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Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Committee on the Rights of the Child

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports submitted by Liberia under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2018*, **

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.
** The annex to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.

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List of acronyms

ABE	Accelerated Basic Education
AFELL	Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia
ANC	Antenatal Care
ASRH	Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health
BFF	Better Future Foundation
BHRP	Business and Human Rights Plan
BR	Birth Registration
BRIMS	Birth Registration Information Management System
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPIMS	Child Protection Information Management System
CPN	Child Protection Network of Liberia
CSCs	County Service Centres
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CWD	Children with Disabilities
DoB	Department of Budget
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West Africa
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GC	Governance Commission
GFF	Global Financing Facility
GoL	Government of Liberia
HMIS	Health Management Information System
IAC	Independent Accreditation Committee
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPC	Infection Prevention and Control
LACC	Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission
LIS	Liberia Immigration Service
LISGIS	Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services
LNRCS	Liberian National Red Cross Society
LRRRC	Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission
MACs	Ministries, Agencies and Commissions
MCSP	Maternal and Child Survival Programme
MIS	Management Information System
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoE	Ministry of Education

MFDP	Ministry of Finance and Development Planning
MiP	Malaria in Pregnancy
MoGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
MoH	Ministry of Health
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoL	Ministry of Labour
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAC	National Aids Commission
NARDWAP	National Rehabilitation for Drugs and War Affected Persons
PMI	U.S. President's Malaria Initiative
RHS	Restoration of Health Services
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SRHS	Sexual and Reproductive Health Services
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education And Training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNHCR	United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees
UNV	United Nations Volunteer Programme
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VCT	Voluntary Counselling and Testing
WACPS	Women and Children Protection Section

I. Introduction

1. Liberia is a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that was ratified in 1993. This report is submitted in accordance with article 44 of the Convention which obligates the State Party to submit an initial report two years after ratification of the Convention, and periodic reports every five years thereafter, to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Liberia submitted its consolidated second, third and fourth periodic reports, along with the written replies to its list of issues, in August 2009. The Committee adopted and considered the reports at its sixty-first session on 17 September–5 October 2012. In December 2012, the Committee published its Concluding Observations (CRC/C/LBR/CO/2-4 (2012)) and invited Liberia to submit a combined fifth and sixth periodic report in January 2018.

2. Liberia welcomed this position and considered the Concluding Observations and addressed the issues of concern in its combined fifth and sixth periodic report submitted in January 2018. However, the report did not consider new harmonized, treaty-specific reporting guidelines adopted on 1 October 2010 (CRC/C/58/Rev.2 and Corr.1) and Liberia was asked to resubmit in accordance with them. This combined fifth, sixth and seventh report is in compliance with the new guidelines.

II. Follow-up information on the concluding observations (CRC/C/LBR/CO/2-4)

3. Liberia considered all the recommendations contained in the Committee's observations on its initial and the second to fourth reports and has addressed them as follows.

Cluster 1: General measures of implementation (Arts. 4, 42, and 44, para. 6, of the Convention)

Legislation

4. Liberia has taken specific actions to address legislative gaps as described below:

(a) A Children's Law was enacted in 2011 providing a comprehensive bill of rights for children. But the law requires review because some of its provisions conflict with other laws and it needs to be aligned with international standards.

(b) The Child Protection Network of Liberia (CPN) – a body of child protection actors including government ministries, international non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations – is currently reviewing the Children's Law but its work has been delayed due to lack of funding. Its eventual findings will form the basis for legislative amendment.

(c) An adoption regulation was passed in 2016 and it prohibits irregular adoption, forced labour, and internal and external child trafficking. The adoption regulation is being implemented and coordinated between the relevant line ministries and the judiciary. An act to amend the Domestic Relations Law where it relates to adoption came into force on 11 September 2013. This act deals with international and domestic adoption of children and prohibits the marriage of females under 18 years and males under 21 years. As a safeguard, its statutory regulation will allow a review to address gaps and inconsistencies.

(d) In September 2021, amendments were made to the 2005 Anti-Human Trafficking Law that removes the requirement of force, fraud or coercion in child sex trafficking cases.

(e) During the reporting period, Convention 138 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) that effectively bans child labour was ratified.

(f) The enactment of the Rape Act (2005) provides for the protection of children from sexual abuse and exploitation regardless of consent provision or interpretation of possible consent. The law also makes rape a non-bailable offence.

(g) Criminal Court E has been established with exclusive jurisdiction to hear and adjudicate sexual offence cases. As there are only four such courts within the entire country, sexual offences in counties without a Criminal Court E are heard by the Circuit Court.

(h) In July 2022, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) validated a Child Labour Bill and submitted it to the national legislature for passage into law. When enacted, the Child Labour Law will support monitoring, tracking and gathering of statistics on children involved in child labour.

5. Liberia has taken progressive action to ensure the full implementation of the Children's Law. However, enforcement of this legislation is still a challenge for the government due to insufficient personnel and specialization of justice and other sectors as well as the limited knowledge and experience of actors with respect to child rights. In addition, Liberia has reviewed other legislation including:

(a) The Domestic Violence Law of 2019, which deals with prohibiting children aged under 18 years from joining the Sande and Poro Societies.

(b) The Inheritance Law of 15 May 2019, which deals with Children's Rights of Inheritance.

Comprehensive policy and national plan of action

6. There is no single comprehensive strategy dealing with children's rights in Liberia. Instead, the policy framework is spread out over a wide range of different strategies and policies.[1]

7. Liberia developed a National Child Welfare and Protection Policy in 2017 with an accompanying Child Welfare and Protection Plan of Action in line with international standards.

8. The National Child Welfare and Protection Policy considered all legislation to protect children. This policy was designed to ensure the safety and well-being of every child, including those with disabilities, by creating and maintaining child-friendly environments to enable them reach their full potential. The policy is intended to identify, prevent and respond to potential forms of violence against children, such as rape, neglect, abandonment, discrimination, and exploitation effectively and efficiently. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between UNICEF, the Government of Liberia (GoL), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 2021 to operationalize the ECOWAS Strategic Framework for strengthening national child protection systems that prevent and respond to violence, abuse, and exploitation of children.

9. In 2018, a National Action Plan for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities was developed. This Action Plan's aim is the promotion of an inclusive society where people with disabilities can reach their full potential and participate in the everyday life of the community. In addition to the Action Plan, a roadmap for persons with disabilities was launched.

10. In 2020, through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) in collaboration with partners and others, Liberia developed a roadmap to reduce sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women, girls and children. This development sought to drive change and foster accountability among duty bearers in addressing SGBV policies, systems and mechanisms to mitigate SGBV risks, especially violence against women and girls, and to provide safe and comprehensive prevention and response services for SGBV survivors. The roadmap also sought to promote an inter-ministerial approach to curb SGBV. Implementation is ongoing under the supervision of the MoGCSP. This framework is aligned with the Spotlight Initiative, a UN and European Union programme that aims to end SGBV and harmful practices against women and girls.

11. In 2021, Liberia revised its 2014 Five-Year National Action Plan for the Fight against the Trafficking of Human Beings. In 2014, the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force was established. This task force is co-chaired by the MoL and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

[1] Assessment Report: Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Liberia, 2018.

12. The MoJ through the Child Justice Section launched the Child Justice Study in 2019. This covered all children in contact with the law. The following four groups of children have been addressed:

(a) Children in conflict with the law, aged 7 to 17 years, who are involved in formal criminal proceedings;

(b) Child victims and child witnesses of crime or who are involved in formal criminal proceedings;

(c) Children involved in or affected by formal civil justice proceedings;

(d) Children involved in informal (child) justice proceedings;

13. In order to cater to child justice actors dealing with cases involving children who come into conflict with the law without resorting to formal justice proceedings, Liberia through the MoJ, with support from UNICEF and other partners, developed the National Strategy on Child Justice in Liberia, which was endorsed in January 2022 and is being rolled out across the country. There is a Child Justice Technical & Steering Committee on the National Strategy on Child Justice. The technical committee worked to develop the strategy while the steering committee monitored and made decisions on the implementation of the strategy. To strengthen implementation of the strategy, several capacity-building trainings on standard operating procedures (SOPs) on child justice were rolled out to various child justice actors including social workers, judges, prosecutors, police officers, probation officers, and correction officers.

14. The National Diversion Guideline of Liberia of 2014 provides a standardized and uniform approach and procedures for child justice actors dealing with cases involving children who come into conflict with the law without resorting to formal justice proceedings.

15. Liberia and One UN Joint Programme for At-Risk Youth was launched with UNICEF and UNFPA support through the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS). The programme maps and assesses the at-risk youth population in Liberia to understand the challenges they face including specific child protection concerns.

Coordination

16. In 2014, Liberia adhered to the Committee's recommendation and merged the Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Gender and Development – the two ministries with oversight on child-related issues – to form the new Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP). Merging the functions and responsibilities of the two entities into a single ministry served as a necessary and preliminary step in ensuring effective coordination.

17. The MoGCSP coordinates child rights policy through its CPN and has decentralized offices in the fifteen counties. The sub-offices implement issues and are headed by Gender Coordinators and Child Welfare Officers. The Gender Coordinators convene and chair monthly coordination meetings with the participation of various partners, including other government ministries, departments of the MoJ (police, prosecutors, immigration), and civil society organizations. There is, nevertheless, a need to include the judiciary in such meetings since child offenders are often heard by magistrates who do not attend coordination meetings at the county level. There is also a need to include the Liberian National Children Representative Forum (formerly Children's Parliament) in the national budget, including financial provisions to educate and raise awareness of the Children's Law in schools and communities.

18. The newly created Department of Children and Social Protection appointed a deputy minister and an assistant minister for children and social protection, and all directors and supervisors had to reapply for their positions. These moves were aimed at creating a body with high status. Other bodies with high status, sufficient authority, a clear mandate, and adequate human, technical and financial resources have been established, including the Steering Committee on Children in Street Situations in 2022 and the Steering Committee on the Anti-SGBV Roadmap in 2020. Each is headed by a minister with the authority to make policy decisions.

19. The Child Justice Section of the MoJ chairs the monthly Child Justice Working Group/Forum & Coordination Meeting comprising government line ministries as well as representatives of civil society and international non-governmental organizations to collaboratively address issues of child protection, particularly in situations where children are either in contact or conflict with the formal legal system. This group has been actively involved with advocacy, policies and procedures development and the design of the Child Protection Diversion section. The Juvenile Diversion Programme has grown from five counties in 2018 to eight counties in 2021, namely: Montserrado, Nimba, Bong, Bomi, Grand Gedeh, Margibi, Lofa, and Grand Cape Mount.

(a) The legal basis for the application of diversion is stated in Article 9, Section 3.2 of the Children's Law;

(b) The Child Justice Section has established a peer education programme to promote the prevention of delinquent behavior by children identified as at-risk. The section has recruited and trained more than 30 Peer Educators in Bong and Montserrado Counties as part of the project. Peer Educators participate in school and community events in areas where children are most at risk of coming into conflict with the law.

20. Liberia has established a National SGBV Taskforce comprising of ministries and agencies, local and international NGOs, relevant UN entities, and development partners. The task force meets once every month to review progress and share ideas or information on mitigating SGBV.

21. In its move to broaden coordination, Liberia has established community-based structures including the Child Welfare Committee, the rural women structure, HEforSHE champions, and youth groups to raise awareness and support government and community initiatives to sensitize members of the community to prevent violence against women and girls.

