)	300 (13)
Number Conducted at Worksites	350 (8)	300 (13)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (8)	Unknown (37)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties were Imposed	0 (8)	0 (13)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that were Collected	N/A (8)	N/A (13)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Yes (13)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (8)	Yes (13)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (8)	Yes (13)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (8)	Unknown (13)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (8)	Yes (13)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (8)	Yes (13)

In 2017, the number of labor inspectors increased to 30, up from 6 the previous year. (37) The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Sierra Leone's workforce, which includes over 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 should employ roughly 74 inspectors. (42; 43) In addition, enforcement of child labor laws remains challenging due to the lack of resources for inspections and insufficient training. (19; 13) Although the government has a complaint line for issues related to child protection, it does not receive any child labor complaints in 2017. (10) Further, 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, but reports indicated that the government did not adequately enforce these laws in the diamond mining sector, due to the limited number of labor inspectors and a lack of funding. (23; 32; 13)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2017, criminal law enforcement agencies in Sierra Leone took actions to combat the worst forms of child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including with training for criminal investigators.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	No (8)	No (13)

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (cont)

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (8)	N/A (13)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (8)	No (13)
Number of Investigations	12 (8)	Unknown (37)
Number of Violations Found	23 (8)	Unknown (37)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	6 (8)	Unknown (37)
Number of Convictions	0 (8)	0 (13)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (8)	Yes (13)

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. (8; 44; 13) During the reporting period, NGOs reported 4 cases of sex trafficking and 15 cases of labor trafficking that resulted in criminal investigations; it is unknown if any of these cases involved children. (13)

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 exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including a lack of named members to the National Commission for Children.

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

Coordinating Body	Role and Description
National Technical Steering Committee on Child Labor (NTCCL)	Develop and coordinate a National Action Plan Against the Worst Forms of Child Labor. (10; 38; 45) Led by the MLSS and the MSWGCA, includes representatives from 10 other government agencies and representatives from international organizations and NGOs. (41)
National Trafficking in Persons Task Force	Coordinate the needs and requirements of agencies that provide shelter and services for human trafficking victims, gather data on reported human trafficking cases, and meet regularly to develop policy and address the issue of child trafficking. (10) Led by the MSWGCA. (46)
National Commission for Children	Coordinate and exchange information in accordance with the Child Right Act. Advise the government on ways to improve the condition and welfare of children as part of the NTCCL. Led by the MLSS and the MSWGCA. (30)

Research was unable to determine whether all members of the National Commission for Children have been named as required by the Child Right Act and whether the coordinating bodies were active during the reporting period. (37)

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 lack of approval of the National Action Plan against the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor‡

Policy	Description
National Action Plan on Human Trafficking	Includes strategies to address human trafficking through prevention, victim identification, protection and referral, training, and government coordination and monitoring. (47) In 2017, the government conducted radio broadcast programs to increase public awareness of human trafficking, conducted training programs on trafficking issues for the police, and informed Sierra Leone nationals overseas in Guinea and Kuwait of the dangers of human trafficking. (37)

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (41; 48; 49; 13; 50)

In 2017, the then First Lady of Sierra Leone, Sia Nyama Koroma, along with other African First Ladies, made a declaration in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, to pledge support to their governments' efforts to prevent child labor, support victims, enhance regional cooperation, and mobilize resources. (51; 52)

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The government has yet to approve the National Action Plan against the Worst Forms of Child Labor, which was drafted in 2014, because it remains under review by the Cabinet. (13)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2017, 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 with insufficient shelters and safe houses for children who have been withdrawn from working on the streets or in forced labor.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor^{†‡}

Program	Description
Child Trafficking Shelters [†]	Government program that refers child trafficking victims to privately run shelters that house child victims of forced labor and human trafficking. (21) Research was unable to determine whether these shelters cared for any child trafficking victims in 2017. (37)
Revitalizing Education Development in Sierra Leone (2014–2017)	World Bank-funded, \$23.4 million project that aims to strengthen the education system in Sierra Leone. Adds resources to support the initiation of a school feeding program, helps eliminate informal school fees, supplies books to children in grades one to three, and supports local councils with school infrastructure needs, among other activities. (53; 54). In 2017, the government worked with the World Bank to secure an additional \$10 million in funding for the project. (55; 37)
UNICEF Country Program (2015–2018)	Aims to combat the worst forms of child labor, increase access to basic education, and address children's needs. (28)

[†] 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. (56; 57)

Sierra Leone has insufficient shelters and safe houses for children who have been withdrawn from working on the streets or in forced labor. (3; 25; 37)

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 all children are protected from hazardous work in sectors that have hazardous conditions and in which child labor is known to occur, including in agriculture, construction, domestic work, transportation, street work, auto repair shops, and dumpsites.	2014 – 2017
	Ensure that the law's light work provisions are specific enough to prevent children's involvement in child.	2015 – 2017
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2017
Enforcement	Ensure that Village Child Welfare Committees are fully established and operational.	2014 – 2017
	Publish information about MLSS funding, whether unannounced inspections are conducted, whether the Labor Inspectorate is authorized to assess penalties, and the number of criminal law enforcement investigations, violations found, and prosecutions initiated, and increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice ratio.	2011 – 2017
	Enforce laws prohibiting child labor in mining, particularly in the diamond mining sector.	2015 – 2017
	Ensure initial training, training on new laws, and refresher training for civil and criminal law enforcement officials on labor and criminal law enforcement.	2015 – 2017
	Ensure that the child protection complaint line is fully operational and accessible as a way to target child labor issues.	2013 – 2017
	Improve coordination between criminal law enforcement agencies to ensure that violations are adequately investigated and prosecuted and that the judicial system has sufficient training and ability to handle child labor and human trafficking cases.	2014 – 2017
	Provide labor law and criminal law enforcement officials with sufficient budgetary and transportation resources to adequately enforce the labor laws throughout the country.	2012 – 2017

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Coordination	Designate all members of the National Commission for Children in accordance with Child Right Act requirements and ensure that all coordinating bodies are able to carry out their intended mandates.	2014 – 2017
Government Policies	Permit pregnant girls to take school entrance exams and attend regular public schools. Adopt the National Action Plan against the Worst Forms of Child Labor.	2015 – 2017 2014 – 2017
Social Programs	Increase access to education for children by eliminating school expenses, providing transportation, increasing the number of schools, eliminating abuse by teachers, and improving access for children with disabilities as well as for children in situations involving early marriage, pregnancy, and motherhood. Increase the availability of shelters and safe houses for victims of forced labor and for children removed from street work, ensuring that they receive and care for trafficked children.	2013 – 2017 2009 – 2017

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