



High Commission of The Republic of Sierra Leone Banjul, The Gambia

NOTE VERBALE

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The High Commission of the Republic of Sierra Leone in the Republic of The Gambia presents its compliments to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in the Republic of The Gambia and has the honour to forward herewith, the report of the Government of Sierra Leone on the Implementation of the Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child for the reporting period of 2015 – 2025.

The High Commission of the Republic of Sierra Leone in the Republic of The Gambia avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in the Republic of The Gambia the assurances of its highest consideration.

BANJUL, 26th FEBRUARY, 2026

**THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON
HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS
REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA**





GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

**STATE PARTY REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE
AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD**

REPORTING PERIOD: 2015 – 2025

SUBMITTED BY:

**THE MINISTRY OF GENDER AND CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE**

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Foreword**List of Acronyms/ Abbreviations**

- ACRWC – African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACERWC – African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ATIP – Anti-Trafficking in Persons
CSE – Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CPIMS+ – Child Protection Information Management System Plus
CRA – Child Rights Act
FHCI – Free Health Care Initiative
FGM – Female Genital Mutilation
FSU – Family Support Unit (of the Sierra Leone Police)
FQSE – Free Quality School Education (Programme)
GBV – Gender-Based Violence
GBVIMS+ – Gender-Based Violence Information Management System Plus
MBSSE – Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
MoGCA – Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs
MoSW – Ministry of Social Welfare
MTNDP – Medium-Term National Development Plan
NAP – National Action Plan
NCPD – National Commission for Persons with Disabilities
SNE – Special Needs Education
SOPs – Standard Operating Procedures
SRH – Sexual and Reproductive Health
TIP – Trafficking in Persons

FORWARD

It is with a deep sense national duty and commitment to the children of Sierra Leone that the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs presents the Government's responses to the List of Issues raised by the Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This document forms an essential component of our reporting obligations and reflects the Government's continued dedication to upholding, promoting, and protecting the rights and welfare of every child within our borders.

Sierra Leone has over the years undertaken significant legislative, policy, and institutional reforms aimed at strengthening child protection systems and improving the developmental outcomes of children. The enactment of the Child Rights Act of 2025 the recent review and update of critical child protection instruments, the ongoing operationalization of the National Alternative Care Policy, and the strengthening of national and district-level child welfare structures collectively demonstrate our resolve to build a protective environment where all children can thrive. These reforms have been complemented by increased investment in social services, expansion of access to education, improved health and nutrition programmes, stronger justice mechanisms for children, and enhanced collaboration with civil society and development partners.

This report presents a frank, transparent, and comprehensive account of the progress made, the challenges encountered, and the strategies deployed to fulfil the rights enshrined in the Convention. It also integrates recommendations from the Committee's previous concluding observations, reflecting our commitment to continuous improvement and accountability. The Government remains particularly focused on addressing persistent and emerging child protection concerns, including violence, harmful practices, family separation, child labour, trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence, and the protection needs of children in vulnerable circumstances, including those with disabilities, those living in street situations, and those affected by emergency situations.

As the State Party, Sierra Leone values the constructive and collaborative dialogue with the Committee of Experts. This engagement provides a vital platform for reflection, learning, and strengthening national reforms aimed at improving outcomes for children. The report therefore not only highlights achievements but also acknowledges systemic constraints, such as resource limitations, socio-cultural barriers, institutional capacity gaps, and the evolving protection needs of children in an increasingly complex environment. These realities guide our continued efforts toward enhancing service delivery, improving coordination across sectors, and ensuring that children's voices are meaningfully integrated into national decision-making processes.

The Ministry recognizes the indispensable role of partners; Government Ministries and Agencies, traditional leaders, civil society organizations, community structures, development partners, and children themselves in advancing child rights in Sierra Leone. It is through this

collective commitment that we are able to strengthen accountability, improve governance of child protection systems, and ensure sustainable progress.

As we submit this report, the Government of Sierra Leone reaffirms its unwavering dedication to upholding the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and promoting an enabling environment where all children can enjoy their rights to survival, development, protection, and participation. We remain steadfast in our determination to ensure that every child grows up safe, healthy, educated, and empowered to fulfil their potential.

I extend my appreciation to all institutions and individuals who contributed to the preparation of this report, and I look forward to a continued constructive dialogue with the Committee of Experts toward the full realization of children's rights across Sierra Leone.

Isata Mahoi PhD
Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs
Republic of Sierra Leone

CHAPTER I: Introduction

As part of its reporting obligations under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Government of Sierra Leone submits relevant responses to the list of issues concerning its combined first, second and third periodic reports. This report presents a frank and comprehensive account of Sierra Leone's progress in the implementation of the African Charter of the Rights of the Child, drawing on national legal reforms, institutional strengthening efforts, and sectoral interventions across child protection, education, health, justice and social development. It highlights achievements made since the initial reporting cycle (from 2002 – 2014) and ACERWC follow-up Mission (8 -11 August 2023) on assessed progress on Committee's Concluding Observations and Recommendations.

Sierra Leone's population is estimated as 8.5 million people. One third of the population are children - persons below the 18. Children make up of a very larger portion of this population con overview of the rights, well-being, and welfare of children in Sierra Leone.

Methodology

This report is informed by contributions from government ministries, independent oversight bodies, civil society organizations, development partners, community groups and children. It reflects State's commitment transparency, accountability and continuous improvement in safeguarding the rights and welfare of children in Sierra Leone. It also aligns with the national development priorities, including the Medium -Term National Development Plan, and global and regional frameworks such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Agenda 2040: Africa Fit for Children. The 6th and 7th State Party Report on the implementation of the UNCRC also informed this report.

The preparation of this report followed a participatory, evidence driven and multi-sectoral process designed to ensure accuracy, inclusiveness and alignment with the reporting guidelines of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

A Technical Working Group comprised of MDAs, CSOs, including children led by the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs was constituted for data collection, drafting and validation of this report.

CHAPTER II: GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Legislation

1. The State Party notes the Committee's observance that despite the enactment of the Child Rights Act, there are various legislative gaps that hinder the full realization of children's rights in the Country. The State Party notes the Committee's observance and has taken measures through the enactment of the Child Rights Act 2025 in July 2025. The CRA 2025 consolidates and updates child protection laws, emphasizing diversion, juvenile justice, access to education, health, and participation rights. It notably codifies juvenile justice reform, establishing juvenile courts and non-custodial, community-based alternatives. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2024, enacted in July 2024, this law aims to eradicate child marriage by criminalizing the act and imposing stringent penalties, including imprisonment and heavy fines, aligning domestic law with human rights commitments. The Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act, 2022, enhances criminal sanctions and protection measures, complementing child protection laws. The Sexual Offences Act (Amendments 2019 & 2024) broadens definitions of sexual crimes against children and institutionalizes specialized courts like the Sexual Offences Model Court across Judicial districts championed by the Judiciary of Sierra Leone. The Medium-Term National Development Plan (2024–2030) explicitly emphasizes legal reforms and enforcement to eliminate FGM. The Draft National Strategy on FGM (2024) aims to operationalize this obligation through a comprehensive legal, health, and community engagement approach. Judicial and Child Protection Structures has been established and expansion of Over 7 One-Stop Centres (OSCs), functioning Sexual Offences Model Courts, and empowered Family Support Units (FSUs) demonstrate a fortified framework for safeguarding children. These centers provide integrated services, medical, legal, psychological, to child survivors of violence, exemplifying strong safeguarding practices. Strategic Planning on National Child Justice Strategy (2014–2018) has been complemented by operational diversion measures under CRA 2025. The National Commission for Children's Strategic Plan (2024–2028) enhances oversight and child participation, supporting safeguarding objectives. Deployment and expansion of One-Stop Centres (OSCs), which are now over 7 in number. These centres offer integrated, child-friendly services—medical, legal, psychological—to child survivors of violence, providing a holistic and accessible safe space that multi-sectorally addresses children's immediate protection needs and supports their recovery. This model exemplifies a comprehensive safeguarding approach that prioritizes child safety, dignity, and

participation within accessible, safe environments. However, there are various legislative gaps that hinder the full realization of children's rights in the Country. These include, discriminatory clauses in the Constitution of the State Party under Section 27 which gives leeway for discrimination in the laws dealing with adoption, marriage and divorce; lack of provision for access to services by victims of trafficking; failure to incorporate a provision for regularization of status of victims in the Trafficking in Persons Act and lack of provisions for procedures of arrest investigation, remand as well as lack of a stipulated time period for pre-trial detention for children in conflict with the law.

2. The Committee recommends that the State Party revise the Child Rights Act in accordance with the Charter in order to fill the legislative gaps. The Committee further recommends that the State Party finalize the revision of the Constitution and ensure that the non-discrimination clause is in full alignment with the Charter. Sierra Leone remains fully committed to integrating the provisions of the **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child** into domestic law, including national legislation and customary law. The **Child Rights Act (CRA) 2007** has been reviewed and the **Child Rights Act 2025** has received Presidential assent to strengthen child protection by addressing legislative gaps and harmonizing national laws. The new **Child Rights Act, 2025**, passed in Parliament on the 3rd July 2025, aims to enhance protections against **violence, abuse, harmful practices, and child marriage**, thereby reinforcing children's fundamental rights.

Key legislative amendments include:

- **Strengthening child justice**, including provisions for **diversion and alternative sentencing**.
- **Clarifying the age of criminal responsibility**— Section 47 of the **Child Rights Act 2025** set at 14 years. However, the **Sexual Offences Act** (amended in 2019) removed the minimum age limit for sexual offences, raising concerns over prosecuting children under 14 for such offences. The **Child Rights Act 2025** seeks to address this issue. The Government has initiated the process of reviewing gender-based violence laws with special focus on the **Sexual Offences Act**.

Comprehensive Policy and Coordination

3. Sierra Leone plans to review **National Policies on Child Welfare**, draft **Alternative Care 2025 under review**, and **Children in Street Situations** over the next two years. A **census of children in residential care** will provide vital data to inform these policies.
4. Guided by the strategic plans of key Ministries and Agencies—including the **Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MoGCA)**, the **Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW)**,

and the National Commission for Children (NCC)—efforts to enhance policy coordination and child rights monitoring will be strengthened.

5. The **Medium-Term National Development Plan (2024-2030)** prioritizes five major areas central to children's rights:

- a. **Feed Sierra Leone**
- b. **Human Capital Development**
- c. **Youth Empowerment Scheme**
- d. **Technology & Infrastructure Development**
- e. **Public Service Transformation**

6. Since 2019, the **Ministry of Social Welfare** and the **Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs** have functioned as distinct entities, each overseeing critical social welfare and gender-focused policies. These Ministries collaborate with **Government Agencies, Departments, and child protection partners** to develop and monitor children's rights frameworks.