22. Liberia supports the work of the Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia (AFELL). AFELL was established in 1994 to carry out advocacy for the rights and promotion of the advancement of women, children, and indigent persons in society.

23. The Children's Law called for the establishment of the National Child Wellbeing Council, a multi-stakeholder body that would bring together government, civil society, and the private sector to coordinate efforts to protect children, and with responsibility for developing and implementing a national child protection strategy. But there are no funds to establish this body.

Allocation of resources

24. There is no current data available on the amount budgeted by the GoL for children, nor about the expenditure on children.

25. Although inadequate financial resources continue to present challenges, Liberia in 2022 increased the budget for immunization for children from US$50,000 to US$350,000.[2]

26. Liberia through the MoGCSP has provided cash to vulnerable families since 30 October 2018 under the Liberia Social Safety Net programme. The project provided quarterly cash transfers (of approximately US$90.00 depending on household size) to at least 12,627 extremely poor and food-insecure households in four counties through a World Bank Trust Fund.

27. In the wake of the COVID-19 response in January 2021, the cash programme provided temporary income support (cash transfers of $15 per capita) to approximately 15,000 extremely poor and vulnerable households in urban communities in Montserrado. The total amount for the initiative was US$3.4 million provided by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

28. Liberia has allotted the MoGCSP a budget line for the provision of subsidies to children in institutions since 2005 when the number of orphanages was close to 115. These

[2] National Budget.

subsidies are ongoing even though the number of institutions has been reduced to 63 known orphanages. The last subsidies were paid in May 2022 to all 63 orphanages in seven counties (Nimba, Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Bassa, Margibi, Bomi, and Montserrado) and each child received US$6.00 per month. There is a need to provide a budget allotment to the two homes directly administrated by GoL – the Liberia Children Village, for children with multiple vulnerabilities and special needs, and Juluta Transit Care Centre, for highly complex cases of children aged over 13 years. UNICEF's financial support helps finance the operation of both homes.

29. Liberia supports child justice through the MoJ. UNICEF provides budgetary support to the Child Justice Section of the MoJ. With this funding, the Child Justice Section has eight social workers deployed in seven counties, with two of these social workers assigned in Montserrado County. The social workers' core functions include monitoring the magisterial courts, juvenile cells in the prisons, police depots, schools, and having meetings with other justice actors in these counties UNICEF also supported the MoJ's Human Rights Protection Division in the drafting of this report. The contribution entailed technical drafting sessions, the holding of regional consultations and validation. Further, key support from UNICEF to the Division is the procurement of office equipment (laptops) and other office supplies (stationery) throughout the activity. UNICEF also provides funding to other units of the ministry including the SGBV Crimes Unit and the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) of the Liberia National Police.

30. The Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) has established a Gender Responsive Planning and Budget (GRPB) unit under the Department of Budget (DoB) to ensure budgets are disaggregated in GoL institutions currently piloting in nine Ministries, Agencies and Commissions (MACs): MoGCSP, Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), Governance Commission (GC), MoJ, Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS), MoL. Despite the adoption of gender-responsive budgeting across the nine MACs, there are still gaps in budgetary support to implement child rights concerns.

31. Corruption has been an underlying factor and a significant barrier for the provision of sufficient and sustainable financing for social services and policies that could benefit children. By stature, Liberia has established an Internal Audit Unit[3] at all government institutions and deployed trained internal auditors at each of these MACs. There is an important amendment to make the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) proactive in investigating and prosecuting corruption cases. There are continuous efforts with support from donor partners to train prosecutors, judges and lawyers to detect and investigate corruption cases.

32. To minimize corruption at local and county levels, Liberia has strengthened the capacity of institutions and staff working directly with vulnerable groups by providing ongoing training on child rights and referral pathways. Some trained groups include social workers stationed at police stations, police officers, judges, child justice staff, civil society, and child welfare providers. Liberia has also provided technical support to child welfare facilities by training staff on tracking and data collection tools to further minimize corruption.

Data collection

33. Although Liberia has taken some steps to strengthen child-centred data collection and its use for planning, it is a long way from achieving desired results as per recommendations for disaggregated data about children in most areas covered under the Convention (CRC/C/15/Add/236 para. 19, 2004), in particular children in poverty, children subjected to violence, children with disabilities, children deprived of a family environment, and children engaged in child labour. As noted above, there is no current data available on the amount budgeted by the GoL for children, nor data for the expenditure on children. Child data does not seem to be correlated with annual budgeting decisions.

34. Data related to child protection are scarce and there are multiple challenges in terms of collection, storage and analysis. There is no single platform for data related to children.

[3] The Internal Audit Act, 2003.

For example, the MoJ collects data on children in contact with the justice system while the MoGCSP collects data on SGBV and data about children who are beneficiaries of the social services system. Currently, the National Disability Commission uses data from the 2008 national population census owing to the unreliability of more recent data. UNICEF agreed to support the National Disability Commission to address the issue of aggregate data for persons with disabilities.

35. In compliance with the recommendations of the Committee, Liberia took broad steps to improve child-centred data collection. In 2016, the MoGCSP signed a contract with USAID and the World Bank to establish the Strengthening of the National Social Safety Net System. The objective was to establish the key building blocks of a basic national safety net delivery system and provide income support to households who are both extremely poor and food insecure. These include a social registry; data collection and household registration; eligibility screening; an integrated Management Information System (MIS) enabling monitoring across participating programmes as well as programme-specific management modules for enrolment, payment, grievance redress, and monitoring and evaluation.

36. There are data collection centres across all the 15 counties that feed into the central database at the MoGCSP. Information collected includes those related to SGBV, family preservation, juvenile protection, adoption, and persistent non-support by a parent or guardian. The SGBV Division at the MoGCSP collects statistical data on sexual and SGBV cases at health facilities, police stations, and by civil society organizations (CSOs) implementing projects. Data is disaggregated by age, gender, and location. According to the 2021 Gender-Based Violence Statistical Report, 76.21 per cent of survivors were aged 17 or younger. The Children Protection Division is currently collecting data from social workers about children who are referred to the services provided by the ministry. The GoL is encouraged by the fact that there already exists a process for data collection that could eventually facilitate the creation of an administrative data system for child protection.

37. The GoL with UNICEF support is establishing a functional child protection information management system (CPIMS). This system will facilitate case management and help to promote evidence-based decision-making in child protection by providing data on the prevalence of child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. To date, practicality and technical assessments have been completed, terms of use have been drafted, data protection impact assessments conducted, data protection and information sharing protocols drafted, and configuration of the tools into a demo database has been finalized for piloting.

38. There is a standing policy at the MoJ to acquire Exit Clearance for children leaving Liberia. In addition, the MoJ operates the information management form. The main challenge with data collected by the Child Justice Coordination Unit at MoJ is that the information is collected, shared and centralized in Microsoft Word format as opposed to a spreadsheet format. This makes it difficult to conduct data quality checks, basic data analysis such as trend analysis, and to ensure data integrity.

39. Electronic birth and death registration has been a priority for Liberia ever since there was a decision to move away from paper ledgers in 1999. But a functional national system is still lacking, with the initial system having been abandoned due to information and communications technology challenges. Being the implementer of all birth registration in Liberia, the MoH has decentralized childbirth registration from 0 to 12 years in health facilities and County Service Centres (CSCs) at county and district levels. Birth registration is free for this targeted age group.

40. A consistent administrative system that registers all births and deaths, including a mechanism to register children who were not registered at birth and to produce unique IDs, would help ensure that children are receiving the specific services they need. Having statistics on the number of children being born was one of the most frequently identified data gaps. Such data would inform decisions and planning in multiple sectors from education to health. Currently, the MoH is conducting a pilot for a birth and death registration module using DHIS2 software. This module includes offline data entry and has been designed along a different data flow than the data from the health management information system (HMIS). The pilot is currently being supported by UNICEF Liberia Country Office and is implemented in Grand Bassa and Montserrado Counties.

41. Based on the Education Act of 2011, Liberia has created an education management information system (EMIS) unit within the MoE. This unit is responsible for collecting data about the number of schools (public, private and faith-based) that are currently active in the country.

42. Liberia, with assistance from the USAID-funded Liberia Teachers Training Programme (LTTP), conducted MoE data collection in 2019–2020 after which results were published. Information was collected on school-age enrolment, dropout across the counties at early childhood development (ECD) and grade school through upper secondary. Data was disaggregated by gender showing that whereas boys and girls start off almost at parity, the enrolment gender divide widens at transition points to below 15 per cent for females at upper secondary. It showed also that only 14 per cent of children are ready for school and the net enrolment rate is 49 per cent.

43. Liberia published the MoE 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 data. The data collection was sponsored by the World Bank, IRISE, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and UNICEF and covered the following indicators: nursery, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, visual impairment, hearing impairment, mental disability/learning difficulty, developmental disability, and other physical disability. The data in the two reporting years show a slightly improved enrolment of over 1.4 million school-aged children. A significant component of the findings of the reports is the declining number of public schools in the country.

Independent Monitoring

44. Liberia established the Independent National Commission for Human Rights (INCHR) in April 2005 with a broad mandate of protecting and promoting all human rights, including for children.[4]

Cooperation with civil society

45. Shocks to the national economy caused by Ebola virus disease, COVID-19 and other factors have made budgetary allotments for regular services rather challenging beyond the goodwill of donor partners and civil society who work within the frameworks established around the implementation of the National Action Plan based on MoUs between respective ministries and themselves.

46. In September 2022, the MoGCSP and partners hosted a two-day working session to review recommendations for the 2011 Children's Law. This working session identified gaps and made recommendations to the CPN for the ministries and agencies responsible for children to finalize their roles and responsibilities.

47. The MoGCSP supervises the CPN and hosts regular meetings every first Tuesday of the month along with the Liberian National Children Representative Forum (formerly the Children's Parliament). The MoL sent two civil society organizations including Liberia Association of Female Sociologists and Children Labour Force,to Sierra Leone for child trafficking studies in 2022. Additionally, in 2020 to 2023 the MoL funded 10 civil society organizations to conduct and standardize the campaign on trafficking in persons.

48. In cooperation with Liberia, the UN and EU Spotlight Initiative provides support to civil society organizations to implement livelihood skills development and Peer Educators training for children in Lofa, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Grand Cape Mount, and Montserrado Counties. Acquisition of livelihood skills has benefited participants by providing economic empowerment and self-reliance in rural areas.

Dissemination, awareness and training

49. During the reporting period, Liberia launched effective media campaigns aimed at educating the public about the Convention's basic principles. For instance, MoJ Child Protection officers work proactively in the counties alongside UNHCR in fully supported programmes to disseminate the Convention's framework to communities, including children.

[4] GAP assessments report, 2022 INCHR.

50. In 2017, around 200 child-friendly copies of the Children's Law were printed with support from UNICEF. The copies were distributed to members of the Liberian National Children Representative Forum in the 15 counties for mass education among communities they work with. A major drawback recognized during this exercise, due to constraints in obtaining financial and technical support, was the absence of local language versions of the Convention to enable wider knowledge of the Convention.

51. Starting in 2019, Liberia administered training for about 100 individuals in occupations that promote justice for children, including prosecutors to enhance their capacity as justice actors.

