

In 2016, 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. 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. Otherwise, the National Technical Steering Committee on Child Labor organized awareness-raising programs on child labor for fishing and quarrying communities, as well as on child labor in street vending in the western area of Freetown. Children in Sierra Leone perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. Children also engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in diamond mining and in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as result of human trafficking. Sierra Leone's laws do not adequately protect children from involvement in hazardous work, and the country has not implemented the national action plan on child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Sierra Leone perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. Children also engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in diamond mining and in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as result of human trafficking.(1-3) 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 (%) | | 66.0 |

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016.(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 (6-10) |
| | Fishing, including deep-sea fishing,† mending nets, and working on boats in the open sea† (1, 3, 9) |
| 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, 9, 11-13) |
| | Quarrying† and crushing stone, including granite, and transporting gravel (1, 3, 9, 14, 15) |
| | Construction, activities unknown (1, 2, 8) |
| | Manufacturing,† activities unknown (2) |
| Services | Scavenging scrap metals and recyclable materials from dumpsites (1, 9, 16, 17) |
| | Domestic work (1, 9) |
| | Street work, including begging, trading, and selling goods (1-3, 8, 9, 18, 19) |

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

| Sector/Industry | Activity |
|---|--|
| Services | Portering, including carrying heavy loads† (1, 9) |
| | Working as apprentices, including in auto-repair shops and on transportation vehicles (poda poda) (1) |
| Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡ | Forced begging, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1, 9, 20-22) |
| | Forced domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (20, 23) |
| | Forced stealing (1, 9) |
| | Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1, 8, 9, 21) |
| | Forced labor in agriculture and at granite and alluvial diamond mines, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1, 9, 20, 21) |

† 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, in addition to domestic work and petty trading.(3, 8, 21) Internally, children are trafficked for forced labor in fishing, agriculture, diamond mines, and begging.(3) Children from neighboring countries are trafficked to Sierra Leone for begging, forced labor in mining and portering, and commercial sexual exploitation.(3, 8)

Research indicated 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.(9, 24, 25) 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) Beyond early pregnancy, 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, 9, 27, 28) Further, despite legal protections, children with disabilities are less likely to attend school due in part to inappropriate school facilities and discrimination.(9, 28, 29) NGOs also reported that children were denied access to school because of their HIV status.(9)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF 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, including its worst forms (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Sierra Leone’s legal framework to adequately protect children from child labor.

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) |

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

| Standard | Meets International Standards: Yes/No | Age | Legislation |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----|---|
| 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 (30-32) |
| 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) |
| 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) |
| Minimum Age for Military Recruitment | | | |
| State Compulsory | N/A* | | |
| State Voluntary | Yes | 18 | Section 28 of the Child Right Act (30) |
| Non-state Compulsory | 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)

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) Currently, the types of hazardous work prohibited for children do not comprehensively cover children’s work in sectors in which child labor is known to occur, including in agriculture, construction, domestic work, transportation, street work, auto-repair shops, and dumpsites, areas of work where there is evidence of harm to children’s health, safety, or morals.(1, 9, 30-32) Furthermore, research did not find whether actions were taken on the Anti-Trafficking Law in 2016.(8)

The Child Right Act sets the minimum age for light work at age 13; however, it does not limit the number of hours for light work, and therefore is not specific enough to prevent children from involvement in child labor.(30)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor, including its worst forms (Table 5). However, gaps in labor law and criminal law enforcement remain and some enforcement information is not available.

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, consisting of six labor officials in the Western Area.(8, 38) MLSS District Labor Officers are responsible for enforcing labor laws in the formal sector.(20) Operate regional offices in Kenema, Makeni, and Bo, in addition to a newly established 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.(9, 32) |
| Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs (MSWGCA) | Serve as lead agency to ensure child protection in country and in criminal law enforcement.(1, 20) Head the National Trafficking in Persons Secretariat.(20) |

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

| Organization/Agency | Role |
|--|--|
| 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 offences.(20, 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) |