7. The State Party notes the recommendation of the Committee to regularly allocate sufficient financial and human resource to the NCC to enable it undertake its mandate effectively. The Child Rights Act 2025 reinforces the mandate of the National Commission for Children (NCC), established under **Section 122** a central role in **monitoring the Convention's implementation** and advising the government on child welfare policies. It works closely with UNICEF and child protection partners to strengthen child rights, including the development of a **complaint's mechanism** for reporting violations.

Allocation of Resources

8. Sierra Leone allocates resources for children's welfare through key social sectors, including the:

- **Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MoGCA)**
- **Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW)**
- **Ministry of Health (MoH)**
- **Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation (MoWRS)**
- **Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE)**

9. While exact financial figures remain difficult to quantify, social sectors providing **basic services for children** account for:

- **30% of the payroll budget**
- **2% of the recurrent government budget (goods and services)**
- **16% of the capital budget**

10. Overall, children's social welfare programs represent **14% of the national budget**, benefiting diverse age groups. Notably, the **education sector prioritizes free quality education**, receiving **22% of the national budget—funding school fee subsidies, teaching and learning materials, and school feeding programs.**
11. A **Citizen's Budget** ensures that children's needs are prioritized in national and local budget allocations, fostering transparency in government spending.
12. To promote **children's participation**, the **Children's Forum Network** engages young people in budget discussions at **national and local council levels**. Local councils allocate **1-2% of their budgets** to child-focused interventions, including **family tracing, reunification, and child protection monitoring.**

Anti-Corruption Measures

13. Since 2019, the **Special Anti-Corruption Division of the High Court** has expedited corruption cases, resolving matters within **three to six months**. Resources recovered from corruption are transferred to **Consolidated Funds** to support government agencies and programs.

Data Collection

14. The Government supports the **Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2025)** and the **Demographic Health Survey** continues to develop **data systems** such as the **Gender-Based Violence Information Management System+ (GBVIMS+)** and the **Child Protection Management Information System+ (CPIMS+)**. Plans for a **census of children in residential care** will improve data accuracy in child welfare reporting.
15. Efforts to **compile data on children with disabilities** have been strengthened through district-level **Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs resources** and a **Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education census**, helping track school enrolment rates, including those with disabilities.

Combating Stigma and Discrimination

16. The **Persons with Disability Act (2011)** has significantly contributed to reducing stigma against children with disabilities. Key initiatives include:
 - **Establishment of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities**
 - **Formation of the National Steering Committee on Disability**
 - **Creation of the Consortium on the Enhancement of Persons with Disabilities**
 - **Development of the Committee on Special Needs Education**

17. Programs promoting **children with disabilities' participation** have played a crucial role in eliminating stigma and enhancing inclusion.

Dissemination, Awareness-Raising, and Training

18. Child rights awareness is widely promoted through **radio and digital platforms**, with **MDAs, civil society organizations, and child protection partners** engaging in discussions on **children's rights, positive parenting, and emerging child welfare issues**.
19. The **National Child Welfare Committee** serves as an inter-agency mechanism for coordinating child protection efforts. Under the leadership of the **Chief Director of Protection at the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MoGCA)**, this committee brings together key **Government Agencies and Ministries** to oversee child rights implementation.

CHAPTER III: DEFINITION OF THE CHILD

20. The State Party notes the Committee's concern about the contradiction between age of consent for marriage in the Child Rights Act and the Registration of Customary Marriages Act. The former puts the age of marriage at 18 years while the latter provides that a child below the age of 18 may lawfully get married on the condition that parental consent is given to this effect. This contradicts the definition of the Child under the Charter, as well as the obligation of Sierra Leone under article 21 of the Charter, which is to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory. While the Committee appreciates the establishment of a committee that is tasked to ensure the harmonization of the definition of the child in all relevant laws, it urges the State Party to expedite the process of harmonization of the definition of the child, and specifically amend the registration of Customary Marriages Act and ensure that the minimum age for marriage is 18 years in all forms of marriage with no exception.
21. The State Party wishes the Committee to know that Section 3(1) of the Child Rights Act 2025 defines a child as a person below the age of 18 years. The verification of the age of a child shall be determined by a birth certificate, national civil registration record and such other documents as may be deemed appropriate. (3) The Minister shall, where a document verifying the age of a child is not available establish guidelines to determine how the age of a child shall be verified. (4) Subject to this section, the Court shall make inquiry about age of the child as it considers necessary and record findings but an order or judgment of the Court shall be invalidated by subsequent proof that the age of the child has not been correctly stated.
22. The passage of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024 has repealed the section 2(2) of the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act 2009 thereby harmonizing the age of all types of marriages in Sierra Leone to 18 years and above. The Prohibition of

Child Marriage came into effect 14th December 2024. The Ministry is working on the development of Regulations to support the implementation of the law.

CHAPTER IV: GENERAL PRINCIPLES

23. The State Party notes the recommendations of the Committee on the general principles and has in the Child Rights Act 2025 made several provisions to strengthen these principles.

Best Interest of the Child

Section 14. (1) In every law, public or private initiative, problematic situation and action, concerning a child, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

(2) The best interests of the child, under subsection (1), includes (a) a substantive right; (b) a fundamental and interpretative legal principle; and (c) a rule of procedure that aims to ensure the full and effective enjoyment of all the rights recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and whose primary consideration is to ensure the holistic development of the child.

Non-Discrimination

Section 15. A person, court or other authority shall, in determining the best interests of a child,

(a) take into account the general principle of non-discrimination in the respect accorded each child in the enjoyment of his rights;

(b) respect and ensure the rights conferred to a child under this Act without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status; and

(c) take all appropriate measures to ensure that a child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

Child's opinion and view.

Section 16. (1) A child, capable of forming his own views, has the right to:

(a) express his views freely; and

(b) participate in decisions, in all matters which affect his welfare and the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with his age and maturity.

Child representation (2) A child shall, for the purpose of freely expressing his opportunity to be heard, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a judicial and administrative proceeding affecting him, in a manner consistent with its procedural rules.

Children to be equally treated

Section 17. A child shall be protected from any act that create unequal access to resources, unequal social status and unequal opportunities for their development.

Child representation

Section 18. (1) A child shall have a right to legal representation at a Juvenile Court. (2) A child shall have a right to give an account and express an opinion at a Juvenile Court.

(3) A child's right to privacy shall be respected throughout the proceedings at a Juvenile Court.

(4) The right of appeal shall be explained to the child, guardian and parents.

Child Participation

Government has effectively coordinated child participation across child protection in order to ensure meaningful and constructive child involvement in programs and activities designed for children. The **National Policy on Positive Parenting** promotes **child participation** at the family level. Furthermore, child representation is ensured through:

- **Child Welfare Committees** established at the **community level** across the country.
- The **Children's Forum Network (CFN)**—a **child-led advocacy organization** serving as a **platform for children's voices** on well-being, welfare, and protection.

The **Board of the National Commission for Children** includes:

One male and one female representative from the **Children's Forum Network (CFN)**.

CHAPTER V: CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOM

24. The State Party notes the Committee's recommendation to take the following measures. a) Develop a policy and long term strategic plan for birth registration; b) Adopt innovative approaches to ensure birth registration, including mobile registration (particularly in rural areas where registration is low); c) Encourage retrospective registration, especially for the hard-to reach communities; d) Strengthen and scale up public awareness and campaigns on birth registration; e) Digitize birth registers to ensure the elimination of fraud and transcript errors; enhance easy control and verification of validity of documents as well as easy access to credible statistical data; f) Provide financial and technical support to the State registry;

g) Take the necessary measure to implement the National Civil Registration Act h) Work in collaboration with civil society partners to create an enabling environment in the effort of enhancing birth registration and certification and i) Provide support to the National Task Force for Births and Deaths.

Birth Registration

25. Section 26(1) of the **National Civil Registration Act, 2016** mandates the **National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA)** to collect, compile, and publish **vital data** on all registered civil events, including **birth registration and the issuance of birth certificates**, with support from the **Ministry of Health**.
26. Birth registration within **90 days** of occurrence is **free of charge**. However, beyond this period, a fee of **USD 3** is required. The NCRA is responsible for registering births across Sierra Leone, with at least **one permanent employee** stationed in every **district**. However, staffing shortages remain a challenge. Each **regional registration center** is equipped with essential tools and technology to facilitate **efficient registration processes**.
27. Section 47 of the **National Civil Registration Act, 2016** provides for the **registration of abandoned children, children in street situations, and migrant children**. While **parents and caregivers** hold the primary responsibility for registering a child's birth, the **State ensures the issuance of birth certificates** and offers these services at **all health centers** where children are born.
28. To **enhance identification processes**, the NCRA has developed a **coordination mechanism** to register **schoolchildren** and children in **Interim Care Centers**, facilitating the issuance of **National Identification Numbers (NIN)** to all Sierra Leoneans.
29. However, children whose births remain **unregistered** may face significant barriers in accessing **essential social services**, such as **education and passport acquisition**. Schools and the Immigration Department require a **National Identification Number (NIN)** for registration, underscoring the **importance of timely birth registration**
30. The State Party notes the observation of the Committee that there are ambiguous citizenship clauses, in the Country's nationality laws pertaining to nationality and citizenship, particularly relating to the status of children born to foreigners as well as children born to foreign fathers in Sierra Leone. The Committee recommends the State Party to amend the relevant clauses in order to clarify ambiguities in line with the Charter and other international treaties the State Party has ratified.
31. The State Party wishes the Committee to know that the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2017 changed the law to allow children born to Sierra Leonean women and foreign fathers to acquire citizenship by birth. Before this amendment, only children born to Sierra Leonean fathers (of Negro-African descent) could claim citizenship by birth, which was a discriminatory provision. Now, both maternal and paternal descent can confer citizenship, provided the Sierra Leonean parent is of Negro-African descent.

CHAPTER VI: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Education, Leisure, and Cultural Activities

Education, Rest, Leisure, Recreation, and Cultural & Artistic Activities

32. The **Free Quality School Education (FQSE) Programme** aims to increase access by waiving tuition fees at primary and basic education levels. The programme is fully implemented, with the government providing textbooks, uniforms, and other support to government and government-assisted schools nationwide. Additionally, regular school subsidies and strict monitoring prevent unauthorized charges imposed on parents and guardians.
33. The purpose of the FQSE is to ensure free quality basic and senior secondary education for all children. Key components include:
- Free admission to government and government-assisted schools
 - Free basic school materials
 - Expansion of the school feeding programme
 - Introduction of a national school bus system
 - Increasing the number of trained and qualified teachers
 - Phasing out the two-shift system in urban schools to allow longer school hours
34. The FQSE has led to a **69% rise in basic education enrolment**, with **51% of students being girls**. The **2021 Annual School Census** reports a **13% increase** in the number of schools, from **10,747 in 2018 to 12,168 in 2022**.
35. The **Teachers' Code of Conduct** strictly prohibits teachers from charging extra fees for lessons.
36. Research in **2020** indicates that **only 58.7%** of teachers possess the required minimum qualifications for their teaching level, underscoring the need for continued investment in teacher training.
37. Despite improvements, students report **corruption, physical violence, and gender-based sexual violence** in schools. The **2021 Out-of-School Study** highlights **sexual violence** as a key barrier to education, particularly for girls.
38. While free education is available, costs remain a barrier for many out-of-school children. Free schooling applies only to **government-approved schools**, which make up **40%** of all schools in Sierra Leone.
- **Unapproved schools**, which represent **50% of schools in Western Area and 65% in Northern Districts**, charge fees and often employ fewer qualified teachers.
 - **Additional costs**, such as transportation, uniforms, and personal learning materials are prohibitive for families in poverty.