52. Further training involved: (a) The judiciary through the James A.A. Pierre Judicial Institute (JI), with support from UNICEF. The JI conducted awareness/training activities for magistrates, probation officers, justice sector actors, medical practitioners, and social workers from Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, and Margibi Counties over the period from 2021 to 2022.[5]

Cluster 2: Definition of the child (Art. 1)

53. Liberia recognizes that a child is anyone under the age of 18 years.[6] This recognition is in cognizance with most international provisions on the definition of a child.

54. Liberia affirms that the Constitution of Liberia, the Children's Law, and the amended penal code, are legislation that criminalize early child marriage, or outlaw practices "that violate or endanger the bodily integrity, life, health, [or] dignity…" of a child.

55. Liberia provides protection for girls below the age of maturity. The age of marriage in customary and statutory legal systems is 18 years for females, in line with the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and 21 years for males. In addition, the passage of an amendment to the Rape Law in 2006 is another legal measure relevant to child marriage as it establishes the age of consent at 18, allowing the prosecution of cases as rape where a person engages in sexual intercourse with a female aged under 18, even if that female is married under customary law. Moreover, Article XII, Section 1 of the Children's Law provides that where any law, other than the Constitution, is inconsistent with the Children's Law, that law shall be invalid.

56. Where minors are involved, the Children's Law takes precedence over the provisions of the Inheritance and Customary Marriage Act 2003 and the Revised Rules and Regulations governing the hinterland of Liberia.

[5] Between 23 to 26 March 2021, training was also held in Kakata, Margibi County for 16 magistrates, public defenders, officers of the Women and Children Protection Section of the Liberian National Police, and Margibi County's County Attorney. This training focused on educating participants on how to use the Child Justice Training Module for Judicial Actors during court trials in which defendants are children in conflict with the law. (b) Between 8 to 10 December 2021, the JI with funding from UNICEF organized and executed training in Buchanan City, Grand Bassa County covering magistrates, juvenile probation officers, medical practitioners, and social workers drawn from Montserrado, Margibi, and Grand Bassa Counties. This training focused on varying topics around child justice. (c) Between 30 August to 3 September 2022, the JI with funding from UNICEF conducted interdisciplinary training in Tubmanburg, Bomi County for 30 participants including magistrates, justice actors, and social workers from Gbarpolu, Grand Cape Mount and Bomi Counties. Topics covered in this training included children in conflict with the law, the rights of child victims, etc. Facilitators were trainers from the JI.

[6] The Children's Law, 2011.

Cluster 3: General principles

57. Liberia has taken the following actions on the issues raised under general principles:

Best interests of the child

58. Liberia has adopted several policy and legal instruments to ensure that the best interest of the child is systematically reflected in the national legislation and national policies. These legal instruments include:

(a) The Domestic Violence Law of 2018;

(b) The amended provision of Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Act in 2020 with specific provisions that protect children against trafficking, child labour and exploitation;

(c) The Liberia Children's Law of 2011 (ref: Art. 7 Sec. 49, 50 & 51);

(d) The Child Labour Bill is being addressed. This bill provides that any party or parties recruiting children to perform light or permitted work must respect the best interest of the child, which includes the need to ensure any duration of work must not take away from the child's school time;

(e) A National Social Welfare Policy has been developed;

(f) The National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAPBHR) is being formulated with provisions seeking to address human rights abuses by business actors including issues of child labour, etc.

59. The Persistent Non-Support section of the Children Division at the MoGCSP provides remedies for children whose fathers come short of providing economic support for their upkeep irrespective of whether the children were born in or out of wedlock.

60. Child Welfare Committees have been established at community levels across the country to monitor and report on violation of children's rights in communities and in the best interest of children.

61. WACPS' deployment in various districts, together with juvenile courts, ensures children's best interests in transactions involving children and adults. In addition, WACPS' presence provides protection for children's wellbeing by guarding against abuse.

62. The MoGCSP in partnership with other implementing partners has undertaken several sensitization efforts in schools and on national radio to educate the public on the best interests of the child. This move is helping to alter the prevailing societal perception that the best interests of the child are inferior to those of adults.

63. Liberia also hosted training for public and private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities, and legislative bodies to help actors understand and incorporate the best interests of the child into their legal reasoning.[7]

64. Although Liberia is not a signatory to the 1993 Hague Convention, references in the Adoption Regulation of Liberia provide for protection of children and cooperation in respect to intercountry adoption.

Right to life, survival and development

65. Article 11 of the 1986 Constitution guarantees the protection of the right to life for every citizen, including children.

66. The National Health Policy and Plan (2007–2011) provides equitable healthcare services to all children irrespective of sex, socio-economic status, origin or geographical location.

[7] Liberia Educational Statistics Report.

67. Article 3, Section 3.1 of the Children's Law states that every child has the right to life. Section 3.2 stipulates that no law shall be valid if it requires the execution or any form of killing children.

68. The practice of ritualistic killings is illegal and swift prosecution is meted against perpetrators of such practices. The legal instrument supporting justice for victims of ritualistic killings is found in the Children's Law.[8]

Non-discrimination

69. Article 7 Section 4.1–4 of the Children's Law states: "Every child with disabilities shall have a right to enjoy a full and decent life in conditions that ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community or town as well as access and benefit from an inclusive education system offering education that is responsive and supportive to the child's learning needs and talents in a participative and non-discriminatory manner."

70. Liberia is committed to the constitutional guarantee of non-discrimination. Respect for diversity has been a hallmark for all without regards to ethnicity, sex and sexual identity, or gender orientation.

71. In order to uphold the laws on non-discrimination and equal protection before the law, Liberia has established Gender and Social Inclusion Unit in more than 50 per cent of all government ministries, agencies and commissions.

72. In 2018, Liberia adopted an Inclusive Education Policy, which addresses non-discrimination to increase access to quality education for all children, including children with disabilities by eliminating environmental, attitudinal, policy, practice and resource barriers that prevent some students from attending their local school with their peers.

73. The National Policy on Girls Education launched in 2006 and revised in 2013 aimed to guide and promote affirmative action for the progressive reduction of gender disparities in education and training as well as in management structure. Girls are enrolled in schools based on financial capacity rather than on the basis of discrimination against the particular geographical origin of girl students. To improve girls' access to education, the MoE has a special section responsible for monitoring girls' education. The MoE's Annual School Census 2019–2020 showed the percentage of girls in primary school was 51 per cent compared with 49 per cent in secondary education. The MoE continues to advance the goal of equal access to education by taking measures to eliminate discrimination and bullying in education. The decline in the number of girls that attain secondary education may be attributed to several factors including early pregnancy.[9]

Respect for the views of the child

74. In 2014, Liberia launched the Juvenile Diversion Programme. The programme's guidelines explicitly state that children should be heard in all judicial proceedings affecting them. The guidelines include age-appropriate methods to accommodate children in judicial proceedings while protecting the identities and rights of children.

75. Liberia continued to support the Liberian National Children Representative Forum by providing consistent platforms for the voices of children to be heard at the local, county and national levels. The Liberian National Children Representative Forum was established in February 2008 to advocate, lobby, represent and speak out on issues affecting children's rights. Article 3, Section 16.2 of the Children's Law, provides for the protection of every child to express their view freely on matters of interest concerning them.

[8] The Children's Law, Section 1, 14.1, Subsection (e), (i), (ii), etc.

[9] MoE National Policy on Girl Education, Section 1.3.

76. Liberia has made efforts to establish county-level children's forums in every county. These forums can provide space for children to voice their opinions and concerns, however, they receive limited financial support from the GoL through the MoGCSP and members of the CPN. As a result of this limited support, the forums have not been able to work effectively.

77. Liberia also utilizes Buddy Clubs embedded in public schools to educate students, teachers and parents about the dangers of female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), bullying, child marriage, and the importance of self-advocacy when the views of children in homes and communities need to be heard.

78. The MoGCSP encourages child participation in a variety of ways. For instance, in order to ensure that children, especially girls, know their rights, the Liberian National Children Representative Forum with support from UNICEF and the MoGCSP conducts awareness on the Children's Law and the Convention as well as on SGBV issues particularly affecting girls. Opportunities are also given to children including girls to participate in activities such as International Days where they can freely express issues affecting their wellbeing.

Cluster 4: Civil rights and freedoms (Arts. 7, 8, and 13–17)

Birth registration

79. Birth registration (BR) falls under the mandate of the Bureau of Vital Statistics at the MoH and became legal through the enactment of the Birth and Death Registration Act of 1971, which made registration of births and deaths compulsory for all citizens. Chapter 51 of the Public Health Act gave the MoH the mandate to provide leadership, policy and strategy direction to ensure effective decentralized birth and death registration in Liberia. The MoH is also charged with the responsibility of producing periodic vital statistics reports.

80. Birth registration coverage declined from 35 per cent in 1989 to 4 per cent in 2007 (2007 DHS), and then increased to 25 per cent in 2013 (2013 DHS), and 66 per cent in 2019 (2019/2020 DHS). The increase in birth registration is due mainly to decentralization of services from one centre in Montserrado County to 57 birth registration centres (15 at the CSCs and 42 at health facilities) as of 2023. With the support of UNDP, the MIA launched a decentralization programme through which it established CSCs in all 15 counties to help reduce the difficulty faced by rural dwellers in accessing important services provided by various MACs. The CSCs host some 14 functional agencies and ministries in all counties and birth registration is one of the services provided.

81. All birth registrations are free for children aged below 13 years nationwide. Over 112,000 children aged up to 12 years were registered in October 2019.

82. To date, more than 26 new BR centres have been organized in public and private hospitals and health centres and clinics.

83. The MoH works with UNICEF, World Bank, and other partners to established BR centres at health facilities and to help increase registrations through awareness campaigns in schools and hard-to-reach communities as well as provide refresher training, technical support and equipment.

84. Mobile birth registration teams have been mobilized with UNICEF and UNDP support. Such teams reach otherwise inaccessible terrain to provide mothers the opportunity to register their children's births and instantly obtain birth certificates for children whose ages qualify for free-of-charge services. All other payment processing is done at particular CSCs. Additionally, data clerks have been stationed in health facilities to offer integrative services that include providing awareness on the importance of mass vaccination, birth registration, etc.

85. In 2022, the MoH with support from UNICEF developed the birth registration information management system (BRIMS) on the DHIS2 platform making the BRIMS interoperable with the HMIS and the death registration information management system.

This is a live system which can generate accurate disaggregated data. Due to challenges with limited internet coverage and electricity supply, the system is designed to work on and offline.

86. Liberia continues to make progress in birth registration with the support and commitment from UNICEF, World Bank, Global Financing Facility (GFF) and other partners. However, challenges such as inadequate operational support continue to impose constraints and hamper sustainability of BR services.

87. The MoH has collaborated with the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), UNHCR, Church Aid – Liberia, the World Council of Churches including the Ecumenical Women Organization, and evangelical churches to register over 10,000 children aged up to 12 years since 2019 in Montserrado, Gbarpolu, Bomi, Cape Mount and Margibi Counties in furtherance of the ten-year #IBelong Campaign of the United Nations that started in 2014 and was expected to end by November 2024.

Name and nationality

88. In 2022, Liberia enacted the Citizenship Law to provide equal citizenship rights to all children born by Liberian women with foreign nationals.[10]

89. The Citizenship Law also allows Liberians to hold on to their Liberian citizenship after acquiring a second nationality. Moreover, the Citizenship Law permits individuals, including children, to claim Liberian citizenship through their mothers, which was not previously the case.

