

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT CONTINUED POLICY THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT

In 2018, Sierra Leone made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. President Bio and Vice President Jalloh together with officials from ministries, departments, and agencies, donated 3 months of their salaries to eliminate school fees for more than 2 million students in primary and secondary education. International donors provided the bulk of funding support to implement the government's free quality education program. Despite this initiative, Sierra Leone is receiving this assessment because it continued to implement a policy that delayed advancement in eliminating the worst forms of child labor. The government continued to prohibit girls who were pregnant from attending regular public schools or taking secondary and post-secondary 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 the mining sector and in commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture and quarrying. 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 the mining sector and in commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. (1-5) 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	51.3 (897,142)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	67.0
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	43.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		68.3

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017 published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019. (6)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from the Demographic and Health Survey, 2013. (7)

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 (8-11)
	Fishing, including deep-sea fishing,† mending nets, and working on boats in the open sea† (1,5,12)
Industry	Mining† for alluvial diamonds, sand, and gold, including loading gravel in sacks or basins, carrying sacks on their heads, washing, and sieving (1,5,10,13,14)
	Quarrying† and crushing stone, including granite, and transporting gravel (1,5,12,15)
	Construction, activities unknown (1,2,10,14)
	Manufacturing† (2,16)
Services	Scavenging scrap metals and recyclable materials from dumpsites (1,5,17,18)
	Domestic work (1)
	Street work, including begging, trading, and selling goods (1,2,10,12,14,19)
	Portering, including carrying heavy loads† (1)
	Working as apprentices, including in auto-repair shops and on transportation vehicles (<i>poda poda</i>) (1)

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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 begging, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,3,20,21)
	Forced domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,20,22)
	Forced stealing (1)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,3-5,10,14)
	Forced labor at granite and alluvial diamond mines, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,20,21)

† 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 in domestic work, granite and diamond mining, and begging; trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation also occurs. There are reports that children, mostly boys ages 5–17, are forced to mine for diamonds for long hours in hazardous conditions, sometimes without pay. (3,5,10,12,21,23)

Research indicated that the government continued to implement a policy that prohibits pregnant girls from attending regular public schools and taking secondary and post-secondary school entrance exams, which makes them vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. (1,3,5,10,14,23-30) Furthermore, despite the new government initiative to make education free through secondary school, substantial barriers remain, including a lack of schools and teachers, lack of transportation to schools, and sexual abuse by teachers. (1,10,26-29) In addition, 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. (26,27,30) Despite previous reports of denied access to school, children with HIV status are able to attend schools as noted by the National HIV/AIDS Secretariat. (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	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	15	Section 125 of the Child Right Act; Section 52 of Chapter 212, Employers and Employed Act (31,32)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Section 128 of the Child Right Act; Sections 47–56 of Chapter 212, Employers and Employed Act (31,32)

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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 (31–33)
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 (34,35)
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 (31,34)
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 (34,36)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Sections 7 and 13 of the National Drugs Control Act (37)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Section 28 of the Child Right Act (31)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15	Section 3 of the Education Act; Section 125 of the Child Right Act (31,38)
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 (31,35,38)

* No conscription (37)

Although Sierra Leone's Child Right Act identifies areas of hazardous work prohibited for children such as portage of heavy loads, going to sea, and work in places in which machines are used, the types of hazardous work identified do not include, among others, street work. There is evidence that street work is conducted in unhealthy environments that may expose children to hazardous substances, agents, or processes; to temperatures; and to noise or vibrations damaging to their health. (1,23,26,31,32,39) Other sectors in which children may be exposed to hazardous conditions in Sierra Leone include agriculture, domestic work, transportation, and dumpsites. (1,23,26,31,32,39)

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. (39)

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)	Formulates, implements, and monitors compliance with child labor regulations through its Child Labor Unit. (5,10,40) MLSS District Labor Officers enforce labor laws in the formal sector. (20) Operates regional offices in Bo, Kenema, Makeni, and an office in the diamond-producing district of Kono. (10)
Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources	Enforces regulations against the use of child labor in mining. Authorized to suspend licenses of mining operators engaged in child labor. (5,26,32)

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

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA)	Serves as the umbrella agency to oversee child protection issues, including child labor. Heads the National Trafficking in Persons Secretariat. (1,5,20)
Sierra Leone Police	Leads the investigation and prosecution of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse through Family Support Units, which are mandated to minimize and eradicate the incidence of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse. (5,20,41)
Transnational Organized Crime Unit	Enforces human trafficking laws and provides statistical data and general information on particular cases of human trafficking. (5,42)
Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development	Enforces child labor laws in the informal sector through its district councils. (1,5)
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. (5,39,41)

The Child Right Act requires the establishment of a Child Welfare Committee in every village, chiefdom, and district; however, research indicates that these committees have been established only in a few parts of the country due to budgetary constraints. (20,24,37,39)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2018, 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 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	2017	2018
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (14)	Unknown (5)
Number of Labor Inspectors	30 (14)	27 (23)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Unknown (37)	Yes (5)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	No (14)	Yes (5)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	No (14)	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	No (14)	No (5)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	300 (14)	350 (5)
Number Conducted at Worksite	300 (14)	350 (5)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (37)	0 (5)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (14)	0 (5)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (14)	N/A
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (14)	Yes (5)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (14)	Yes (5)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (14)	Yes (5)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (14)	Yes (5)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (14)	No (5)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (14)	No (5)

In the past, the labor inspectorate did not have a dedicated budget; however, research indicates that a provisional budget of \$11,800 is approved for 2019. (5) Sierra Leone employs 8 Occupational Health and Safety Officers, 14 Labor Officers, and 5 Labor Inspectors, all of whom handle labor inspections. (23) 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 would employ about 74 inspectors. (43,44) In addition to the insufficient number of inspectors, enforcement of child labor laws remains challenging due to insufficient training and the lack of resources for inspections. (5,14,20) The government has a complaint line for issues related to child