39. The **FQSE Programme**, launched in 2018, has increased **total enrolment by 36%** across **pre-primary, primary, junior secondary (JSS), and senior secondary schools (SSS)** (from 1,984,493 in 2019 to 2,697,590 in 2021).

- Learning outcomes improved in 2021, with 77% of children passing the **National Primary School Examination**, up from 74.1% in 2020.

40. The government has introduced **distance learning programmes** for teachers to boost qualifications, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, **50 FQSE school buses** have been procured to improve transportation for students.

School Feeding Programme

41. Since 2008, economic challenges have underscored the importance of **school feeding programmes** as a social safety net for children facing poverty and food insecurity.

- These programmes **increase enrolment and reduce absenteeism**.
- They **enhance learning** by preventing hunger and improving cognitive abilities.

42. The **nationally owned home-grown school feeding programme** integrates local food production, supporting community development. As of **March 2021**, **434,671 children** across **14 Districts** (in 1,604 schools) received meals through this programme.

Hands Off Our Girls Initiative

43. The "**Hands Off Our Girls**" initiative targets teenage pregnancy, rape prevention, and early child marriage, helping to reduce school dropouts among girls.

44. To complement this, the **Chief Justice of Sierra Leone** established a **Sexual Offences Model Court** in 2020 to prosecute offenders and act as a deterrent against the exploitation of underage girls.

Standard of Living and Social Protection

45. Sierra Leone has implemented various policies and programs to **combat poverty**, particularly among children and vulnerable populations.

Poverty Reduction & Youth Employment:

- National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA)
- Pro-Poor Growth for Peace Consolidation & Youth Employment (GPCYE) Project
- Financial Cooperation Agreement with Germany (€17.5 million) to **empower rural youth**

46. The **National Social Protection Policy** (adopted in 2011, amended in 2018, and revised in 2020) outlines a framework for protecting the extreme poor and vulnerable.

• **Medium-Term National Development Plan (Targets by 2023):**

- Establish an **integrated national identity card system**
- Create a **social safety net fund** for emergency response
- Ensure **formal sector workers** have social security
- Provide **social protection** to at least **30% of vulnerable populations**, including children with disabilities

47. The revised **Social Protection Policy** follows a **life-cycle approach**, addressing vulnerabilities such as **disabilities, aging, and economic insecurity**.

48. It incorporates **three pillars** of social protection:

- **Social Insurance** (for formal workers)
- **Social Assistance** (for the extreme poor)
- **Traditional Social Protection** (community-based systems)

49. Gender equity and inclusivity remain central to Sierra Leone's social protection efforts.

- Health and Health Services
- Health Policies and Strategies

The **National Policy on Health and Sanitation (2021)** and the **National Health Sector Strategy (NHSS) 2021-2025** aim to:

- Address **unfinished Millennium Development Goals (MDG) targets**.
- Strengthen **health systems** and ensure **equitable access to healthcare**.
- Improve **sustainable health financing and healthcare service quality**.
- Achieve **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)** by 2030, as outlined in the GoSL's Road Map.

50. Other key policy documents include:

- **School Health Policy (2021)**
- **Sierra Leone Health Information System Policy (2021)**
- **Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health Strategy (2017-2021)**

Reduction in Child and Infant Mortality

51. Sierra Leone has made steady progress in reducing **child and infant mortality**. Estimates from the **Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN-IGME)** indicate:

- **Neonatal mortality rate** fell from 38.5 (2011) to 30.9 (2021).
- **Under-one mortality rate** declined from 104.2 (2011) to 78.3 (2021).
- **Under-five mortality rate** dropped from 154.5 (2011) to 104.7 (2021).

52. The **estimated stillbirth rate** in Sierra Leone stands at **30 per 1,000 live births**, with **7,596 stillbirths expected** during the survey. However, only **5,608 stillbirths** were documented, yielding a **stillbirth rate of 25.6 per 1,000 live births**.

Of the **5,608 stillbirths** reported,

- **55.5% (3,118 cases)** were macerated stillbirths.
- **44.5% (2,490 cases)** were fresh stillbirths.

The leading causes of **neonatal deaths** in Sierra Leone include **prematurity, birth asphyxia, and sepsis**.

Free Health Care Initiative and Infant Mortality Reduction

To **reduce stillbirths**, the government instituted the **Free Health Care Initiative (FHCI)** for **pregnant women**, enabling them to attend **clinic appointments** for essential maternal care.

53. Additionally, **ambulance services** across Sierra Leone have significantly improved healthcare accessibility, leading to a **decline in infant mortality**. From **2009 to 2019**, the **infant mortality rate** dropped to **80.9 deaths per 1,000 live births**, with further reductions expected.

The **National Health Sector Strategic Plan (NHSSP) 2021–2025** seeks to:

- **Strengthen health sector coordination** over the next five years.
- **Establish and equip Special Care Baby Units (SCBUs)** at all hospitals and district levels.

Implementation of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Road Map (2021–2030)

Sierra Leone has taken **concrete measures** to advance **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)**, including:

- **Construction of district hospital laboratories.**
- **Procurement of laboratory equipment.**

- **Operationalizing the Sierra Leone Social Health Insurance (SLeSHI) scheme to provide healthcare coverage for all citizens.**
- **Expanding the Free Health Care Initiative (FHCI), covering:**
 - **Maternal and child health services for pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children under five at no cost.**
 - **Malaria testing and treatment, free for the entire population since 2010.**
 - **Extension of services to physically challenged persons, Ebola survivors, and soon to school-going children under the School Health initiative.**
- **Strengthening the Health Management Information System (HMIS) to provide quality healthcare data for informed decision-making.**
- **Increasing childhood vaccinations (ages 12–23 months) for tuberculosis, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, and measles.**
- **Provision of cost-recovery drugs, ensuring accessibility nationwide.**

Expansion of Healthcare Workforce

54. The government has significantly improved employment in the healthcare sector. From 2018 to 2020,

- **4,000 health workers were employed.**
- **Plans are in place to employ an additional 3,000 healthcare workers.**

Previously, many nurses served as volunteers without formal employment codes, affecting commitment levels. Improved employment ensures stability and quality of service delivery.

Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV

55. The Secretariat for HIV Prevention developed:

- **Guidelines for integrating mother-to-child HIV transmission elimination into RMNCAH, TB, and Nutrition programs.**
- **HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan (2016–2020) aimed at:**
 - **Zero new infections.**
 - **Zero discrimination.**
 - **Zero AIDS-related deaths.**
 - **Test All, Treat All, Retain All approach for comprehensive HIV prevention.**

56. The strategy focused on targeted HIV prevention services, particularly for high-risk populations, ensuring mother-to-child transmission elimination.

Pluralistic Health Service Delivery Model

Sierra Leone's health system is pluralistic, involving:

- **Government institutions**
- **Private healthcare providers**
- **Local and international NGOs**
- **Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs)**
- **Traditional medicine practitioners**

57. Healthcare services are delivered at three levels:

1. **Primary Health Units (PHUs)**
 - **Maternal and Child Health Posts (MCHPs)** for villages under 5,000 people.
 - **Community Health Posts (CHPs)** for towns with populations between 5,000 and 10,000.
 - **Community Health Centres (CHCs)** at chiefdom level, covering 10,000–20,000 people.
2. **Secondary health care**—provided at district and non-governmental hospitals.
3. **Tertiary health care**—offered at regional hospitals and specialized non-governmental institutions.

Increased Budget Allocation for Healthcare

In adherence to the **Abuja Declaration**, Sierra Leone has progressively increased its health budget, from 7.4% in 2012 to 11% in 2020.

Additionally, on **October 3, 2022**, the government introduced the **Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine** into the routine immunization schedule to protect adolescent girls from cervical cancer.

- **The Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS)**, supported by **GAVI, UNICEF, and WHO**, launched a campaign to vaccinate **153,991 girls**, ages 10, with two doses administered over six months.

Sierra Leone National Nutrition Survey (SLNNS) 2021

Conducted between **August 1–31, 2021**, the **National Nutrition Survey** assessed malnutrition rates among:

- **Children (ages 6–59 months).**
- **Adolescent girls (ages 10–14 and 10–19).**
- **Adolescent boys (ages 10–19).**
- **Women of reproductive age (15–49).**

The survey also evaluated contributing factors, including:

- **Infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices.**
- **Dietary diversity and meal frequency.**
- **Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) conditions.**

UHC Road Map 2020-2030 and Child Healthcare Expansion

The UHC Road Map (2020-2030) aims to **expand Free Health Care for Children**, ensuring better health outcomes.

- **The National Health Policy (2021) and National Health Sector Strategic Plan (2021) were launched to guide health program implementation.**
- **A Health Financing Strategy was introduced to enhance Free Health Care and improve health equity.**
- **Healthcare worker training at subnational and national levels ensures sustainable community engagement through the Primary Health Care Model.**

Adolescent Health

National Strategy for Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage Reduction

58. Sierra Leone developed and launched the **National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage (2018-2022)**, supported by both government and development partners. The strategy was implemented through a costed plan, ensuring adequate resource allocation.

A new **National Strategy (2025-2030)** has been approved for official launch and full implementation, reinforcing ongoing efforts to mitigate adolescent pregnancy and child marriage.

Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Bill

59. The **Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Bill** has been approved by Cabinet, gazetted, and tabled in Parliament for enactment, aiming to strengthen maternal and reproductive health frameworks across the country.

Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme

60. The **Ministry of Health** oversees the **Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme**, which monitors and delivers age-appropriate sexual health information and services for adolescents both in and out of schools.

Key aspects include:

- **Free contraceptive methods** provided to all individuals, regardless of age, across government institutions.
- **Post-abortion care services** available to all.
- **Abortion remains illegal**, except in cases where the pregnancy poses a health risk to the woman or the unborn child.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Schools

70. Sierra Leone has incorporated **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)** into its school curriculum, initially introduced in **three Districts**, with plans for **nationwide expansion**.