90. Article III, Section 4.1 of the the Children's Law states: "Every child shall have a right to a name that is not humiliating or degrading to the child except where these names are based on cultural and traditional practice."

Cluster 5: Violence against children (Arts. 19, 24, para. 3, 28, para. 2, 34, 37 (a) and 39)

91. Liberia has developed a comprehensive national strategy to prevent and address all forms of violence against children. The following form part of this strategy:

(a) The National Child Welfare and Protection Policy has been established;

(b) The Child Protection Network is in force;

(c) The National Strategy on Child Justice in Liberia has been formulated;

(d) A standardized operating procedure on SGBV is in force;

(e) A GBV Taskforce has been constituted and working to proactively tackle the range of issues associated with GBV in society;

(f) The enactment of the new Rape Law in 2005 that provides for the protection of children, especially girls aged 0–17 years, against sexual abuse whether or not by consent. This legislation has made sexual offences such as rape a non-bailable crime;

(g) Criminal Court E has been established in Montserrado, Bong and Nimba Counties with jurisdiction to prosecute SGBV cases;

(h) The creation of an In-Mobile Camera Screen in Court E to protect the identity of rape survivor/witness during court trial;

(i) On 27 February 2009, the MoJ established the SGBV Crimes Unit and decentralized them in nine counties: Montserrado, Lofa, Nimba, Bong, Grand Gedeh, Sinoe, River Gee, Grand Kru, and Maryland;

(j) Offices of the WACPS have been decentralized with a current presence in all 15 counties;

[10] Liberia Constitution. 20 (A).

(k) Renovation and equipping of several WACPS offices have been done with short-stay facilities for child victims of violence;

(l) In 2019, Liberia initiated the draft of the Business and Human Rights Plan (BHRP) to guide the state in fulfilling its duties to protect individuals (including children) and communities from business-related human rights abuses consistent with its domestic and international obligations.

(m) The National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights being developed (2023) will address a raft of human rights concerns. Specific to employment, the National Working Group on Business and Human Rights will develop guidelines for companies to manage their employment processes in compliance with human rights standards to ensure non-discrimination, prevent child labour, avoid environmental degradation, etc.;

(n) There is a semi-annual review of reports on child protection issues by stakeholders;

(o) There is an SOP on adoption case management.

Corporal punishment

92. Corporal punishment has been abolished in Liberia since the 1980s.[11] The Children's Law prohibits corporal punishment or other punishment that may compromise the physical or mental wellbeing of children in Liberia. The MoGCSP coordinates the CPN and the Liberian National Children Representative Forum to create awareness messages to prevent violence in homes and schools. In instances where violations occur, the MoGCSP works with the police and courts to prosecute. With the awareness and enforcement of persecution, corporal punishment in schools has been reduced.

93. The Liberian Children Representative Forum has established mechanisms for discouraging incidents of corporal punishment in communities and constantly raises awareness in order for victims to report to the appropriate authority for remedial actions.

94. With support from UNICEF, the MoGCSP together with the CPN and Children Representative Forum is currently embarking on a Social Behaviour Change campaign to sensitize communities on violence against children. In this campaign, messages have been developed in seven thematic areas with corporal punishment being part of them.

95. Under the then Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (now MoGCSP), the Department of Social Welfare developed regulations for the appropriate use and condition of alternative care for children in 2010. The regulations for institutions where children reside mandated the proprietors/tress to develop a mechanism for confidential reporting of corporal punishment which allowed children to make formal complaints. Also, the MoGCSP, the Parents Teachers Association of Liberia (PTAL), MoE and county school boards carry out awareness campaigns against corporal punishment. In the event a child is a victim of corporal punishment, the school is obliged to report it.[12]

Sexual and gender-based violence

96. The MoGCSP has established referral pathways and created links among service providers to coordinate their responses to victims/survivors of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. The pathway is unique to counties. The referral system is also being utilized to respond to other issues of abuse affecting children.

[11] Liberia Constitution. 20 (A).

[12] An instance of MoGCSP and WACPS dealing with corporal punishment is the following narrative: In May 2023, a 7-year-old male child was brutally beaten by his biological mother for stealing LRD 300 from her room. According to the mother, the child was in the constant habit of stealing from neighbours and she had to pay back whatever he stole. Community members reported the corporal punishment case to the police when the child appeared with bruises and cuts all over his body. The WACPS immediately removed the child, arrested the mother and called the MoGCSP for placement. With the child in a safe place, an investigation was conducted by the police and the case was forwarded to the magisterial court for adjudication. After several days, the MoGCSP was asked to assess family members for the child to be placed in their care based on the court's order.

97. The MoGCSP and partners have also been making efforts to strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms such as Children Welfare Committees (CWCs) and GBV Observatories to monitor and report child welfare and protection issues.

98. Liberia's cultural and traditional norms usually seek family and community involvement when resolving matters that concern children and other community members. However, statutory law establishes some limitations on this culture and makes it compulsory for strict reporting of grave matters like rape to WACPS offices.

99. According to data from the MoGCSP, reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence amounted to 2,186 in 2022, a number close to the 2,105 cases reported in 2018, and 500 cases more than those reported in the previous year. The increase in reported cases was attributed to the rising awareness on prevention and reporting conducted by the National SGBV Taskforce.

100. In 2020, after community members, youth, civil society organizations, and women rights groups had staged demonstrations against the rising numbers of rape and other forms of violence against women and girls in Liberia, a National Taskforce against rape and SGBV was instituted and several consultations were held with key stakeholders including CSOs and religious and traditional leaders. Rape was declared a national emergency for two years (2020–2022). A National Roadmap to end SGBV was designed and developed by key CSO and GoL stakeholders after advocacy by women's movements on how best to advocate against violence against women and girls (VAWG) issues and hold duty bearers accountable. The Anti-SGBV Roadmap guides future action to address rape and other forms of SGBV and seeks to change the current dynamics of "business as usual."

101. Liberia is working in collaboration with UNFPA and UNICEF, the MoE and MoGCSP to ensure a safe school environment for all children – including children with disabilities. Reporting of SGBV/SEA cases has improved in schools. At least 50 public schools were trained to set up "Buddy clubs" (a peer-to-peer support structure) with 750 members (375 girls and 375 boys). An estimated 500 cases of SEA were reported from schools and referred to the appropriate authorities. The increased reporting was a result of the production and rollout of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Manual and the pilot initiative of the draft protection, sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) guidelines for schools.

102. Both UNICEF and UNFPA are collaborating with Liberia to improve the availability and accessibility of essential rights-based and survivor-centred services to child survivors of violence, including those from marginalized groups and communities. SGBV response services covered different sectors and included healthcare services (clinical management of rape and other reproductive health interventions including fistula repair surgeries, maternal health care, family planning and sexuality education for adolescents), psychosocial services (mental health care and referral, psychosocial counselling, trauma healing and rehabilitation), legal services (capacity building and the provision of logistics for adequate investigation, documentation, case file preparation as well as enhanced prosecution), protection services (safe home), and community engagement and empowerment services (capacity building and provision of logistical support to women, peace huts, rape observatory, religious and traditional leaders, women and youth engagements). The initiative also invested in strengthening the capacity of service providers to address forms of violence and ensure services are of high quality for all women and girls, including those traditionally left behind.

103. In 2018, Liberia through the MoGCSP established a call centre which was reactivated in 2020 with the support of UNFPA and UNICEF. The aim of the call centre is to track and quickly respond to pertinent child issues, including domestic maltreatment of children, child trafficking, and child labour.

104. Liberia has addressed issues surrounding early and forced marriages under the SGBV Roadmap which was launched in 2020 and continues to conduct awareness on early and forced marriages. UNICEF supports the SGBV Crimes Unit of the MoJ to prosecute SGBV cases and other support services such as temporary shelter in safe homes for victims and survivors of SGBV as well as psychosocial treatment in Rivercess, Montserrado, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Cape Mount and Margibi Counties.

105. Seven One-Stop Centres have been established to provide multiple services including medical, psychosocial, investigation and legal services to victims/survivors of SGBV. Five of these facilities operate in Montserrado, Bong and Grand Gedeh Counties with support from UNICEF, UNFPA and other development partners.

Harmful traditional practices

106. Liberia is actively combating the incidence of FGM especially in rural communities where many challenges still persist due in part to FGM being a long-established cultural practice in such areas.[13] One mechanism has been to work with traditional leaders to reduce harmful traditional practices, including FGM and early marriage. As a result of such interaction, Liberia adopted the Ganta Policy that suspended all Sande activities.

107. A National Working Group against FGM was set up to secure the criminalization of FGM under section 16.21L of the Domestic Violence Act. However, the 53rd Legislature struck out a criminalization clause in the Domestic Violence Act owing to the culturally sensitive nature of the practice.

108. On 18 January 2018, Liberia issued Executive Order No. 92 suspending FGM of children for one year. This was followed by the issuance of a traditional proclamation on 25 June 2019 in Nimba County.[14] This action was reinforced on 4 February 2022 in Gbarnga, Bong County during the observance of FGM Day that suspended FGM practice in all 11 practicing counties. Additionally, on 6 February 2023, the National Traditional Council of Chiefs and Elders also banned FGM in Montserrado and surrounding areas, and suspended the practice in the remaining 10 counties. These regulations have limited the forceful recruitment and initiation of girls.

109. One notable measure against FGM is the suspension of licenses or permits for bush schools in 2021. In addition, there is increasing engagement with traditional leaders and stakeholders on reporting harmful traditional practices. These actions are all in accordance with national efforts aimed at finally dismantling FGM since FGM is integral to the bush school establishment.

110. In 2010, the MIA came to an agreement with Zoes (traditional female elders/teachers of the Sande) and other traditional leaders to relocate all bush schools at least twenty-five miles away from communities to discourage the forceful initiation of children.

111. The GoL has also worked in partnership with traditional leaders to carry out public awareness and sensitization campaigns and has supported programmes that provide alternative sources of livelihood for Zoes and other traditional practitioners who often rely on these practices as their primary source of income. This alternative livelihoods programme that began in 2022, and currently caters to former bush school operators, issued out of the June 2019 Ganta Policy when an inventory of all traditional practitioners and *grooves*[15] were conducted with the aim of providing alternative livelihoods to traditional practitioners. The inventory identified 1,335 traditional practitioners and 721 traditional *grooves* in the practicing areas. To date, 300 of these traditional practitioners receive alternative livelihoods support and there are four counties with vocational and heritage centres.

112. The forced recruitment of girl and boy children into Sande and Poro activities has been of concern to Liberia because of disruption to primary school attendance and other harmful acts. The policy of introducing alternative livelihoods for bush school operators is helping to end forced recruitment especially in Bomi, Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa, Gbarpolu, and Montserrado Counties.

113. In December 2016, Liberia launched the African Union campaign to end child marriage in Africa.

[13] Sec 20.1 of Children's Law.
[14] UN WOMEN 2019 Report.
[15] Grooves are the architectural infrastructure for the Sande bush school.

Cluster 6: Family environment and alternative care (Arts. 5, 9–11, 18 paras. 1 and 2, 20, 21, 25 and 27 para. 4)

Family support

114. The MoGCSP, with the support of UNICEF, established and provided coaching and supervision for the Child Welfare Committees in all 15 counties of Liberia. Child Welfare Committees received training on Child Protection Case Management that enabled them to support activities to prevent family separation and refer vulnerable and at-risk children to appropriate services. UNICEF supported the reactivation of some Child Welfare Committees through the Spotlight Initiatives. Five counties' Child Welfare Committees were reactivated in Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Cape Mount, Lofa and Montserrado. Close to 1,500 members from these five counties benefited from the support, which included provision of jackets, book bags, scratch cards, snacks for meetings, and transportation reimbursement.