The Child Right Act requires the establishment of a child welfare committee in every village, chiefdom, and district; however, these committees have only been established in a few parts of the country due to budgetary constraints.(20, 25, 30)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2016, labor law enforcement agencies in Sierra Leone took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

| Overview of Labor Law Enforcement | 2015 | 2016 |
|--|--------------|-------------|
| Labor Inspectorate Funding | Unknown (41) | Unknown (8) |
| Number of Labor Inspectors | 18 (42) | 6 (8, 25) |
| Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties | Yes (41) | Yes (43) |
| Training for Labor Inspectors | | |
| Initial Training for New Employees | Yes (20) | No (8) |
| Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor | N/A | No (8) |
| Refresher Courses Provided | Yes (20) | No (8) |
| Number of Labor Inspections | 250 (20) | 350 (8) |
| Number Conducted at Worksite | 250 (20) | 350 (8) |
| Number Conducted by Desk Reviews | Unknown (41) | 0 (8) |
| Number of Child Labor Violations Found | 0 (20) | 0 (8) |
| Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed | 0 (20) | 0 (8) |
| Number of Penalties Imposed that Were Collected | 0 (20) | 0 (8) |
| Routine Inspections Conducted | Yes (41) | Yes (8) |
| Routine Inspections Targeted | Yes (41) | Yes (8) |
| Unannounced Inspections Permitted | Yes (41) | Yes (8) |
| Unannounced Inspections Conducted | Yes (41) | Unknown (8) |
| Complaint Mechanism Exists | Yes (41) | Yes (8) |
| Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services | Yes (41) | Yes (8) |

In 2016, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MLSS) had 6 labor inspectors and 44 factory inspectors who assess the safety and health of workers in factories.(25, 42, 43) The number of labor inspectors is insufficient for the size of Sierra Leone’s workforce, which includes over 2 million workers. According to the ILO’s recommendation of 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in least developed economies, Sierra Leone should employ roughly 67 inspectors.(44, 45) In addition, enforcement of child labor laws remains challenging due to the lack of resources for inspections and insufficient training.(20) Although the Government has a complaint line for issues related to child protection, it does not receive child labor complaints.(11) 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 effectively enforce these laws in the diamond mining sector.(9, 32)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2016, criminal law enforcement agencies in Sierra Leone took actions to combat the worst forms of child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor

| Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|--------------|---------|
| Training for Investigators | | |
| Initial Training for New Employees | No (20) | No (8) |
| Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor | N/A | N/A (8) |
| Refresher Courses Provided | No (20) | No (8) |
| Number of Investigations | Unknown (46) | 12 (8) |
| Number of Violations Found | Unknown (46) | 23 (8) |
| Number of Prosecutions Initiated | Unknown (46) | 6 (8) |
| Number of Convictions | 0 (20, 47) | 0 (8) |
| Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services | Yes (47) | Yes (8) |

Reports indicate that criminal law enforcement in Sierra Leone, particularly in its efforts to address human trafficking, is hampered by a lack of coordination, limited funding, and a lack of training among law enforcement personnel and the judiciary.(8, 47) During the reporting period, 12 cases of child forced labor and child sexual exploitation were investigated by the authorities, and six of these were prosecuted; however, no convictions were reporting during the reporting period.(8)

The Government has a formal complaint mechanism. Complaints filed are routed to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) or the MLSS to assess the situation and determine the victim's medical and shelter needs; once notified by the authorities, the police pursue an investigation.(8) MSWGCA officials reported that the Child Protection Office received 728 complaints related to child abuse in 2016.(25)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor, including its worst forms (Table 8).

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

| Coordinating Body | Role & Description |
|--|---|
| National Technical Steering Committee on Child Labor (NTCCL) | Develops and coordinates a National Action Plan Against the Worst Forms of Child Labor.(11, 38, 48) Led by the MLSS and the MSWGCA, and includes representatives from 10 other government agencies as well as representatives from international organizations and NGOs.(43) In 2016, the NTCCL met every quarter and conducted three sensitization programs in fishing and quarrying communities, in addition to programs on child street work in the western area of Freetown. The NTCCL also trained 20 government social workers on child labor and human trafficking.(8, 25) |
| 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 policy and address the issue of child trafficking.(11, 49) Led by the MSWGCA.(50) In 2016, a proposed anti-migrant smuggling law and ratification of the ECOWAS Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters both remained under review by the Cabinet.(8) |
| National Commission for Children | Coordinates and exchanges information in accordance with the Child Right Act. Advises the Government on ways to improve the condition and welfare of children as part of the NTCCL; Led by and the MLSS and the MSWGCA.(30) |

Research was unable to determine whether all members of the National Commission for Children have been named in accordance with Child Right Act requirements.

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government of Sierra Leone has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 9).