CSE is integrated into the following **seven subjects**:

- **Language Arts**
- **Social Studies**
- **Integrated Sciences**
- **Religious Moral Education**
- **Home Economics**
- **Practical Arts**
- **Physical Health Education**

80. To support implementation, six **Coordinating Committee Groups (CCGs)** were established, focusing on:

- **Linking schools with adolescent sexual health services.**
- **Teacher training.**
- **Community engagement.**
- **Monitoring and research.**
- **Curriculum development.**
- **Communications strategies.**

Adolescent-Friendly Sexual and Reproductive Health Hubs

81. With support from UNFPA, four **Adolescent-Friendly Sexual and Reproductive Health Hubs** were established in **Koinadugu District**, offering:

- **Free sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services.**
- **Family planning services and counselling.**
- **Sexually transmitted infection (STI) treatment.**

- **Community outreach on gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and referral services for survivors.**

CHAPTER VII: FAMILY, ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE

Children Deprived of a Family Environment and Adoption

Residential Care and Alternative Care Policy Review

82. In 2024, a census was planned to assess the number of children in residential care, alongside a scheduled review of the National Policy on Alternative Care. This policy aims to:

- **Monitor residential institutions and ensure compliance with established standards.**
- **Conduct regular placement reviews and develop individual reintegration plans for children.**
- **Establish mechanisms for reporting, monitoring, and addressing maltreatment cases.**

83. By emphasizing adherence to minimum care standards, reviewing placements, and facilitating individualized reintegration plans, the policy fosters a protective environment for children in residential care, ensuring their well-being and successful reintegration into society.

Implementation Challenges in Alternative Care

84. The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, responsible for fully implementing the Alternative Care Policy, faces challenges due to limited human and financial resources. These constraints hinder efforts to:

- **Comprehensively address issues related to children deprived of a family environment and adoption.**
- **Undertake community outreach sessions to improve informal care practices, including "men pikin" care arrangements.**
- **Enhance monitoring mechanisms for Interim Care Centres (ICCs) to ensure compliance with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).**

Despite these challenges, ICCs have been trained on SOP implementation, with the Ministry conducting regular monitoring to ensure compliance.

Resource Constraints in Child Protection Services

85. Despite efforts by the government and its partners to increase technical, financial, and human resources, obstacles remain in:

- Improving infrastructure within alternative care centers.
- Addressing staffing inadequacies, especially in remote areas.
- Providing sufficient training and equipment to enhance service delivery.

Child Adoption Legal Framework

86. Child adoption in Sierra Leone is governed by the **Adoption Act, 1989**, which ensures the **best interests of the child** are protected throughout the adoption process. Complementary legislation includes:

- **Section 133 & 135 of the Child Rights Act, 2025**
- **Part X (Sections 53, 54, and 55) of the National Civil Registration Act, 2016**

87. Eligibility requirements for adoptive parents, as outlined in **Section 3 of the Adoption Act, 1989**, include:

- **Prospective adoptive parents must be at least 25 years old and at least 21 years older than the child.**
- **Married couples and single individuals (except single males who are not relatives of the child) are eligible to adopt.**
- **The law does not discriminate based on race, ethnicity, religion, or nationality.**

The government is currently working on amendments to the **Adoption Act, 1989**, to align it with international standards.

Ongoing Review of Adoption Legislation

88. The then Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs commenced a review and amendment of the **Adoption Act No. 9 of 1989** to enhance consistency with international child protection standards.

89. In 2020, the Ministry conducted nationwide consultations on the review, generating a report submitted to the Law Officers' Department for final drafting before parliamentary consideration.

Adoption Authority and Oversight

90. Adoption procedures in Sierra Leone are overseen by:

- Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs
- High Court of Sierra Leone
- National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA)

91. These entities collaborate with additional agencies, including:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
- Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police
- Anti-Human Trafficking Unit
- Transnational Organized Crime Unit
- Interim Care Centres (ICCs)
- Local Councils

(Refer to Sections 2(1) and 3(4)(c) of the Adoption Act No. 9 of 1989 and Part X (Sections 53, 54, and 55) of the National Civil Registration Act, 2016 for legal details.)

Adoption Process: Consent and Relinquishment

92. Before an adoption is finalized, the biological parents or legal guardians must provide:

- Voluntary written consent, witnessed by an authorized officer or social worker.

Interview, Home Visit, and Assessment

Prospective adoptive parents must undergo:

- Social investigations conducted by qualified social workers.
- Home assessments evaluating the suitability of living conditions to ensure a nurturing and safe environment for the child.

Fostering and Custody Requirements

93. According to Section 4(a) and (b) of the Adoption Act, 1989 and Section 103 of the Child Rights Act, 2025:

- An adoption order cannot be granted unless the applicant and the child reside in Sierra Leone.
- The child must have been in the custody of the adoptive parents for at least six months prior to the adoption order.

Adoption Order and Legal Finalization

94. Once **child relinquishment consent** has been obtained and all necessary **assessments completed**, adoptive parents can apply for an **Adoption Order** through the **High Court of Sierra Leone**. If the court determines that the adoption serves the **best interests of the child**, it grants the order, legally establishing **full parental rights and responsibilities**.

Inter-Country Adoption Regulations

95. Although Sierra Leone is **not a member of The Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption**, international adoptions are permitted under **kinship and non-kinship adoption arrangements**. Guidelines follow recommendations from:

- Justice Showers Commission of Inquiry on the HANCI-MAP Adoption (2012)
- Adoption Act, 1989
- The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (where applicable)

Inter-country adoptions require strict oversight, including:

- Involvement of the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs.
- A minimum six-month fostering period.
- Submission of a home study report.
- Court appearance by the applicant(s) to ensure the child's welfare.

Adoption Registration and Documentation

All **Adoption Orders** granted by the **High Court of Sierra Leone** must be registered with:

- National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA)
- Office of the Administrator and Registrar General, Roxy Building, Freetown

A **copy of the registered file** must also be **submitted to the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs**.

Post-Adoption Monitoring and Support

After an adoption is finalized, **post-adoption monitoring** may be conducted to:

- Assess the child's well-being and adjustment in the adoptive family.
- Provide ongoing support and intervention if necessary, ensuring the child's stability and welfare.

- Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs
- High Court of Sierra Leone
- National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA)

91. These entities collaborate with additional agencies, including:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
- Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police
- Anti-Human Trafficking Unit
- Transnational Organized Crime Unit
- Interim Care Centres (ICCs)
- Local Councils

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Adoption Order and Legal Finalization

CHAPTER VIII: PROTECTION OF CHILDREN MOST VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

Freedom of the Child from All Forms of Violence

Legislative and Policy Framework

96. The Government of Sierra Leone has enacted and implemented several laws and policies to protect children from violence, exploitation, and abuse. Key legislative and policy instruments include:

- **Domestic Violence Act, 2007**
- **Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019**
- **Child Rights Act, 2025**
- **Basic and Senior Education Act, 2023**
- **Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, 1926**
- **Anti-Human Trafficking, Migrant, and Smuggling Act, 2022**
- **Disability Act, 2011**
- **National Strategy for Addressing Issues of Children in Street Situations**
- **National Policy on Alternative Care (2014)**
- **National Policy on Child Welfare (2014)**
- **Children's Forum Network (CFN), serving as a national platform for child advocacy**
- **National Strategy on Positive Parenting Educational Programme**
- **Code of Conduct for Teachers**
- **National Policy on Interim Care Centres and Facilities**

These instruments serve to strengthen child protection mechanisms and prevent all forms of violence.

School Safety and Protection from Corporal Punishment

97. The National Policy on School Safety ensures violence-free learning environments. Additionally, Section 72(1) of the Basic and Senior Secondary Education Act, 2023 explicitly prohibits corporal punishment and any other degrading punishments. The Code of Conduct for Teachers further safeguards children from abuse and harm in school settings.

98. The National Referral Protocol on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) (2022) addresses school-related gender-based violence, ensuring effective reporting and intervention mechanisms.

99. Through the **European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative**, Sierra Leone is set to receive **additional resources in 2024** to strengthen **violence prevention and response efforts in health, education, social welfare, law enforcement, and judicial sectors.**

100. The **Comprehensive School Safety Policy (2019)** establishes **school-based violence prevention strategies.** A manual on "**Reducing Violence in Schools**" guides educators on preventing **sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)** and outlines **reporting pathways.**

26. Reporting Mechanisms and Child Protection Measures

Schools now report incidents of violence through **referral structures, including:**

- **8060 Hotline**
- **116 Hotline**

101. The **2021 Annual School Census** recorded **101 schools reporting instances of violence.** The **Child Rights Amendment Bill, 2024** further **prohibits corporal punishment** and **strengthens child protection measures.** The **Revised Referral Pathway (2022)** integrates **school-based sexual violence into a broader GBV referral system.**

Response Services for Survivors of Violence

102. The **Legal Aid Board Act, 2012** established the **Legal Aid Board,** which provides **accessible, affordable, and sustainable legal aid services to indigent persons.**

Specialized support services include:

- **Family Support Unit (FSU)**
- **Sexual Offences Model Court (SOMC)**
- **One-Stop Centres (OSCs)—providing medical, psychosocial, and legal assistance to survivors**
- **Social Workers assigned to FSUs and chiefdoms for case management and psychosocial support**
- **14 operational One-Stop Centres across the country**
- **Two Safe Homes and several Interim Care Centres (ICCs) for temporary shelters and rehabilitation**
- **Child Protection technical staff stationed at courts to support children in conflict and contact with the law**

These response mechanisms are designed to **ensure confidentiality, adherence to ethical principles, and protection for survivors.**

COVID-19 and Allegations of Security Force Violence

103. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the Ombudsman and Human Rights Commission referred complaints of alleged violence by security forces to the Complaints, Discipline, and Internal Investigations Department (CDIID) of the Sierra Leone Police.

104. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the CDIID, Ombudsman, Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL), and senior representatives of the armed forces condemned violent actions by some officers, pledging accountability. However, no official report was issued by the CDIID. No children were arrested during the enforcement of COVID-19 safety measures.

Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Gender-Based Violence

Legislative Reforms on Child Marriage and Sexual Offences

105. The age of majority in Sierra Leone is 18 years. However, challenges remain regarding the implementation of the Sexual Offences Act, 2012, as amended in 2019, due to contradictions with the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, 2009.

106. To resolve inconsistencies, the Child Rights Act, 2025 introduced the following:

- Repealing provisions in the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act (2009) that legalize customary marriage with parental consent for persons under 16 years.
- Establishing 18 years as the statutory minimum age for marriage with clear penalties for violations.
- Modifying the age of criminal culpability in the Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (and its 2019 Amendment) to align with provisions of the Child Rights Act.

107. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2024, which came into effect on December 14, 2024, strengthens legal frameworks to combat child marriage and gender-based violence.

Child Protection Case Management and Data Systems

108. The Child Protection Case Management System, operated by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs with support from UNICEF, maintains an online database (PRIMERO) to track all cases of violence against children, including provided services.

Additional data systems include:

- **Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS)**
- **Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS)**
- **GBVIMS+, piloted in three districts**

These systems ensure **reliable and comprehensive data collection to inform child protection strategies and interventions.**

Reporting and Referral Mechanisms

109. To facilitate the reporting and referral of **sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases**, a **24-hour toll-free helpline** was established in 2021. The **SGBV Referral Protocol and Pathway** were reviewed to include **school-based SGBV cases**, ensuring more **effective responses**. Additionally, the **National Strategy on SGBV Response (2021)** outlines **clear procedures for reporting sexual abuse and exploitation**, particularly concerning children. However, the helpline remains **inaccessible online**, limiting digital access.