115. The MoGCSP implements the National Social Welfare policy through its mandates. The Department of Children and Social Protection is the department directly responsible for social services. These activities are implemented through the divisions and units where social workers provide case management. Psychosocial services to vulnerable people including children, the elderly and persons with disabilities are also provided.

116. Liberia created a cash transfer programme as part of a family strengthening programme in Bomi and Maryland Counties where vulnerable families received cash assistance to meet household needs and promote their children's education. Through this pilot, the GoL developed the National Social Protection Policy and Strategy.

117. Kinship care and informal foster care are the two forms of alternative care widely used in Liberia. The MoGCSP is implementing a formal foster care programme on a very small scale, especially for children with special needs. UNICEF has supported the MoGCSP to revise the current foster care guidelines and development of standards that guide the implementation of formalized foster care and the monitoring of informal foster care placements.

118. Young mothers and fathers receive parenting education as part of the overall life skills programme implemented in UNICEF-supported adolescent resource centres.

119. The MoGCSP has a unit that mediates children's maintenance allowances. Single mothers are aware that the MoGCSP can mitigate child allowance issues, so single mothers gather at the office for redress on a daily basis. From January to June 2023, some 227 mothers were provided social work assistance in the recovery of their child maintenance allowance.

Alternative care

120. The MoGCSP, MoJ and other CSOs conduct monitoring assessments of all orphanage homes nationwide. As a result of such assessments, substandard orphanage homes have been closed. Of 114 orphanages in existence in 2005, only 66 are currently in operation in 2022.

121. Liberia is currently managing two institutional care centres for vulnerable children separated from their families. One as a permanent home where most children have special needs or disabilities. The other as a transit home, established during the COVID-19 pandemic for children whose parents were being treated and it was not closed after the pandemic because different institutions kept referring trafficked, missing, runaway and other children who have serious mental health conditions or had their rights violated by care givers. The infrastructure and living conditions of both centres are not ideal and both are funded through UNICEF and not via the public budget.

122. Liberia developed regulations on the appropriate use and conditions of alternative care for children. These regulations outline the framework for the accreditation, supervision and monitoring of alternative care institutions. An Independent Accreditation Committee (IAC) was established comprised of government ministries, agencies and CSOs as the key decision making body to determine the best interest of the child in identifying suitable placement options.

123. The MoGCSP is promoting family-based care for children in need of alternative care with kinship care and foster care being the most widely used alternatives. UNICEF has supported the MoGCSP to develop a training package for foster care providers that include modules on child development, rights of children in foster care, role of the government in supporting families, identifying, preventing and responding to abuse, positive discipline, and self-care among others.

124. Alternative care guidelines were developed to ensure alternative care options and support professionals working with children at risk of losing family care to be provided with appropriate alternative care in a family setting. With support from UNICEF, the guidelines are currently being reviewed, taking into consideration global standards and best practices in care reform.

125. The Children's Law includes articles and sections that clearly outline the conditions under which alternative care (institutional and foster care) can be provided and supported in Liberia. The law identifies possible risk factors that may face children coming into alternative care, and sets out the required procedures for admitting children into alternative care. It emphasizes institutional care as a measure of last resort while promoting family-based care.

126. The GoL developed and implemented a national deinstitutionalization of children project. This contributed to the reduction of orphanages across the country. Most of the children in sub-standard orphanages were reunified with their families.

Adoption

127. Liberia enacted and passed the Adoption Law[16] of Liberia on 17 September 2013. On 30 January 2015, the government lifted the Moratorium on Inter-Country Adoption and instructed that all laws, regulations and SOPs be strictly adhered to. The law says the child's best interest is paramount. Only when appropriate placement or adoption within the child's extended family is unavailable, or not in the best interest of the child, should adoption by an unrelated person or persons be considered. Furthermore, the law does not permit adoption by proxy and the SOP indicates parents must give consent to all adoptions.

128. The SOP for Adoption considers the following:

(a) No adoption decree can be issued without an approved case summary from the MoGCSP;

(b) A petition for adoption must be filed with the probate court;

(c) The petition must contain the name, age, residence and marital status of the Petitioners;

(d) The name, date and place of birth of the child, the date and manner in which the petitioners acquired custody of the child, facts (if any) that render consent of either parent unnecessary, the petitioners' desire to adopt the child, and the child's change of name should also be contained in the petition.

129. The act to amend chapter 4, sub chapter C, parts 1 and 2 of the Domestic Relations Law relating to adoption came into force on 11 September 2013. To ensure full implementation of the law, an SOP was developed that considers appropriate action and review by the probate court and the Liberia Immigration Service (LIS).

130. The Adoption Regulation passed in 2016 prohibits irregular adoption, forced labour and internal and external child trafficking. As a safeguard, the Regulation will be regularly reviewed to eliminate gaps and inconsistencies.

131. As Liberia does not permit adoption by proxy, the petitioners, the parent/parents, or guardian(s) of the child, and the child herself are required to attend the compulsory hearing though the court may waive the appearance of the child for good cause.

132. The MoJ is responsible for issuing exit clearances for juvenile adoptees and children with special needs as well as children travelling without biological parents to depart the

[16] Regulation on the Adoption of Children in Liberia 2013.

country. In response to issues surrounding child trafficking, the Child Justice Section continues to support the MoJ with regard to the development and implementation of an exit clearance policy for children who are transported out of Liberia by non-biological parents. The MoGCSP ensures that all parties follow the SOP in the adoption process.

Cluster 7: Basic health and welfare (Arts. 6, 18, para. 3, 23, 24, 26, 27, paras. 1–3, and 33)

Children with disabilities

133. Liberia has taken steps to cater to children with disabilities (CWD) with the Liberia School of the Blind, the Monrovia School of the Deaf and other relevant institutions through the MoE budgetary allotment.

134. Liberia provided funds to the Commission on Disabilities through its budgetary allotment of the 2022 fiscal budget to empower parents of CWDs that are aiding them in mobility issues.

135. The MoGCSP, with support from UNICEF, operates the Liberia Children's Villages. These dedicated homes provide care services for children with special needs, including disabilities. Some of these special-needs children have been abandoned by their families at birth.

136. In 2018, a National Action Plan for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities was developed and updated and approved in 2023 after its expiration in 2022. Its aim is the promotion of an inclusive society where people with disabilities (including children) can reach their full potential and participate in the everyday life of the community. In addition to the action plan, a National Strategic Disability Road Map for persons with disabilities has been developed and launched in alignment with the National Action Plan.[17]

137. The National Commission on Disabilities is also working with the MFDP to provide educational aid to children of parents with disabilities, especially those children who seek alms in the streets and therefore are not in school. There is an ongoing planning process to collect disaggregated data on all persons with disabilities including children with disabilities and children of parents with disabilities who are not in school.

138. The National Commission on Disabilities is working with the MoE to ensure that the Education Reform Act (ERA 2010) is reviewed and updated to include measures that enhance inclusive access to all opportunities by students with disabilities. Nonetheless, challenges such as inadequate financial and technical resources continue to impede the review of the Act.

139. In 2018, Liberia developed and launched the Special and Inclusive Education Policy. This policy advances the quality of the educational process and improves the quality of education for all – including students with disability.

140. Liberia in partnership with development partners is supporting awareness campaigns by organizations of persons with disabilities that aim to reduce stigmatization of children with disabilities. These awareness efforts have helped to provide the public with knowledge and have greatly impacted children with disabilities in positive ways. But there remain challenges to access some rural parts of the country.

141. The issue of trained teachers to cater to the needs of children with disabilities is a challenge. For instance, there is a severe shortage of teachers with sign-language qualifications to directly communicate with deaf children.

142. Concern Worldwide supported an awareness and vaccination campaign on COVID-19 that specifically targeted persons with disabilities.

[17] (NAP 2023/NDSR).

Health and health services

143. Both the Ebola virus disease (EVD) in 2013–2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019–2021 devastated Liberia and severely impacted every aspect of life. Between 2013 to 2015, EVD caused schools to close, the economy came to a halt, and healthcare systems collapsed under the strain of the epidemic. Entire households were wiped out and approximately 8,000 children were orphaned or left with only one parent.

144. Post-Ebola recovery was already slow by the time COVID-19 surfaced to further devastate the country. In 2015, the GoL developed an investment plan titled "Building a Resilient Health System." The investment plan complemented the National Health Plan (2011–2021) and aimed to develop a resilient health system that would restore the gains in health security that were lost to Ebola. The Building a Resilient Health System investment plan aimed to reduce risks due to epidemics and other health threats and accelerate progress towards universal health coverage by improving access to safe and quality health services. The new investment plan promised citizens improved access to safe and quality health services, a robust health emergency risk management system, and an enabling environment that restores trust in the GoL's ability to provide services.

145. There have been gradual increases in the healthcare spending over the reporting period. While 2019 healthcare spending was US$52 million, it climbed to US$57 million in 2020. In 2021 healthcare spending reached US$66.9 million.

146. By 2023, the number of health facilities had risen from 782 to 975. Many of these, especially in Montserrado County, are privately-owned facilities and their total number fluctuates. In terms of medical outreach services for people in hard-to-reach places, constructing additional healthcare facilities across rural regions remains tough due to resource unavailability. Communities still have to trek long distances to seek medical care. Nevertheless, a marked improvement over the years is an increase in the number of Community Health Assistants (CHAs) to treat less critical conditions like diarrhoea and malaria and identifying referral cases to standard health care facilities.

147. Considering measures taken to conduct health education with families, children, community and religious leaders in order to promote positive attitudes and healthy behaviours, the Family Health Division (FHD) of the MoH has been working with partners, especially WHO and UNICEF, to hold regular radio talk shows on healthy behaviour. This endeavour has not been very proactive and will need a more structured arrangement with other programmes (e.g. on immunization, health promotion, community health, etc.) via the media and with CSOs within various communities.

148. Liberia has a high maternal mortality rate attributed to direct post-partum haemorrhage, obstructed or prolonged labour, complications of unsafe abortion, eclampsia, malaria and anaemia.[18] However, initial figures show a steady decline in the general maternal mortality due to improved healthcare delivery since the last report. From 994 per 100,000 (pre & intra-war) to 777 per 100,000 (post war), it stood at 770 per 100,000 in 2012. Access to skilled maternal care including delivery has increased in Liberia. Institutional deliveries by skilled attendants have increased by 15.3 per cent (64.7 per cent in 2010 and 80 per cent in 2012). According to the Liberia Demography and Health Survey of 2007, eight in 10 mothers (79 per cent) received prenatal care from a health professional (doctor, nurse, midwife or physician assistant). In 2012, 87 per cent of first ante-natal clinic (ANC) visits were attended by skilled personnel. Report on access to maternal health services amongst pregnant women in 2012 revealed 1st ANC visit at 87 per cent. Fourth ANC visit in 2012 was 58 per cent compared to 2010 which was 40.9 per cent.