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protection; however, research was unable to determine its level of operation in 2018. (5) Although, 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, reports indicated that the government did not adequately enforce these laws in the diamond-mining sector because of the limited number of labor inspectors and a lack of funding. (5,14,26,32)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2018, 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 training for criminal investigators.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	No (14)	Yes (5)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (14)	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	No (14)	No (5)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (39)	0 (5)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (39)	Unknown (5)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (39)	Unknown (5)
Number of Convictions	0 (14)	Unknown (5)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (23)	Unknown (23)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (14)	Yes (5)

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. (10,14,45) The government does not publicly release information on the number of violations found, prosecutions initiated, or convictions. The government did not provide information on the number of penalties imposed for violations related to the worst forms of child labor. (5,23)

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 & Description
National Technical Steering Committee on Child Labor (NTCCL)	Develops and coordinates the National Action Plan against the Worst Forms of Child Labor. (13,40,46) Led by MLSS and MSWGCA, and includes representatives from 10 other government agencies, representatives from international organizations, and NGOs. (47) In 2018, the NTCCL coordinated quarterly meetings with stakeholders, such as MSWGCA, the Sierra Leone Congress, the Sierra Leone Employers, the Federation of Education, and the National Commission for Children, on issues related to child labor. (23)
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. (23) In 2018, efforts were hampered due to limited funding for the task force, with an annual budget of \$14,800 to fund anti-trafficking activities. In December 2018, the Task Force trained 25 social workers, who helped to identify 481 potential human trafficking victims, many of whom were returning migrants from Algeria, Libya, Mali, and Niger. (23)
National Commission for Children (NCC)	Coordinates and exchanges information in accordance with the Child Right Act. As part of the NTCCL, advises the government on ways to improve conditions for and the welfare of children. Led by the MLSS and the MSWGCA. (39) In 2018, the NCC undertook awareness-raising activities and developed a handbook on child rights and responsibilities. (23)

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As of 2018, and as required by the Child Right Act, all members of the National Commission for Children have been appointed. (23,37)

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 funding for 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 (2015–2020)	Includes strategies to address human trafficking through prevention efforts, victim identification, protection and referral of victims to services, training of personnel, and government coordination and monitoring. (3) In 2018, in support of the National Action Plan, the National Trafficking in Persons Task Force convened monthly meetings with government institutions, international organizations, and NGOs. It reviewed the Anti-Human Trafficking Act and continued the process of drafting legislation to combat trafficking in persons, trained government agencies on the victims' referral mechanism, worked with the MLSS to develop and implement the country's Labor Migration Policy, and coordinated with the Vice President's office to implement a nationwide trafficking in persons public awareness program. (23)

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (5,14,28,47,48)

Research could not find evidence that the National Action Plan against the Worst Forms of Child Labor is in force, despite its initial drafting in 2014. (5,14)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2018, 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 insufficient shelters and safe houses for children who have been withdrawn from street work or forced labor.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Child Trafficking Shelters†	Government-funded program that refers child trafficking victims to privately run shelters that house child victims of forced labor and human trafficking. (22) In 2018, shelters suffered funding issues that affected their functionality, and assistance to victims was provided primarily with the support of NGOs. (3,4)
UNICEF Country Program (2015–2018)	Three-year program that aims to combat the worst forms of child labor, increase access to basic education, and address children's basic educational needs. (27)

† 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. (49,50)

With an initial donation of three months salary of President Bio and Vice President Jalloh and various officials from ministries, departments, and agencies, the government started a program to eliminate school fees, in an effort to support free public primary and secondary education for more than two million students. (4,5,28,29,51) Sierra Leone has insufficient and under-funded shelters and safe houses for children who have been withdrawn from working on the streets or in forced labor. (3,16,33,52)

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).

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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 dangerous conditions and in which child labor is known to occur, including in agriculture, domestic work, transportation, street work, and dumpsites.	2014 – 2018
	Ensure that the law's light work provisions are specific enough to prevent children's involvement in child labor.	2015 – 2018
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2018
Enforcement	Ensure that Village Child Welfare Committees are established and operational in all areas.	2014 – 2018
	Publish information on Ministry of Labor and Social Security funding, criminal violations found, prosecutions initiated, convictions achieved, and penalties imposed. Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2011 – 2018
	Enforce laws prohibiting child labor in mining, particularly in the diamond mining sector.	2015 – 2018
	Ensure refresher training for civil and criminal law enforcement officials on child labor and criminal law enforcement, and establish a complaint and reciprocal referral mechanisms for labor law enforcement.	2015 – 2018
	Ensure that the child protection complaint line is operational and accessible in order to identify child labor issues.	2013 – 2018
	Improve coordination between criminal law enforcement agencies to ensure that violations are adequately investigated and prosecuted. Ensure that judicial system personnel have sufficient training and resources to handle child labor and human trafficking cases.	2014 – 2018
	Provide labor law and criminal law enforcement officials with sufficient resources to adequately enforce labor laws throughout the country.	2012 – 2018
Coordination	Ensure the National Trafficking in Persons Task Force is active and has appropriate funding to carry out its mandate.	2018
Government Policies	Permit pregnant girls to take school entrance exams and attend regular public schools.	2015 – 2018
	Adopt a National Action Plan against the Worst Forms of Child Labor.	2014 – 2018
Social Programs	Increase access to education for children by providing transportation, increasing the number of schools, eliminating abuse by teachers, and improving the accessibility of facilities to children with disabilities.	2013 – 2018
	Increase the availability and funding of shelters and safe houses for victims of forced labor and for children removed from street work.	2009 – 2018

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