Public Awareness and Community Engagement

110. The **Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs**, along with **child protection partners**, continues to promote **public awareness on the harmful impact of sexual abuse**. Laws such as the **Sexual Offences Act and Child Rights Act**, along with established **mechanisms for reporting and response**, have been widely **popularized in rural communities** through **workshops, community engagements, and media outreach**.

One-Stop Centres and Rainbo Centres for Survivors

111. To improve **access to survivor-centered care**, the **Government of Sierra Leone** has established **One-Stop Centres (OSCs)** in **district referral hospitals**, providing **comprehensive services for SGBV survivors**, most of whom are children. These services include:

- **Psychosocial counselling** by trained professionals
- **Legal assistance** provided by assigned police officers
- **Medical support** for survivors
- **Age-appropriate psychosocial care** tailored to children

112. Currently, **7 OSCs and 6 Rainbo Centres** operate across **Sierra Leone**, with staff undergoing **continuous SGBV-related training**. Additionally, the **SGBV Referral Protocol and Pathway** were revised to integrate **school-related SGBV cases**, while the **GBV e-Referral system** was launched to facilitate **remote updates and increase accessibility of GBV services**.

Support for Child Victims of Sexual Violence

113. Through partnerships with gender and child protection organizations, the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs ensures the provision of post-rape services and social reintegration for child victims of sexual violence. Two Safe Homes—located in Bombali and Western Urban, and managed by Commit and Act and World Hope International—offer:

- Safe child-friendly accommodation
- Post-rape counselling
- Social reintegration programs

These facilities are critical in supporting child survivors through case management services and rehabilitation.

Investigation and Legal Action Against Sexual Violence

114. The Family Support Unit (FSU) holds the primary responsibility for investigating and prosecuting cases of sexual violence against children. To ensure efficient investigations, trained FSU personnel are stationed at OSCs, benefiting from specialized training and capacity-building initiatives.

The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019 introduced stricter penalties, including:

- Increasing the maximum sentence for sexual penetration of minors from 15 years to life imprisonment
- Criminalizing rape compromise and settlement, imposing strong penalties for offenders

A multisectoral approach, involving health, social, legal, and human rights sectors, ensures that case management and legal services are pursued to their logical conclusion.

Child Protection Case Management System

115. The Child Protection Case Management System, established with support from UNICEF, leverages Primero methodologies for efficient documentation and follow-up on child protection cases. Standard tools include:

- Case Management Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
- Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS)
- Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS+)

These systems document cases of violence against children, ensuring effective data collection and intervention strategies.

116. The Judiciary has also set up an Information Centre at the Sexual Offences Model Court, allowing public access to case information. Additionally, multiple help lines, managed by both state institutions and civil society organizations, support victims in accessing legal and social services.

Judicial Training on Sexual Violence Cases

117. The Judiciary of Sierra Leone, in collaboration with the Judicial and Legal Training Institute, Defence for Children International, and Equality Now, organized a judicial colloquium to train 30 judges on adjudicating cases of sexual violence. This initiative aimed to:

- Update judges on provisions of the amended Sexual Offences Act, 2019
- Promote a victim-centered approach in judicial proceedings

Such training enhances legal expertise and sensitivity in handling sexual violence cases.

National Campaign Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

In December 2018, the First Lady of Sierra Leone, Dr. Fatima Maada Bio, launched the "Hands Off Our Girls" campaign to:

- Raise public awareness on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)
- Influence policy reforms targeting rape, child marriage, and gender inequality
- Improve girls' access to reproductive healthcare, including cancer and fistula treatment

The campaign has since been officially launched in all districts, engaging:

- Paramount chiefs and traditional leaders
- Government institutions
- Civil society organizations (CSOs)
- Girls and youth advocacy groups

This initiative continues to be instrumental in mobilizing stakeholders to protect girls' rights and prevent SGBV.

Special Protection Measures

Asylum-Seeking, Refugee, and Migrant Children

118. Sierra Leone has established a comprehensive legal framework for asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant children. The **Refugees Protection Act, 2007 (Act No. 6 of 2007)** was enacted to domesticate the **1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees**, the **1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees**, and the **1969 OAU Convention Governing Refugee Problems in Africa**. This Act reaffirms Sierra Leone's legal commitment to recognizing and protecting refugees and asylum seekers.

119. The **National Migration Policy (NMP)**, adopted in 2022, serves as Sierra Leone's first comprehensive policy to manage migration governance. It aims to strengthen institutional capabilities and improve administrative and legislative procedures, aligning with domestic legislation, regional frameworks, and international treaties.

120. Sierra Leone accommodates foreign nationals and provides equal protection. As per the **International Human Development Report (2022)**, there were **54,300 international migrants in Sierra Leone in 2019**, representing **0.7%** of the total population. **97%** of them were West African nationals from **Guinea, Liberia, The Gambia, Nigeria, and Ghana**, with minorities from **Britain, America, India, and Lebanon**.

121. The Government acknowledges migration challenges faced by Sierra Leoneans abroad and has partnered with the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** to facilitate safe returns. Since 2017, IOM has assisted over **3,000 Sierra Leonean returnees**, with **70%** registered in **Freetown and Waterloo**.

122. At the **Second Global Refugee Forum (GRF) 2023**, Sierra Leone committed to:

- Implementing the **National Action Plan on Statelessness**, aiming to regularize **80%** of persons at risk of statelessness by 2026.
- Increasing access to social rights and documentation for at least **1,500 individuals** by 2026.
- Mobilizing funding for **ninety-three socio-economic infrastructure projects** in nineteen refugee host communities through the **Tenki Salon project (2024–2026)**.
- Securing sustainable access to land for **3,500 displaced persons** in protracted situations by 2025–2026.

Economic Exploitation, Child Labour, and Children in Street Situations

123. The Government has ratified **ILO Conventions 138 (Minimum Age for Work)** and **182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour)**. Following this ratification, Sierra Leone established:

- **Minimum Age for Work Declaration: 15 years for non-hazardous work, 18 years for hazardous work.**
- **National Child Labour Unit to monitor and enforce child labour policies.**
- **Employment Act (2023), specifically Part X, which extensively addresses hazardous work for children.**

The National Plan of Action on the Worst Forms of Child Labour promotes:

- **Awareness campaigns**
- **Enforcement of child labour laws**
- **Social protection schemes**
- **Integration and rehabilitation programs**

124. The Government and Child Protection Partners, including the **Children's Forum Network**, conducted **nationwide consultations** to assess **children in street situations**. A **comprehensive strategy** has been developed, focusing on:

- **Prevention through awareness campaigns**
- **Strict enforcement of laws**
- **Institutional coordination for lasting solutions**

125. The **National Strategy for Addressing Children in Street Situations (NSACSS)** assigns key roles to the **Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs** at the coordinating entity, **Ministry of Social Welfare**, **National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA)**, **Ministry of Basic & Senior Secondary Education**, and **Local Councils** to allocate **budgetary support**. Using **UNICEF-supported case management systems**, children are **identified and reunited with families** under the **National Family Tracing & Reunification Network**.

Sale, Trafficking, and Abduction

126. The **Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act (2022)** includes **specific protections** for children, including:

- **Prohibition of child sexual exploitation in tourism**
- **Prevention of fraudulent adoption**
- **Criminalization of cross-border trafficking for sexual and labor exploitation**

127. In 2020, the **African Programming and Research Initiative to End Slavery (APRIES)** collaborated with the **Ministry of Social Welfare** on a **child trafficking and labour survey** in **Eastern Sierra Leone**, providing **new evidence** on the issue.

The 2019–2020 household survey found a child trafficking prevalence rate of 33% in Eastern Province:

- 45.7% of children in Kono
- 32.9% of children in Kailahun
- 26.6% of children in Kenema

The Anti-Trafficking in Persons (ATIP) Task Force Secretariat has developed data collection tools for victim care, case investigations, and prosecutions, with quarterly analysis of trafficking trends.

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) aids in victim identification and provides protective services, helping to address root causes of trafficking.

Key stakeholder training is conducted regularly on trafficking detection, victim care, and referral procedures. A field handbook is being developed for trauma-informed care of child victims.

A training manual for law enforcement is being finalized for incorporation into the Sierra Leone Peacekeeping and Law Enforcement Academy (SILEA) curriculum.

128. In 2024, the ATIP Task Force Secretariat secured NLe.500,000 (\$23,810) in seed funding for the Victims of Human Trafficking (VOT) Trust Fund, officially launched by the First Lady on February 23, 2024. Plans are underway for an annual fundraising initiative to expand protective services for child victims.

The ATIP Task Force Secretariat has engaged in nationwide community and media awareness campaigns on human trafficking prevention.

- Media Against Trafficking in Persons (MATIP) was formed to amplify anti-trafficking efforts.
- Christian and Muslim communities are encouraged to establish action groups at the district level.
- Ten pilot schools are being identified as ATIP School Clubs to train children in trafficking detection and prevention.

129. The U.S. State Trafficking in Persons Report (2022) rates Sierra Leone as a Tier 2 country, indicating that while the nation does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, it is making significant efforts toward compliance.

Compared to the previous reporting period (2021), the government has demonstrated increased efforts, including:

- **Signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Guinea to strengthen anti-trafficking coordination.**
- **Convicting more traffickers and improving law enforcement actions.**
- **Launching a nationwide trafficking hotline to facilitate victim reporting and intervention.**
- **Ratifying the ECOWAS Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, aimed at enhancing cross-border law enforcement efforts.**

However, the report also identifies key areas where Sierra Leone has not yet met the minimum standards, including:

- **A decline in the number of trafficking investigations.**
- **Inadequate shelter and victim services, with support primarily limited to Freetown.**
- **No reported government funding to support NGOs providing victim shelter and services.**

CHAPTER X: HARMFUL PRACTICES

Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

130. The State Party notes the Committee recommendation to explicitly prohibit and criminalize FGM, and to take the necessary measures to create awareness about the adverse effect of FGM on communities in general and the girls in particular among all relevant stakeholders with the aim of eliminating the practice. The Committee further recommends that the State Party works with secret societies towards changing mind-sets and promote positive cultural context to replace the practice. The **Child Rights Bill, 2024**, which was tabled in Parliament for passage, explicitly **prohibits and criminalizes Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**. However the clause to end child FGM was unfortunately removed from the text through a motion was raised in the well of Parliament. We have a new Child Rights Act 2025 which was passed into law on 3rd July 2025. In collaboration with **Child Protection Partners**, the **Government of Sierra Leone** has engaged **Traditional Leaders and Practitioners (Soweis)** in consultations across all districts. These engagements culminated in the signing of a **Memorandum of Understanding**, committing stakeholders to ending child FGM nationwide.

Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy and Child Marriage

131. Teenage pregnancy rates have declined by 33%, from 62,583 cases in 2019 to 41,943 in 2022. To further address this issue, the **National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy (NSRTP)** is conducting consultations to review and update the **National Strategy on the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy and Child Marriage**.