149. Among the factors contributing to the current maternal mortality status is that maternal and child health care facilities at most health centres across Liberia are in need of basic infrastructure and support to operate efficiently. In clinics in remote areas, for instance, midwives and health workers deliver babies without electricity at night. Nurses and other health workers on night duty improvise by using light from their cellphones or asking patients to purchase gasoline for the clinic's generators. Transport is also hugely problematic in such

[18] MoH Annual report, 2010 & 2012.

areas when women arriving at the clinics with complications must be transferred to referral facilities over long distances on very challenging roads. International organizations continue to partner with GoL to provide interventions to reduce the maternal mortality rate to less than 70 per 100,000 live births in accordance with Goal 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Under the H6 Joint Programme on Health (formerly H4+) – a partnership that brings together six UN agencies working in collaboration with the government – UN Women has contributed solar lighting systems (designed to work under severe weather conditions) to clinics around the country and, in partnership with the MoH, trained 115 nurses and health workers in six counties in the maintenance and operations of the systems which, with proper maintenance, are expected to last for 15 years. Additional medical equipment, including X-ray machines and ventilators, have been supplied and 736 health workers have been trained in preventive aspects of reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health.

150. To drive the momentum further, the MoH audits all maternal deaths and key findings including recommendations are shared with relevant authorities for appropriate action. It is also routine for the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) units at various health facilities to continually remind new mothers, including teen mothers, and other caregivers to utilize post-natal health services. Care given during the post-natal period is currently focused on the mother as compared to the past when emphasis was more on newborn care. Regardless of where delivery occurs, the mother is expected to attend post-natal clinic (PNC) to be examined by trained health workers within 42 days to avoid post-partum complications. The MoH reports a slight decline in PNC visits, with 64,962 PNC visits in 2010, and 64,597 PNC visits in 2012.[19] In rural Liberia, trained traditional midwives are incentivized to refer pregnant women to health centres for deliveries. MCH personnel assist with awareness and outreach programmes on the prevention of home deliveries. These health volunteers are also trained to identify early symptoms of malaria and other diseases for referral to health centres.

151. Child mortality has significantly improved over the years. From 276 per 1000 in 1990 it now stands at 33 per 1000 in 2023. Meanwhile, childhood illnesses are being combated by the provision of vaccines against vaccine-preventable diseases that account for more than 70 per cent of children's death. The country has now introduced about twelve vaccines and will be introducing the new malaria vaccine in 2024.

152. The high risk of teenage pregnancy to children in areas such as Grand Kru, River Gee, Lofa, and Montserrado Counties is being addressed. According to the Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2019/20, public health facilities account for 57 per cent of family planning availability and use. The southeastern counties account for the highest family planning consumer: e.g. Grand Kru 42 per cent, River Gee 41 per cent, Maryland 45 per cent, etc. In Montserrado County, however, the absorption rate (21 per cent) and/or usage of family planning is amongst the lowest despite its high population density.

153. Furthermore, Liberia collaborates with partners and CSOs to tackle the high incidence of teenage pregnancies and other related issues among adolescent girls. Among key strategies to minimize or reduce teenage pregnancy is the Peer or Youth Friendly Corner – a unit that is established in most public healthcare facilities. Within these Peer or Youth Friendly Corners, adolescent girls initiate peer-to-peer conversations around a wide range of life-skills education including family planning. Regarding the high level of clandestine and unsafe abortions, the Revised Public Health Law of 2019 states that pregnancy should be life-threatening or accompanied by other medical preconditions before abortion is carried out by a licensed physician. The law has been passed by the House of Representatives and is now before the Senate.

154. Coverage of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services is crucial to the maintenance of health. According to the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme, as of 2020, 75.3 per cent of Liberia's population have access to at least basic drinking water services (85.5 per cent urban vs 64.1 per cent rural), up almost 2 per cent from 2017. For sanitation services, as of 2020, only 18.2 per cent of the population have access to at least basic sanitation services (29.0 per cent urban vs 6.4 per cent rural). According to the Liberia Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Project, about 42 per cent of the population still practice

[19] MoH Annual report, 2010 & 2012.

open defecation. Securing access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation for all would go a long way to reducing infectious diseases and deaths especially among children.

Adolescent health

155. Liberia deals with issues surrounding adolescent health in a number or ways. For instance, the MoGCSP has the Adolescent Girls Division, established by law and headed by a director who reports to the Deputy Minister for Gender. The division's creation was aimed at improving the social and economic condition of adolescent girls and it functions under four pillars: coordination, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, and capacity building through skills training.

156. UNICEF has been working with the government through line ministries including the MoH, the MYS and the MoGCSP to develop and implement a national strategy to empower adolescents and youth. The strategy includes training materials (foundational life skills curriculum and programmes, technical and vocational skills training) that are delivered at youth centres, resource centres, and safe spaces across the country. The goal of this investment is to empower adolescents and youth and promote equal opportunities in life while at the same time serving as a means to prevent and respond to violence against children.

157. The MoGCSP, along with CSOs and international partners, has carried out several awareness campaigns with adolescents on sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

158. The MYS and MoE receive technical and financial support from UNFPA and other partners. Such support is geared at improving sexual and reproductive health services (SRHS) for marginalized youth and adolescents through advocacy and capacity development for the provision of adolescent-friendly and youth-friendly services. In addition, the USAID maternal and child survival programme's restoration of health services project – Maternal and Child Survival Programme/Restoration of Health Services (MCSP/RHS) – aimed to increase the quality of adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) services offered at facilities in Liberia by adopting a useful counselling tool to the Liberian context and building the capacity of Liberian health workers to provide quality health to adolescents and youths.

159. The MoH's family health division involved the MCSP to work at delivering a training of trainers (TOT) programme for county and district supervisors across three southeastern counties (Grand Gedeh, River Gee, and Sinoe) and was later rolled out to health facilities and staff. The MCSP then reinforced the training during supportive supervision and mentoring conducted over the life of the project.[20]

160. MCSP is strengthening infection prevention and control (IPC) practices and supporting the Essential Package of Health Services at 61 target facilities in Bong, Nimba, Lofa and Grand Bassa Counties through training, intensive supportive supervision, triage, improvement of waste management, and planning and management of essential IPC commodities and supplies. In addition to improving the country's reproductive, maternal, newborn and child healthcare services, MCSP is also generating demand for these services through community-level work. In light of MCSP project achievements in Liberia, as well as the U.S. President's Malaria Initiative's (PMI) interest in expanding to additional counties with support for malaria in pregnancy (MiP) and malaria case management, the programme is also executing a USAID/PMI-funded Expansion of Malaria Services project that supports national and county level efforts on MiP and case management. The project covers three southeastern counties (Grand Gedeh, River Gee and Sinoe) and two north-western counties (Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount).[21]

161. On 30 June 2022, Liberia launched a US$13.9 million "National Fund Drive for the Rehabilitation and Empowerment of At-risk Youth" (known locally as *Zogos*) at the Ministerial Complex in Monrovia. The fund drive highlighted the overwhelming rate of drugs proliferation, abuse and addiction by Liberia's at-risk youths and sought to find practical solutions to take young people off drug addiction and abuse nationwide, while rehabilitating

[20] Maternal and Child Survival Programme – 2018.
[21] USAID's 2018 "Acting on the Call" Report.

and empowering them. Currently a mechanism is in place to document and transfer the targeted youth to rehabilitation centres.

HIV prevention

162. During the early post-war years, Liberia included HIV prevention in its HIV strategies. Most HIV prevention was aimed at the general population, as population-based, HIV-prevalence data showed signs of HIV spreading. Consequently the GoL and NGOs developed information, education and communication and behaviour change communication programmes. Associations of people living with HIV, community-based organizations and faith-based organizations actively partnered with the GoL to raise public awareness.

163. Some major condom promotion activities include the social marketing of condoms, the production of print and audio communication materials, public murals, improving care at youth centres, the provision of community-based sensitization activities, and the setting up of distribution outlets at the community level. Condom distribution increased from 2.6 million male condoms in 2006 to 8.2 million in 2015.[22]

164. Testing has increased over the years: between June 2007 and December 2008, a total of 81,576 persons were tested for HIV, whereas in 2015 a total of 115,213 individuals were actually tested for HIV and 113,312 (98 per cent) received their results.

165. Prevention and Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission is a key programme area in the HIV response of Liberia. These services are integrated in Maternal and Child Health services and have been rolled out throughout the counties, including at sites at faith-based, private and international NGO health facilities. This has resulted in significant scaling up of the programme.

Standard of living

166. Up till December 2019, over 10,000 adolescent youth, half of whom were females, received life skills and business training and agro-inputs and tools, in addition to labour subsidies, to engage in communal farming. The beneficiaries were mostly located in hard-to-reach rural parts of the country. The support offered them productive employment and they engaged in other income-generating activities as well which helped them contribute to the development of their communities.

167. The MYS in 2019 launched the second phase of the National Cadet Programme under which 100 youths between the ages of 18 and 35 were recruited from colleges and vocational and technical schools. These youths were assigned to various institutions in both the public and private sectors for three months for on-the-job experience. The programme was implemented with support and funding from Mercy Corps and the Swedish Embassy, and provided a monthly stipend of US$100 to each cadet for transportation and lunch. For the first time, cadets were assigned to banks, factories and auditing firms among others.

168. In collaboration with the United Nations Volunteer (UNV) Programme, UNDP partnered with the Monrovia City Corporation (MCC) on 13 August 2022 to launch a Cash-for-Work clean-up exercise covering 10 communities in Monrovia and its surroundings to help tackle the issue of poor waste management while providing short-term income to support livelihoods for disadvantaged communities with an emphasis on adolescents and youth between the ages of 18 and 35. The exercise was part of UNDP's and the GoL's Livelihood & Empowerment Creation Project that promotes access to income for vulnerable populations including youth, women and persons with disabilities. The project worked closely with community leaders and the MCC Community Service and Solid Waste Management Departments, and enrolled 400 community volunteers from the targeted 10 communities that comprised of Jallah Town, Slipway, Vai Town, Plumkor, West Point, PHP, Saye Town, Capitol Hill, Buzzy Quarter, and God Bless You Community. The volunteers participated in waste collection, cleaning of beaches and riverbank areas and each volunteer received US$100 over the work period.

[22] National AIDS Commission (NAC) 2010, Kiazolu, Cooper et al. 2016) HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT).

169. A number of new housing estates have been constructed throughout the country over the reporting period. The occupancy of these low-cost estates is intended entirely for low-income families. According to the National Housing Authority (NHA), the following are the newly built units: (1) Ben Town, Margibi County, 80 units constructed 2010/2016; (2) NASSCORP Village, Brewerville, Montserrado County, 163 units constructed 2012/2017; (3) Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, 10 units constructed 2011/2012; (4) Sanniquelle, Nimba County, 10 units constructed 2011/2012; (5) Grand Gedeh Housing Project, 15 units constructed 2017; (6) Millennium Estate, Duazon, Margibi County, construction ongoing.

170. 108 housing units are being constructed in the VOA Community in Brewerville to resettle victims of the West Point sea erosion in 2017.

171. Increased provision of electricity to the general populace is ongoing. Twenty-four per cent of households in Liberia had access to electricity in 2020 (39 per cent of urban households and 4 per cent of rural households).[23] By 2021, this proportion of electricity access had jumped to 29.85 per cent.[24] To date, as a result of multifaceted investments in the energy sector – including the completion of repairs to the war-damaged Mount Coffee Hydro plant in 2016, the Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea (CLSG) project, and the West Africa Power Pool (WAPP) – Liberia is registering 170,000 customers connected to the national grid. This figure generally translates into over 850,000 people with access to electricity. Connections are currently ongoing amid competing priorities and acute resource scarcity.