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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.(51) In 2016, no activities were carried out and directly funded by the Government; however, several trainings for police, border guards, and social workers were held on human trafficking issues in support of the plan’s objectives, financed through international organizations and NGOs.(25) |

† The Government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.(20, 43, 52, 53)

The Government has yet to approve the National Action Plan against the Worst Forms of Child Labor and has not included child labor elimination and prevention strategies in the Education Sector Plan.(8, 54)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2016, the Government of Sierra Leone funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms (Table 10).

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

| Program | Description |
|--|---|
| <u>Global Action Program on Child Labor Issues Project</u> (2011–2017) | USDOL-funded project implemented by the ILO in approximately 40 countries to build the capacity of the Government and to develop strategic policies to eliminate child labor.(38, 55) For additional information about USDOL’s work, please visit our website . |
| Human Trafficking and Sexual Violence Prevention Program (2013–2016) | USDOS-funded project implemented by World Hope International (WHI) that provides the only shelter for human trafficking victims in Sierra Leone. Identifies victims of human trafficking and exploitation and provides care, recovery, and reintegration services, and works to build the Government’s capacity to combat human trafficking in a sustainable manner.(20) In 2016, WHI provided shelter and related care for 23 children who were victims of forced labor, namely domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.(8) |
| Government-run Shelters† | Government program that refers child trafficking victims to private shelters that house child victims of forced labor and human trafficking.(23) In 2016, the Government noted that there was an insufficient number of shelters.(25) |
| 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.(56, 57) In 2016, 30 early childhood education classrooms were nearly completed.(25, 57) |
| UNICEF Country Program (2015–2018) | Aims to address the worst forms of child labor, increase access to basic education, reduce child marriage and adolescent pregnancies, and address other children’s needs.(28) In 2016, among other activities, UNICEF provided technical support, including vehicles, to assist the Government in monitoring educational programs and activities.(25) |

† Program is funded by the Government of Sierra Leone.

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)

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

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

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms

| Area | Suggested Action | Year(s) Suggested |
|-----------------|---|-------------------|
| Legal Framework | Ensure that all children are protected from hazardous work, particularly in agriculture, construction, domestic work, transportation, street work, repair shops, and dumpsites that have hazardous conditions and in which child labor is known to occur. | 2014 – 2016 |
| | Clarify whether actions were taken to strengthen prohibitions on domestic human trafficking in the Anti-Trafficking Law. | 2015 – 2016 |
| | Ensure that the law’s light work provisions are specific enough to prevent children from involvement in child labor. | 2015 – 2016 |

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms (cont)

| Area | Suggested Action | Year(s) Suggested |
|---------------------|---|-------------------|
| Legal Framework | Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 by non-state armed groups. | 2016 |
| Enforcement | Ensure that Village Child Welfare Committees are fully established and operational. | 2014 – 2016 |
| | Publish information about MLSS funding and whether unannounced inspections are conducted, and increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO recommendation. | 2011 – 2016 |
| | Enforce laws prohibiting child labor in mining, particularly in the diamond mining sector. | 2015 – 2016 |
| | Ensure training for civil and criminal law enforcement officials. | 2015 – 2016 |
| | Target child labor issues as part of the child protection complaint line. | 2013 – 2016 |
| | Improve coordination between criminal law enforcement agencies to ensure that violations are effectively investigated and prosecuted, and that the judicial system has sufficient training and ability to handle child labor and human trafficking cases efficiently. | 2014 – 2016 |
| | Provide labor law and criminal law enforcement officials with sufficient budgetary and transportation resources to effectively enforce the labor laws throughout the country. | 2012 – 2016 |
| Coordination | Designate all members of the National Commission for Children in accordance with Child Right Act requirements. | 2014 – 2016 |
| Government Policies | Permit pregnant girls to take school entrance exams and attend regular public schools. | 2015 – 2016 |
| | Integrate child labor prevention and elimination strategies into the Education Sector Plan. | 2015 – 2016 |
| | Adopt the National Action Plan against the Worst Forms of Child Labor. | 2014 – 2016 |
| Social Programs | Increase access to education for children by eliminating school expenses, providing transportation, increasing the number of schools and improving poor infrastructure, eliminating abuse by teachers, and improving access for children with disabilities as well as for children in situations involving early marriage, pregnancy, and motherhood. | 2013 – 2016 |
| | Increase the availability of shelters and safe houses for victims of forced labor and for children removed from street work. | 2009 – 2016 |

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