132. The State Party notes the Committee's appreciation on the decline in the rate of child marriage and recommends the State Party to accelerate the fight against child marriage. The **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2024**, was passed into law in July 2024 and came into force in December 2024 to formally **abolish child marriage**, reinforcing legal protections for minors. While the **implementation of the strategy is ongoing at the community level**, it is spearheaded by the **Teenage Pregnancy Secretariat**, in partnership with various **Ministries, Departments, Agencies, and Child Protection Partners**.

133. Despite challenges posed by the **COVID-19 pandemic**, the **end-of-evaluation report** indicates that the **majority of planned actions were successfully implemented**, reflecting **continued progress** toward the protection and empowerment of young girls.

Efforts to Eradicate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Child Marriage

134. Sierra Leone remains committed to **eliminating FGM and child marriage** nationwide. As part of the **Child Rights Bill, 2024**, the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs intensified efforts to:

- **Conduct district and regional consultative meetings with Paramount Chiefs, Soweis, and Religious Leaders.**
- **Secure a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the abolition of child FGM.**
- **Develop alternative sources of income for FGM practitioners to encourage them to abandon the practice.**
- **Harmonize laws preventing child marriage and strengthen awareness campaigns on its negative consequences.**
- **However, the Sierra Leone House of Parliament passed into law the Child Rights Bill on the 3rd July without expressly prohibiting child female genital mutilation.**
- **The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs is working with partners to review and strengthen the draft National Strategy for the Reduction of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting to ensure we raise awareness on the issue in a bid to bring the practice to its barest minimum for the participation or involvement of children.**
- **The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs in collaboration with Partners have set up Technical Working Group (TWG) to organize consultations for the development of regulations and popularization of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act - 2024 at district, regional and national levels respectively; including the review of the Alternative Care Policy (2013) for the protection of vulnerable children in need of care.**
- **The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs coordinates advocacy programs like the celebration of the International Day of the Girl Child, the World Children's Day, and the commemoration of the Day of the African as a continued effort to promote the rights of the girl child against abuse, violence and exploitation. This is done in partnership with child protection & development partners, CSOs, and other MDAs.**

- The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs has revitalized the National Child Welfare Committee coordination meetings at district and national levels put strategies in place to address children's issues and prioritize their rights.

CHAPTER XI: CHILD JUSTICE

135. Part V (Section 31 - 59) of the Child Rights Act 2025 extensively dealt with Child Justice.

136. In Sierra Leone, diversion in juvenile justice represents a progressive policy and practice framework aimed at steering children in conflict with the law away from formal judicial proceedings and instead channeling them into community-based interventions, counseling, and social services that prioritize rehabilitation and reintegration over punishment. This approach is anchored in the recognition that children are best served when supported to overcome the circumstances that led to offending, rather than being exposed to the often harmful effects of formal judicial processes and detention. A milestone in this effort was the Cabinet's approval in July 2025 of the national Diversion and Alternatives to Detention Policy for children, which was officially launched and reinforced by the new Child Rights Act 2025. Together, these reforms seek to embed diversion firmly within the country's legal framework, ensuring that juvenile justice is consistent with international child rights standards. By promoting alternatives to detention, the policy not only aims to reduce negative outcomes such as stigmatization and recidivism among children but also alleviates the strain on the justice system, fostering a more child-friendly, restorative, and rehabilitative model of justice in Sierra Leone.

137. The new Child Rights Act (2025) and the Cabinet's approval in July 2025 of the national Diversion and Alternatives to Detention Policy explicitly foregrounds diversion as a primary, child-centred response: where appropriate, children should be handled outside formal court processes and be referred to community-based mediation, counselling and services. The Act provides for diversion panels that may mediate criminal matters, caution the child about the consequences of their actions, and with the parties' consent impose a six-month community guidance order placing the child under the supervision of a respected community guardian; during mediation panels can also recommend apologies or restitution of services to victims. These statutory provisions build on an earlier National Framework for the Diversion of Children in Conflict with the Law (piloted in 2019 across selected police stations and revised in 2022), which limits diversion eligibility mainly to misdemeanors and envisages diversion at multiple stages (pre-arrest, pre-adjudication and post-adjudication).

138. To operationalize those reforms and meet the recommendations, Government has taken a coordinated, resourced and time-bound approach that links legislation, institutions,

training and monitoring with these practical steps recommended below (each step aligned to recent national developments and good practice):

- Issue clear implementing regulations and an operational plan. Publish detailed regulations/guidelines that translate the Act's diversion principles into standard operating procedures (who may refer a case, eligibility criteria, confidentiality safeguards, consent procedures, data collection and referral pathways to social services). This should mirror the structure of the National Framework and be issued by the Ministry of Justice.
- Fast, phased national roll-out that builds on pilots. Start with a rapid roll-out in high-caseload districts (where the 2019 pilot operated) then expand regionally; use the pilot locations to test checklists, referral forms and community guardian rosters before full scale-up. Ensure the roll-out plan names lead agencies, quarterly milestones and an initial 12–18 month budget.
- Massive, multi-tiered capacity building. Design a standardized curriculum and deliver cascaded trainings for judges, magistrates, prosecutors, police (including Family Support Units), legal aid lawyers, social workers and community guardians that cover: (a) diversion eligibility and procedures, (b) child-friendly interviewing and informed consent, (c) restorative mediation techniques, (d) safeguarding and referral pathways, and (e) data recording and monitoring.
- Embed diversion at every decision point and minimize pretrial detention. Amend prosecutorial and police circulars to require consideration of diversion at pre-arrest, pre-charge and immediately after adjudication where appropriate; set diversion as the default for eligible misdemeanours and non-violent offences, with detention only as a last resort. Establish a mandatory supervisory review (e.g., within 48–72 hours) for any child detained to fast-track release or referral to diversion. Data and case-tracking should be digital where possible to spot delays and detention trends.
- Monitoring, quality assurance and data systems. Create a simple national diversion monitoring framework (core indicators: # diverted, stage of diversion, recidivism at 6/12 months, victim satisfaction, time in detention avoided) and require monthly/quarterly reporting from police stations, juvenile courts and Ministries.
- Invest in infrastructure and specialist courts. Allocate recurring and capital resources to: (a) establish specialized juvenile court sittings or designated juvenile dockets in regional and district courts to ensure child-sensitive procedures, (b) set up regional remand homes or approved children's rehabilitation centres (separate from adult prisons) to hold children only when absolutely necessary, and (c) expand Sexual Offences Model Courts and survivor-centred infrastructure so sexual offences involving children are handled promptly and sensitively.
- Protect rights, consent and safeguards. Ensure diversion is voluntary, that a child's best interests and the views of the child are systematically recorded, and that diversion does not

- become a backdoor to informal punishment or stigmatization. Provide legal aid and independent oversight to protect children's rights throughout diversion processes.
- Community engagement and restorative practice. Recruit and vet community guardians (people of good standing), invest in community awareness campaigns so families and victims understand diversion options, and integrate restorative outcomes (apology, restitution, community service) in a way that safeguards victims and avoids re-victimization.

CHAPTER XII: RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHILD

139. Section 12(1) of the Child Rights Act 2025 outlined the responsibilities of a child. A child shall, subject to age, ability and evolving capacities:

- (a) contribute towards family cohesion;
- (b) respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times and to assist them in case of need; (c) place his physical and intellectual abilities at the service of his country;
- (d) preserve and strengthen social and national solidarity;
- (e) preserve and strengthen positive cultural values in his relations with other members of the society, in the spirit of tolerance, dialogue and consultation and to contribute to the moral well-being of society;
- (f) preserve and strengthen the independence and the integrity of his country; and
- (g) exhibit diligence towards studies and work.

CHAPTER XII: MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

Statistical Information and Data

140. Sierra Leone is preparing to undertake MICS7, a comprehensive survey that will provide updated data on **children's rights and welfare**, supporting informed policy decisions and interventions.

The **Annual School Census (ASC) 2022** recorded a total of **1,289 pregnant schoolgirls**, distributed as follows:

- **JSS3:** 358 students (28%)
- **JSS2:** 212 students (17%)
- **Class 4:** 6 students (0.5%) (the lowest reported figure)

Across all school levels, the highest incidence of **pregnancy** was found in the final grade:

- **Class 6** for primary school
- **JSS3** for junior secondary school
- **SSS3** for senior secondary school

The reported mean ages of pregnant schoolgirls were:

- **Primary:** 15 years
- **JSS:** 17 years
- **SSS:** 19 years

The minimum ages of pregnant girls recorded were:

- **Primary:** 12 years
- **JSS:** 12 years
- **SSS:** 14 years

In 2019, gender disparities were observed in various professional sectors:

- **Teaching workforce:** Only 28% were women.
- **Health professionals:** 61% were women.
- **Overall employed population:** 53% were women.

141. Sierra Leone ranks sixth lowest globally in terms of female representation in teaching, significantly below the 45% average for primary school teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite achieving gender parity in WASSCE exam participation and success rates, women remain underrepresented in teacher training programs, indicating that entry requirements are not the primary barrier to enrolment.

142. To reduce gender disparities in the teaching sector, the Education Service Commission Study recommends offering targeted scholarships and incentives to encourage women to pursue careers in education.

Statistical Information and Data

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- **JSS:** 12 years
- **SSS:** 14 years

Teacher Gender Distribution

144. The **Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education's Annual School Census (2021)** provides the following breakdown of **teachers by gender** across different education levels:

Table 1: Number of Teachers by Gender

School Level	Female Teachers	Male Teachers
Pre-Primary	5,408	897
Primary	13,692	30,055
Junior Secondary	3,398	16,638
Senior Secondary	1,002	9,722

Source: Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Annual School Census (2021)

Progress in Nutrition

145. The **Directorate of Food and Nutrition** has implemented various **child survival interventions** to reduce malnutrition across Sierra Leone. Key nutrition indicators were

monitored through routine services (2021-2023) in DHIS and Sierra Leone National Nutrition Surveys (SLNNS, 2014-2021).

Key Nutrition Indicators (2021-2023)

Indicator	2021	2022	2023
Early initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour of birth (HF03)	96.6%	96.8%	98.5%
Vitamin A supplementation for children (6-11 months) (HF2)	434,973	541,817	457,225
Vitamin A supplementation for children (12-59 months) (HF2)	1,008,867	1,473,542	1,688,785
Deworming for children (12-59 months) (HF2)	986,425	1,515,978	1,753,990
Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) cure rate (0-59 months) (HF19)	31,230 (82%)	37,348 (99.1%)	31,516 (97.6%)

SLNNS Nutrition Indicators (2014-2021)

Indicator	2014	2017	2021
Ever breastfed	99.2%	99.1%	97.9%
Early initiation of breastfeeding	54.9%	56.8%	89.4%
Exclusive breastfeeding	58.8%	61.6%	52.7%
Bottle feeding	-	23.3%	9.7%
Minimum dietary diversity	36.4%	29.7%	22.9%
Minimum meal frequency	14.4%	41.1%	33%
Minimum acceptable diet	-	-	4.9%

Source: Directorate of Food and Nutrition, Child Survival Programme Implementation (2024)

Distribution of Pupils with Disabilities by Grade, Type, and Sex

146. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (2023) has reported disability statistics across different school levels. Below is a summary of pupil distribution by disability type and gender for pre-primary, primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary levels.