Table 1
Youth employment/engagement programmes with # of beneficiaries

Programme Name	*# of Beneficiaries*	*Type of Activity*	*Status*
1. National Cadet Programme	75 (41 females)		Ongoing
2. National Youth Literacy Programme	270 (95 females)	Literacy	Ongoing
3. National Youth Volunteers Programme	380 (79 females)	Volunteering	Currently recruitment ongoing
4. Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health Programme	1700 (60 males)	Reproductive health	Expecting to rollout in new counties with 2000 new beneficiaries
5. National Peace Building Education and Advocacy Programme	455 (75 females) in seven counties.	Education and advocacy	Currently halted for lack of funding
6. Youth Connect–Liberia	Impacted 15,000 since 2016		Currently halted for lack of funding from Government
7. At-Risk Youth Programme	1,500 (expected)	Crime prevention Drug rehabilitation	Centre under construction
8. Action for Adolescents Development Programme	3,095 (2,040 females)		Implemented in 11 counties at 17 youth centres
9. Youth Opportunity Project (YOP)	6,000 (50% females)		Ended in 2021. Operated in all 15 counties

Source: Ministry of Youth & Sports.

[23] LDHS 2019–2020.
[24] Source: World Bank.

Cluster 8: Education, leisure and cultural activities (Art. 28–31)

172. Liberia has provided free primary education since 2011. In 2017, it introduced the Free West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) programme and it underwrites all fees for 12th graders sitting the annual West African Senior Secondary Education exams. Within the West African region, WASSCE is the main qualifying test that every secondary or high school student must pass before gaining matriculation into tertiary institutions. The total cost redeemed to approximately 33,124 parents/guardians/sponsors amounts to US$2.48 million annually.

173. Since 2019, Liberia has waived fees for public universities and colleges for all students.

174. The education budget has increased and in 2021–2022 it was US$78.4 million.

175. The MoE launched a new Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) for the 2017–2021 academic period with USAID support.

(a) The new Accelerated Basic Education (ABE) programme seeks to increase access to quality education services for out-of-school children and adolescents.

(b) This activity also supports communities to improve education for out-of-school learners by offering accelerated learning programmes that condense six years of the primary education cycle into three years.

(c) Notably, girls - including young mothers - account for the majority of ABE enrolments. In 2015, ABE providers enrolled 10,364 students with 58 per cent of candidates being female. However, ABE is not offered at a large number of schools and its provision is currently limited to six counties.

176. Liberia received World Bank and other international partner resources to fund the MoE/IRISE project that is catering to improvement of school infrastructure, provision of textbooks, etc. within the country.

177. Liberia, through the MoE, developed technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in all the fifteen county capitals with funding from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). The TVET programme is being upgraded in Harbel, Greenville, Voinjama, and Zwedru as well as at Booker Washington Institute (BWI).

178. The National Commission on Disabilities, in partnership with AIFO-Liberia – an Italian international organization – is supporting five private TVET centres in five counties (Montserrado, Bong, Nimba, Bomi and Lofa) to adopt accessibility standards to allow youth with disabilities to have access to livelihood skills.

179. In 2019, the MoE reformed the curriculum from content-based to competency-based and integrated sexuality education and other emerging issues. The civics curriculum was also developed for grades 1 to 12.

180. The MoE has developed a policy for teachers called National Teachers Professional Standards for Liberia (NTPSL).

181. In order to stem SGBV, Liberia developed a safe school protocol and continues to raise SGBV awareness in schools. Additionally, gender education has been integrated into the National Curriculum for grades 1 to 12.

182. The MoE also developed a code for teachers and school administrators in 2014. This policy is helping to address the incidence of sexual harassment in schools. Furthermore, the MoE developed a policy called the National Teachers Association Community Engagement and Dropout Prevention Policy in August 2020 to aid the process of helping children stay in school.

183. The MoE currently provides WASH facilities with gender sensitive considerations. This move has provided 641 schools with full WASH packages. Also the MoE with support from UNICEF has provided grants to 200 schools for WASH improvement which is ongoing.

184. Liberia developed a National School Health policy in 2019 to encourage schools to keep pregnant girls in school as long as they are able to regardless of their pregnancy status.

185. The high pregnancy levels in the southeastern counties are being curtailed with the aid of the Power and Fulfil programme which is supported by the Swedish Government and UNFPA. Since this programme's delivery, there has been a significant reduction in pregnancy among adolescent girls.

186. Over the reporting period, the MoE organized a back-to-school programme to encourage girls to return to school every year. The School-Health Unit of the MoE has organized clubs to encourage girl children to return to school.

187. The MoE operates a community engagement policy that charts the strategy to ensure the safe return of out-of-school children. The MoE employs community education monitors who work closely with community dwellers to deal with social norms that prohibit children from accessing school.

188. School feeding programmes are ongoing in a number of counties. Provision of free school meals is critical to stimulating learning for young children. Free school meals enable increases in enrolment, retention of students in schools, avoidance of absenteeism, alleviation of silent hunger, etc. Besides government initiatives, a number of development partners conduct school feeding in different parts of the country: (1) Mary's Meals conducts school feeding in Bomi, Cape Mount, Lower Montserrado, and Gbarpolu Counties. In 2021, Mary's Meals catered to 1,550 children; (2) Save the Children conducts school feeding in Grand Bassa, River Gee, and Grand Gedeh Counties. Save the Children caters to 5,200 children; (3) WFP conducts school feeding in Nimba, Maryland, Bong, and parts of Montserrado Counties. WFP caters to 42,000 children at 177 schools. WFP conducts feeding in public and community, pre-primary and primary schools. A critical difference in WFP's feeding is that its food is sourced from local production as a way of incentivizing local farmers while Save the Children and Mary's Meal source their food from regular imports.

189. A number of multipurpose recreational centres were constructed by Liberia during the reporting period. For instance, on 14 February 2014, the Chevron-Monrovia Central Park was dedicated in Via Town, Monrovia. In 2019 the United Arab Emirates provided the GoL with a grant of US$5 million for the construction of the PHP Sport Pitch, a recreation centre situated on Redemption Road, Central Monrovia. On 9 February 2021, the government inaugurated the multipurpose Invincible Park in Sinkor, Monrovia. This park incorporates a football training field, a children's playground, and basket and volley courts. The West Point Sports Pitch, built at a cost of US$399,000, was dedicated on 20 May 2023. The Survivor Sports Park in Clara Town was dedicated on 31 July 2021. Currently the New Kru Town Sports Pitch is under construction. Other than the Invincible Park and PHP projects, the other projects are situated in relatively overcrowded communities around Monrovia where the population tends to be low-income earning or poor. Moreover, the parks tend to be the only available spaces where children and young people converge to partake in events of a cultural and sporting nature as well as outdoor, leisure and school-related exercises.

III. Special protection measures (Arts. 22, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37 (b)–(d), and 38–40)

A. Refugee children

190. In 1993, Liberia established the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) to work along with UNHCR to provide protection for refugees and refugee children.

191. The National Action Plan on the protection of children includes programmes that cater to refugee children. Such services as health, education, sheltering in safe homes, foster homes, and foster care are all covered in the NAP's programmes.

192. Article VII, Section 5 of the Children's Law promotes the provision of basic social services and welfare of refugee and displaced children. Children coming into contact with

the LRRRC are screened to trace family information or relatives for the purposes of reunification. Based on the screening's outcome as to missing parents and so forth, placement in alternative care is carried out along with routine monitoring.

193. Separated children seeking asylum are placed in foster care/homes by protection staff either with their relatives or foster families. Unaccompanied children arriving en mass and, being underage, are not subject to individual Refugee Status Determination (RSD). Depending on particular situations, these children are asked basic questions like names, whereabouts of their parents, who they were travelling with, date of birth, etc. Where applicable, they are united with their parents with the help of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (ICRC), among others. In 2011, a group of 88 armed fighters including 20 children came through the Plebo border in Maryland from Cote d'Ivoire. Liberian agents took them into an internment camp in Wenzu on the Bong to Lofa Highway. After regular joint security investigation, the LRRRC worked in collaboration with the ICRC and the UNHCR to reunite the children with their families.

194. Overall, the refugee population has declined drastically owing to the following reasons: (1) Voluntary repatriation after cessation of civil unrest; (2) Cessation of refugee status; (3) Resettlement of refugees to third countries such as Canada and Australia among others. There are over 2,500 refugees still in the country.

195. The process of naturalization has hugely impacted refugee decline. The LRRRC received naturalization requests from numerous refugees from Sudan, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Togo and Sierra Leone. After receipt of the applications, the LIS authenticated the refugees' residency status, after which they were sent to Criminal Court B Assize for completion of the naturalization process. In 2016, 3,022 refugees were naturalized. The number in 2017 was 2,412. In 2018 over 2,888 Sierra Leoneans declared their intention to naturalize. Of this number, 307 took the oath of allegiance and gained Liberian nationality. The government provided fee waivers for all refugees accessing the naturalization process.

B. Economic exploitation including child labour

196. Liberia through the MoL, and with support of WINROCK International, has established the Liberia Legal Reform Committee (LRC), which aims to review laws on child labour, identify gaps in those laws and develop a list of hazardous and light work for children.

197. Prevention of proscribed child labour, especially with particular reference to locals or multinationals exploiting or appropriating children in their work regimens, is of cardinal importance to Liberia. The Labour Law defines particular categories of work for a child and specifically limits a work day of two to four hours for a young person aged below 18 years.

198. Article 2(3) of the Labour Law outlaws the use of child labour and provides a broad definition of child labour to include all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale of and trafficking in children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including the forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.[25]

199. On 7 September 2021, the legislature passed an amendment to the 2005 Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons within the country that removed the requirement of force, fraud, or coercion in child sex trafficking cases and prescribed penalties for adult trafficking that are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with the penalties for other grave crimes including prison sentences of not less than 20 years and fines up to US$200,000.

200. Through its requirement for sector clearances, the MoGCSP has ensured that businesses develop child protection policies whose submission is required before they finally qualify for sector clearance.

201. Labour inspectors are assigned in all 15 counties. One of the major functions of these inspectors is to identify and remove children engaged in hazardous work.

[25] Children's Law of Liberia, Section 20-20.1. Also Section 21.2.

202. In 2021, the MoL inspectorate reported conducting 43 child labour-specific investigations and removed 38 children from situations of exploitation or endangerment. These children were referred to the MoGCSP for social services or placed in protective shelters. Such successes are marginal owing to insufficiency of funding. A funding handicap is often experienced by law enforcement personnel and other officials who identify child labour or human trafficking cases. These personnel become personally responsible for the victims' welfare by providing financial support or taking the children into their own homes for care.

203. In 2022, the MoL, in partnership with WINROCK International, trained and contracted private labour liaisons to augment the efforts of the labour inspectors. During the reporting period, Liberia made about 556 labour inspections, including 43 inspections specifically focused on child labour.

204. As well as boosting the capacity of the Child Labour Division of the MoL, WINROCK International continues to provide support to civil societies to monitor child labour violations. The support of international partners is crucial to CSOs currently monitoring child labour in communities and advocating for protection and safety, including the prosecution of child labour perpetrators by the MoJ. The WACPS investigate child endangerment cases and human trafficking in cooperation with the Liberia National Police's Anti-Trafficking Unit and the LIS.