Pre-Primary (Nursery) - Disability Distribution

Disability Type	Boys	Girls
Visual Impairment	92	103
Hearing Impairment	99	103
Speech Impairment	164	157
Physical Impairment	104	78
Learning Disabilities	106	93
Hunchback	04	05
Albinism	08	03
Dwarfism	07	01

Primary School - Disability Distribution

Disability Type	Boys	Girls
Visual Impairment	2,722	2,350
Hearing Impairment	2,626	2,279
Speech Impairment	2,277	1,946
Physical Impairment	1,574	1,290
Learning Disabilities	1,844	1,950
Hunchback	60	65
Albinism	92	102
Dwarfism	78	78

Source: Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (2023)

General Measures of Implementation

147. Quantifying the exact allocation of resources dedicated exclusively to children in the national budget remains a challenge. However, the social sector, which delivers basic social services for children, is structured as follows:

- Payroll Budget: 30%
- Other Recurrent Government Budget (Goods and Services): 2%
- Capital Budget: 16%

Overall, the social sector supporting children represents **14% of the national budget**, though some programs and initiatives also benefit other age groups beyond children.

In the education sector, the government has prioritized **Free Quality Education**, allocating **22% of the total national budget** to this initiative (refer to paragraph 9 above for details).

General Principles

148. In response to the devastating impact of **Kush** and other harmful substances, **President Dr. Julius Maada Bio** has declared a **National Emergency on Drugs and Substance Abuse**. This decision follows growing concerns over the widespread abuse of these substances, with urgent calls to **disrupt supply chains** and provide support for **affected individuals**.

To address this crisis, a **task force** will be established to implement a **multi-pronged strategy** focused on:

- **Supply chain disruption** to prevent access to illicit drugs.
- **Victim support and rehabilitation** for those suffering from substance abuse.
- **Public awareness campaigns** to educate communities on the dangers of drug abuse.

Furthermore, **Sierra Leone** will incorporate a **Drugs and Substance Abuse module** into the **Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 7 (MICS7)** to ensure that its **preventive and response strategies** are **evidence-based and data-driven**.

Civil Rights and Freedoms

149. According to the **National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA)**, **Sierra Leone** recorded **225,501 live births in 2022**, compared to **225,433 in 2021** and **213,723 in 2020**.

- The **sex ratio at birth** for 2022 (**97.2**) was slightly higher than 2020 (**96.4**) and 2021 (**94.0**), indicating a **higher number of female births than male births**.
- The **Completeness Rate** for 2022 (**52.1%**) was **1% lower** than in 2021.
- The **Total Fertility Rate (adjusted)** remains around **six children per woman**, consistent with the **2015 Census findings**.
- **Crude birth rate** and **general fertility rate** have remained **unchanged**.
- The **mean age at childbearing** is **approximately 27 years**.
- Using **unadjusted figures**, the **Total Fertility Rate** for 2020, 2021, and 2022 was around **three children per woman**.

(Source: **Vital Statistics Report, Sierra Leone, 2022**)

According to the 2019 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS):

- Birth registration of children under one year increased from 77% in 2013 to 90% in 2017.
- In 2020, registration stood at 78%, rising to 80% in 2021, and 85% in 2022 (UNICEF Sierra Leone, 2023).
- The COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced registration rates during these years.

Concerning registration of children under five years:

- The 2019 DHS found that 90% of children were registered with civil authorities.
 - 93% of children under two years were registered.
 - 89% of children aged 2–4 years were registered.
- This figure dipped to 81.1% in 2020 and 2021, rose to 84%, and later returned to 90% in 2022.
- Most registrations occur after hospital births, while children born at home are less likely to be registered (Apland et al., 2014).

Child marriage rates have declined significantly over the years:

- Marriage before age 18 decreased from 51% in 1994 to 30% in 2019, with the downward trend beginning in 2004.
- Marriage before age 15 fell from 21% in 1994 to 9% in 2019.
- The adolescent birth rate has declined in parallel with child marriage rates.

Violence Against Children

Violent discipline remains widespread in Sierra Leone and has increased significantly over the years.

- According to Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), 86.5% of children aged 1–14 years (with similar rates for boys and girls) experienced some form of violent discipline in their household in 2017, compared to 64.8% in 2010—a 20% increase.
- According to the 2019 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS):
 - 7.4% of Sierra Leonean women aged 15–49 reported experiencing sexual violence.
 - 4.5% experienced sexual violence in the 12 months preceding the survey.
 - Unlike physical violence, the prevalence of sexual violence has decreased significantly from 10.5% in 2013 to 7.4% in 2019.

Physical violence against women remains high, with an increasing trend:

- Based on 2019 DHS data, 61% of women aged 15–49 reported experiencing physical violence in their lifetime.
- 43% experienced physical violence within the 12 months preceding the survey, marking a significant increase from 2013 figures:
 - In 2013, 56% of women had experienced physical violence at some point.
 - 27% reported incidents within the previous year.
- Sierra Leone continues to have one of the highest rates of physical violence in West Africa.
- The prevalence of physical violence varies geographically:
 - Higher in rural areas (63.8%) than in urban areas (56.8%).
 - Violence rates increased across all provinces between 2013 and 2019, except in Northern Province, where cases declined by 5.5%.

Juvenile offending cases have declined:

- According to Family Support Unit data (2019–2022):
 - Cases dropped from 1,367 in 2019 (1,170 males, 197 females) to 884 in 2022 (719 males, 165 females).
 - Economic abuse cases rose due to increased poverty, with 312 reported cases.

Legal Aid Board representation for juveniles has increased:

- Between 2015 and 2020, the Legal Aid Board represented 1,788 juveniles.
- In just the first six months of 2022, 1,136 children (976 boys, 160 girls) received legal representation—a significant increase.

Child victims of crimes:

- Family Support Units oversee child victims of offences and collect disaggregated data.
- Reports from 2019–2022 show a declining trend in cases:
 - 5,343 child victims recorded in 2019 (815 males, 4,528 females).
 - 3,949 recorded in 2022 (835 males, 3,114 females).

Most common crimes against children (2019–2022):

- Sexual violence: 10,822 cases (196 males, 10,626 females).
- Physical abuse: 4,141 cases (1,747 males, 2,394 females).

Violence cases reported to authorities:

- 229 cases of violence and police violence resulted in prosecutions.

Out-of-court settlements:

- **109 cases** were resolved outside court, categorized by offence type.

Protective measures for children:

- **1,711 children** received protective measures and multidisciplinary remedies as victims or witnesses of violence, neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and exploitation.

Children affected by harmful practices:

- **16 children** were victims of female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage.

Family Environment and Alternative Care

150. A **child-sensitive approach** to social benefits should consider **family relationships and household composition**, recognizing the vital connections children have with adults in their lives. In Sierra Leone, children living in **single-parent households** are more likely to experience poverty.

- According to **Multidimensional Poverty Index data**, households headed by **females** are **1.7% more likely to be poor**, despite existing **social insurance provisions** for survivors of previously insured individuals (**spouses, orphans, and parents**).
- **Surviving spouses** of individuals who previously received **old-age or disability pensions** are entitled to **40% of the pension**.
- However, since the **majority of Sierra Leone's workforce** is employed in the **informal sector**, many remain **excluded from social insurance schemes**, limiting access to pension entitlements for surviving spouses.

Sierra Leone has **non-contributory social transfer schemes** targeting vulnerable populations:

- The **National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA)** implements projects that offer:
 - **Social and economic opportunities.**
 - **Capacity building for local governance.**
 - **Humanitarian assistance** for disadvantaged communities.
- The **Ministry of Social Welfare** is mandated to **promote welfare and safeguard the rights** of vulnerable and underprivileged groups, including:
 - **Young people, women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.**

The **Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS)** provides insight into **social transfers** allocated to households of persons with disabilities:

- The data does not specify the source of these transfers or the exact programs under which they fall.
- However, the majority of social transfers were provided in-kind, including:
 - Seeds
 - Bed nets
 - Livestock

Further research is needed to evaluate the long-term impact of these programs in poverty alleviation and strengthening social protection networks for vulnerable populations.

Social Transfers to Households with Disabilities (2019)

The National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) facilitated various social transfer programs to support households with disabilities in 2019. Below is a breakdown of the total transfers by program:

Table: Social Transfers for Households with Disabilities (2019)

Program	Total Transfers (Le)
Cash for Work	625,000
Cash Transfers (No Work)	544,781
Food for Work	587,701
Food (No Work)	588,471
Medicines or Medical Supplies	580,917
Micro-Loans	592,395
Others In Kind Transfers (Seeds, Bed Nets, Livestock)	1,212,819

Source: National Commission for Social Action, 2019

Family Environment and Alternative Care

151. While social protection programs provide short-term relief to vulnerable households, a comprehensive, long-term approach is essential for sustainable impact. An integrated social protection system should include:

- Legal and policy framework integration to ensure continuity and accessibility.
- Adequate financial allocations to strengthen program implementation.
- Investments in infrastructure to improve service delivery and long-term effectiveness.

Children in Family-Based Care, Residential Care, and Informal Care

152. The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs Assessment Report (2022) provides a breakdown of children receiving family-based, residential, and informal care across different districts in Sierra Leone.

Table: Distribution of Children in Alternative Care (2022)

Location/District	Boys	Girls	Total
Western Urban	259	339	589
Western Rural	242	275	487
Tonkolili	10	12	22
Kono	13	21	34
Kailahun	15	17	32
Bombali	79	76	155
Karene	12	16	28
Kambia	30	44	74
Bonthe	22	34	56
Moyamba	54	67	121
Bo	121	158	279
Pujehun	07	09	16
Kenema	47	52	99
Port Loko	88	101	189

Source: Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs Assessment Report, 2022

Children with Disabilities

As of the 2023/2024 school year, 44,792 children with disabilities are enrolled in regular schools across Sierra Leone.

The number of children with disabilities living with their families stands at 93,129 for the 2023/2024 school year.

In 2023, 516 children with disabilities received child support under the national social safety net and other economic and support services.

153. Data on the disability status of students remains incomplete, but household surveys indicate that children with seeing, hearing, walking, and cognition impairments have only a 67% chance of being in school, compared to 73% for children without disabilities, with no significant gender differences (UNICEF & Government of Sierra Leone, "MICS Country Report Sierra Leone").

Girls with disabilities face multiple structural and social barriers to accessing education.

- According to the Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) 2018:
 - 20% of the general population aged 3–24 could not access school in 2018.
 - Among those with disabilities, this figure rose to nearly 30%.
 - For females with disabilities, school inaccessibility reached 33%.
- Despite these challenges, educational attainment levels between students with and without disabilities show only minor differences.
- In some cases, such as among boys at JSS level, children with disabilities appear to perform better academically.