205. Liberia has abolished the practice of children helping their parents/guardians to meet production quotas in concessions and businesses.

206. Liberia has taken measures to prohibit commercial sexual exploitation of children according to Article 2.3 of the Decent Work Act.[26]

207. Owing to delay in establishing the National Commission on Children, the MoGCSP acts as the lead advisory agency on policy formulation, coordination, and monitoring of child protection through its Child Protection and Development Division. The MoGCSP guides Liberia's efforts on compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention, and African Union protocols on women and children. But gaps still exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labour laws.

208. Currently there is ongoing research and the formation of a bill seeking to further address the issue of child labour by Liberia.

209. Liberia has ratified ILO Convention No. 138 and 182 on the worst form of child labour and children working in hazardous conditions, and there is ongoing ILO technical support to Liberia.

210. Liberia has also amended the Trafficking in Persons Law to include issues relating to child labour.[27]

C. Children in street situations

211. In 2022, the MoGCSP with support from UNICEF hired a national consultant to conduct an assessment of children in street situations in Liberia. After the assessment, a five-year roadmap was drafted for validation and implementation. In addition, UNICEF supported the GoL and CSOs to undertake a social service workforce mapping and assessment. This mapping and assessment which was finalized in 2022, informed the development of a national capacity-building strategy and plan for the development of the social service workforce as part of the overall process of strengthening child protection systems in Liberia.

212. Drug abuse and addiction among the youth population is posing a threat to general society. Drug use is that it is massively contributing to an increase in the number of street children and an increase in drug-related crimes and insecurity in urban cities across the

[26] Article 1 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia (18–21).
[27] The Revised Trafficking In Person Act of 2021.

country. There are local producers of mostly marijuana but most hard drugs enter the country from outside as criminals exploit the country's weak security systems as well as its porous borders to carry out their illegal activities. Some local producers are experimenting with new drugs and coming up with products such as "*kush*" that is causing rampant deaths among youths. Other local manufacturers use ingredients that include substances from automobile exhausts and human skeletal remains from old cemeteries to produce drugs.

213. Liberia has been taking urgent steps to curb drugs. For instance, the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency (LDEA) and other security agencies conduct raids and seizures on an almost daily basis. The LDEA was established in 1998 as an autonomous agency in the MoJ. It is charged, among other tasks, with fighting drug trafficking at the borders. LDEA and its Liberian security counterparts are working to reduce drug infiltration into the country by apprehending and destroying illegal drugs that enter Liberia's ports. The huge busts of drugs entering the country in recent times attest to the sheer magnitude of the drug problem. The US$100 million worth of drugs seized from foreign merchants in 2021 provides an example of the situation.

214. As part of the ongoing crackdown on illicit drug trafficking in Liberia, the 54th Legislature has passed several amendments to the Drugs Law that make most drugs offences non-bailable. The new law includes stricter penalties for drugs and makes it extremely difficult for individuals charged for drug-related crimes to be released on bail. The new Drugs Law 2023 strengthens the LDEA operations by calling for sentencing of up to 10 years when found guilty of illicit drugs crimes.

215. With the launch of its US$13.9 million fundraising for the rehabilitation of vulnerable (at-risk) youth and adolescents who habitually abuse drugs and other substances, Liberia hopes to rescue and rehabilitate scores of disadvantaged youth living in the streets. The UN system in Liberia is supporting this joint initiative through robust resource mobilization efforts to complement Liberia's support to the programme.

216. In August 2014, over 500 at-risk youth participated in a two-week peace-building training under the Socio-Economic Empowerment of the Disadvantaged (SEED) project.[28] The exercises were held simultaneously across various targeted communities including West Point, New Kru Town, Central Monrovia, Mount Barclay, and Red Light among others. Participants were trained in conflict prevention, mediation and social cohesion as well as business, vocational and entrepreneurship training in areas such as tailoring, plumbing, cosmetology, etc. The project was supported by UNDP Liberia with funding from the UN Peace building Support Office through the Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund (LMPTF). The Ministries of Health and Youth and Sports and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) partnered in the project which was implemented through the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) in close collaboration with YMCA Liberia.

217. Additionally, members of the CPN provide support for children rescued from the street. According to data collected on street children, Street Child, for example provides for children rescued from the streets and placed in schools.[29] Those rescued benefit from school tuition, book bags, copybooks and livelihood grants to their parents to engage in sustainable business ventures.

218. Both government and private groups, including religious entities and CSOs, operate drug rehabilitation centres across the country to complement the fight against drug abuse among the youths. Almost all these centres operate as transitional housing for individuals with addiction challenges where the premise of rehabilitation, education, empowerment and reintegration is upheld. Also, they generally conduct drug-abuse community awareness in schools and carry out outreach programmes in slum communities that are gravely challenged by youth drugs use.

[28] UN Peace-building Project Trains Disadvantaged Youth in Conflict Prevention (2014).

[29] Street Children Assessment Report.

219. The National Rehabilitation for Drugs and War Affected Persons (NARDWAP) – a non-governmental organization founded in 2018 – is one such centre. Between 2018 and 2019, NARDWAP conducted anti-drugs and alcohol awareness campaigns with 890 youth participants. Key partners of NARDWAP include the MoH Mental Health Unit, LDEA, MoJ, MoE, and MFDP. Other rehabilitation centres include: (1) Catherine Mills Rehabilitation Centre in Paynesville – arguably the country's oldest continuously functioning rehabilitation entity; (2) Ether S. Grant Rehabilitation Centre – a government-accredited rehabilitation centre established in 2018; (3) Action Against Drugs Abuse; (4) Mother Rescue Daughter is run by the United Methodist Church; (5) Lutheran Technical Vocational Institute is run by the Lutheran Church.

D. Sale, trafficking and abduction

220. Liberia, through its penal code, criminalizes child abduction, child trafficking, the sale of children and child prostitution.

221. In July 2005, Liberia legislated the Trafficking in Persons Act, which bans and criminalises labour trafficking and prescribes a minimum sentence of one year's imprisonment for adult trafficking and six years' imprisonment for child trafficking.

222. Liberia was recently upgraded to Tier 2 in the US State Department 2022 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report while a Liberian judge, Cornelius Flomo Wennah, was highlighted and certificated as TIP Hero for his role in advancing the fight against human trafficking.

223. Although it is difficult to determine the number of children rescued from traffickers, Liberia has conducted a number of reunifications in collaboration with the Liberian National Red Cross Society (LNRCS), the ICRC, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The LRRRC has over the years rescued children that were trafficked into the country from across the borders, especially by Third Country Nationals (TCNs). Liberia tries and punishes would-be traffickers when apprehended. The LIS collaborates with the ICRC to reunite children rescued from trafficking schemes with families or relatives.

224. Vigorous efforts are routinely carried out at all immigration entry points to detect child trafficking.

225. Over the reporting period, 32 children have been rescued from attempted trafficking schemes. The alleged traffickers were investigated, charged and sent to court for prosecution and those found guilty of trafficking were sentenced.

226. Most child victims trafficked domestically are taken usually from rural to urban areas where they are exploited for sex, used in domestic servitude, forced into begging in street corners, and/or forced labour within the country. Statistics from a quantitative data collection conducted by UNICEF and the MoGCSP in 2023 show a total of 366,585 children selling in the streets in the 15 counties. Montserrado has the highest number, 48,682 children, selling in the streets. The statistics are not clear on the number of children brought from upcountry who end up selling in the street.

227. Considering the robust measures against child trafficking, Liberia is effecting a three-pronged programme of Prosecution, Prevention and Protection

(a) Prosecution – More successful TIP prosecutions have been achieved over the reporting period since the passage into law of the amended Anti-Human Trafficking Law. Additionally, Liberia rescued about 26 Liberian girls trafficked to the Arab Republic of Oman;

(b) Prevention and Protection – At least three Safe Homes have now been established in Bomi and Margibi Counties for victims' protection and safety. These homes are adequately supported with food, electricity and entertainment and are guarded by well-vetted private security to ensure that the homes are not identified by unauthorized members of the public.

E. Children in armed conflict

228. Liberia respects the principle of protecting children from involvement in armed conflict and violence. It upholds that every child shall have the right to be protected from involvement in armed or any kind of violent conflict. Sections 22–22.1, 22.2, 22.3 of the Children's Law states: "The Ministry of National Defence shall not recruit or conscript any child into military service." It says further that the Ministry of National Defence shall ensure that the army in Liberia does not use landmines and other weapons declared by international law to be adverse to children.

229. The National Commission on Small Arms was established by Executive Order in 2006 and through an act of legislature in 2012. The Commission was established to, inter alia, protect children from armed conflict and provide them psychosocial support. The proliferation of arms in the immediate post-war years necessitated the creation of a state body to mop up and destroy these leftover deadly devices that pose a danger to the general public. In September 2022 the Commission publicly destroyed a total of 105,503 assorted weapons comprising 381 firearms, 105,032 rounds of ammunition and 82 explosives, including arms collected over the years under the Organised Crime: West Africa Response to Trafficking (OCWAR-T) project, and the AU-UN "Silencing the Guns" campaign which every September grants amnesty to gun holders to surrender illicit guns without legal or criminal consequences.

230. The LRRRC has deployed border monitors to carry out awareness among citizens and joint security actors across the Cestos and Cavalla River basins on the danger of armed conflicts, especially the possibility of recruiting children to engage in armed conflict. In previous years, there were child protection core groups in the counties, especially in those forming the border with Cote d'Ivoire. The LRRRC through its UNHCR partner conducts workshops for local government authorities, including joint security officers, on preventing armed actors luring children into armed conflicts.

231. The LRRRC is fully aware of the trauma suffered by children that are involved in armed conflict. The institution has trained counsellors that perform spot assessments of such children. The LRRRC collaborates with other humanitarian agencies like UNHCR, ICRC, LNRCS, WHO, MoH, and MoGCSP to provide psychosocial support to children. Recovery support involves placing children into foster homes or reuniting them with their families.

Administration of juvenile justice

232. The Juvenile Procedure Code of Liberia [30] was enacted in 2011 and provides procedures for the administration of justice for children. Notwithstanding, most child justice actors and stakeholders have limited or no knowledge about the contents of the code. As child incarceration, imprisonment and the institution of corporal punishment of children continue to pose challenges, UNICEF in collaboration with the judiciary, through the JI, is rolling out child justice training including about the Juvenile Procedure Code. More than 70 child justice personnel from AFELL and other bodies have so far been trained.

233. The Juvenile Court was established with exclusive jurisdiction to hear only cases involving children. Though the court is yet to be decentralized to other counties, cases of children coming into contact and/or conflict with the law are promptly heard in locations (Montserrado) where such courts are located. Magisterial courts administer child justice in the other 14 counties where the Juvenile Court is not yet present.

234. The Criminal Court E is a specialized court with exclusive jurisdiction to hear sexual offence cases. It administers justice in sexual offence cases involving both children and adults. Meanwhile Court E is found in four counties (Montserrado, Nimba, Bong and Lofa) and the need to decentralize the court to the other 11 counties remains a challenge.

[30] Judiciary Law, Chapter 11.

Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

235. The Ministry of Justice and UNICEF developed a joint workplan to conduct advocacy for the ratification of the three optional protocols of the CRC – the Operational Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC), and Optional Protocol for the Direct Communication Procedure between Children and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Work surrounding this advocacy to the national legislature is ongoing.