Inclusive education continues to be a major campaign to ensure equal access to schooling for marginalized individuals.

- The Annual School Census (ASC) 2022 identified 44,792 pupils with disabilities enrolled at different education levels.
- Enrolment distribution among pupils with disabilities:
 - 4% in pre-primary school
 - 62% in primary school
 - 24% in junior secondary school (JSS)
 - 10% in senior secondary school (SSS)
- The most prevalent types of disabilities among enrolled students:
 - Visual impairments (27%)
 - Hearing impairments (21%)
 - Learning disabilities (20%)
 - Speech-related disabilities (18%)
 - Other physical impairments (14%)

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2017 provides a broader definition of disability, categorizing functional difficulties into:

- **Group 1:** Seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care, communication.
- **Group 2:** Child functional difficulties such as anxiety, depression, difficulty accepting change, controlling behavior, concentration issues, and social interactions.
- Findings from MICS 2017:
 - 26% of children aged 5–9 had functional difficulties, declining to 19% among 15–17-year-olds.
 - No significant differences were noted between boys and girls, or between children in urban and rural areas.
 - The most common difficulties were social and emotional challenges, with anxiety and depression being the most prevalent.

- While overall school attendance was similar for children with and without disabilities, those with Group 1 disabilities were significantly less likely to attend school (UNICEF & Government of Sierra Leone, "MICS Country Report Sierra Leone").

Basic Health and Welfare

Child mortality trends in Sierra Leone have fluctuated over the years:

- **Under-five mortality:**
 - 140 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2008
 - 156 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013
 - Decreased to 122 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2019
- **Infant mortality:**
 - 89 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2008
 - 92 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013
 - 75 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2019
- **Neonatal mortality:**
 - 36 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2008
 - 39 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013
 - 31 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2019

(Source: *SLDHS 2019*)

Infant mortality rate in Sierra Leone has shown a steady decline:

- 2024: 68.418 deaths per 1,000 live births (2.43% decline from 2023)
- 2023: 70.123 deaths per 1,000 live births (2.95% decline from 2022)
- 2022: 72.253 deaths per 1,000 live births (2.86% decline from 2021)
- 2021: 74.383 deaths per 1,000 live births (2.78% decline from 2020)

(Source: *UNICEF Sierra Leone*)

Malnutrition remains a critical challenge:

- 500,000 children under five in Sierra Leone are stunted.
- 30,000 children suffer from severe malnutrition and face an immediate risk of death due to inadequate dietary intake and high disease burden.

Infant and young child feeding practices are sub-optimal, with 70% of young children consuming monotonous diets dominated by starchy staples like rice and cassava.

- On average, children receive food from only two of six major food groups.
- Consumption of legumes, nuts, pulses, dairy, fruits, and vegetables is low.
- Food insecurity, cultural beliefs, and dietary taboos further restrict access to nutritious foods, particularly during the nine-month rainy season.

The Government of Sierra Leone has prioritized nutrition as part of its key development agenda, incorporating it into:

- Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plans (2019–2023 & 2024–2030)
- Multi-Sectoral Plan for the Reduction of Malnutrition
- Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement

According to the 2019 DHS survey and WFP Survey 2023:

- Stunting among children under five decreased from 38% in 2013 to 23% in 2023.
- Wasting decreased from 9% to 5%.
- Underweight prevalence declined from 16% to 14%.
- Exclusive breastfeeding for children under six months increased by 30% from 2013 to 2019.
- Breastfeeding for children aged 6–23 months increased from 7% to 9%.
- Anaemia among children aged 6–59 months reduced from 80% in 2013 to 68% in 2019.

The Government has strengthened support for the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Secretariat within the Office of the Vice President to enhance coordination and implementation of nutrition-related programs.

Vaccination coverage among children aged 12–35 months:

- 56% of children (12–23 months) and 51% (24–35 months) received all basic vaccinations.
- 49% (12–23 months) and 40% (24–35 months) received all basic vaccinations by age 12 months.
- 2% (12–23 months) and 3% (24–35 months) received no vaccinations.

(Source: SLDHS 2019)

HIV continues to affect children and infants disproportionately:

- Mother-to-child transmission prevention coverage: 69%.
- In 2022, only 4,549 out of 6,600 HIV-positive pregnant women received treatment.
- Vertical transmission rate: 15.79%, leading to nearly 1,000 infant and child deaths (under 14 years) in 2022.

- **60,000 HIV-exposed children remain unidentified, due to:**
 - **Poor integration of HIV and RMNCAH services.**
 - **Breakdown of early infant diagnostic equipment.**
 - **Persistent stockouts of HIV commodities.**

(Source: *MTNDP 2024–2030*)

The State Party confirms that new data on child health and welfare will be collected in the next Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), for which planning has begun.

Education, Leisure, and Cultural Activities

The National Policy on Integrated Early Childhood Development (2021) ensures equitable access to quality early learning opportunities for children aged 3–5 years, facilitating a smooth transition into primary education.

Financial barriers remain a significant challenge to education access in Sierra Leone, contributing to the high number of out-of-school children.

- **Free education applies only to government-approved schools, which make up 40% of schools nationwide.**
- **Unapproved schools, which charge fees and often have fewer qualified teachers, vary in ownership:**
 - **Faith-based institutions**
 - **Community-owned institutions**
 - **Private institutions**
- **Regional disparities in school approval status:**
 - **Western Area: 50% of schools are unapproved.**
 - **Northern Districts: 65% of schools are unapproved.**
- **In many areas, the only available schooling option is an unapproved school.**
- **Even where free, government-approved schools exist, additional education-related costs—such as transportation, uniforms, and personal learning materials—create barriers for children, particularly those from economically disadvantaged households facing extreme poverty and gender inequality.**

Children with disabilities face significant challenges in accessing education, despite a notable number being enrolled.

- **School infrastructure remains largely inaccessible:**
 - **Only 10% of schools have ramps, limiting mobility for children with disabilities.**
 - **Lack of adapted learning materials prevents effective inclusion.**

- Limited teacher training hinders support for students with special educational needs.
- Poor sanitation facilities and lack of hygiene products also restrict girls' access to education, particularly during menstruation.

School attendance trends and out-of-school rates:

- According to DHS 2019, more boys than girls in the 6–14 age group had never attended school, whereas among 15–19-year-olds, no significant gender differences were observed.
- Late enrolment (overage students) is common.
- In 2018, 524,000 children were estimated to be out of school, including those with disabilities—representing 22% of children aged 6–18 years.
- Two-thirds of out-of-school children had never attended school, while one-third had dropped out prematurely.

Education, Leisure, and Cultural Activities

Students with Disabilities in Schools

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (Annual School Census 2021) provides the following distribution of students with disabilities across various school levels:

Table: Percentage of Students with Disabilities by School Level

School Level	Percentage of Children with Disabilities
Pre-Primary	4%
Primary	60%
Junior Secondary	26%
Senior Secondary	10%

In 2023, the number of children not attending primary and secondary school was 1,022.

The number of school dropouts in 2023, including children with disabilities, girls, and teenage mothers, was 1,225.

The number of reported cases of bullying, violence, sexual abuse, and harassment in schools in 2023 totaled 2,005.

In 2023, 638,000 children attended early childhood education, including children with disabilities. The average years of attendance remain to be determined.

Cases of gender-based violence perpetrated by teachers, their investigation status, and prosecutions require further disaggregated data for comprehensive reporting.

Special Protection Measures

There are currently no asylum-seeking, refugee, or migrant children in detention. However, 364 children fall under the category of asylum-seeking, refugee, and migrant children in Sierra Leone.

Child labor remains a significant concern:

- In 2011, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that 45.9% of children aged 5–17 years (895,427 children) were engaged in child labor, with 22.3% of boys and 21.7% of girls involved in hazardous work (totaling 428,776 children).
- According to the 2023 UNESCO Institute for Statistics report, the rate of working children has decreased slightly, from 45.9% in 2011 to 35.1% in 2023.

Child trafficking remains a serious issue, primarily affecting vulnerable children from poor rural areas who are trafficked into urban centers.

- The 2021 report on Child Trafficking and the Worst Forms of Child Labour identified the most at-risk groups:
 - Children aged 12–17
 - Children who have lost one or both parents
 - Children who are not enrolled in school
- The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated children's vulnerability, while limited identification of victims likely contributes to underreported trafficking cases.
- The US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report (2022) documented:
 - 26 child victims of sex trafficking
 - 23 child victims of unspecified exploitation

Table: Child Victims of Trafficking Cases by Year

Year	Male	Female	Total
2019	13	07	20
2020	11	09	20
2021	27	21	48
2022	14	10	24

Total			112
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Source: *Family Support Unit (2022)*

Government efforts to combat child labor and trafficking:

- The **Employment Act, 2023**, sections 95 and 96, provides special protection measures for children, specifically addressing child labor.
- Sierra Leone enacted the **Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Act, 2023**, aimed at protecting migrant workers and reducing human trafficking and smuggling.
- The State Party signed bilateral and multilateral agreements with:
 - Kuwait
 - State of Qatar
 - United Arab Emirates (UAE)
 - Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
 - **SOS Labour Ghana (Transfer to Transform Program)**
 These agreements seek to minimize trafficking risks and promote adequate protections for migrant workers.

Policy advancements in 2023:

- In **March 2023**, the Parliament of Sierra Leone ratified an agreement with the State of Qatar, regulating employment opportunities for Sierra Leonean workers in Qatar.
- The **Ministry of Labour** issued overseas recruitment licenses to 15 Private Employment Agencies, enforcing stringent recruitment criteria.
- **Legislative alignment:**
 - Domestic laws now comply with international standards, including:
 - ILO Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age)
 - ILO Convention No. 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour)
 - The **Employment Act, 2023**, further aligns minimum age for employment with international labor standards.

Investigations and prosecutions related to child labor:

- In 2023, 13 cases of child labor investigations led to prosecutions.

Children in street situations:

- According to the 2020 Head Count Survey, approximately 20,000 children are living in street situations in Sierra Leone.

Diversion and non-custodial sentencing:

- Over 90% of the annual average of 8,000 children arrested and investigated by police receive diversion programs or non-custodial sentences.

Rehabilitation and reintegration services:

- The annual average of children at Approved School rehabilitation facilities is 30 children per year, receiving structured reintegration support.

One-Page Matrix of ACRWC Action Points – Sierra

Action Point	Recent Developments (2022–2025)	Supporting Legislation / Policies / Structures
Submit periodic report	2025 report finalized and submitted to the ACERWC.	ACRWC (ratified 2002), CRA 2007.
Adopt Child Rights Bill 2022 & constitutional review	CRA 2007 under review; Child Rights Act 2025 enacted; constitutional review ongoing.	Child Rights Act 2025; Constitutional Review Process.
Resource allocation for implementation	Line ministries (MoGCA, MoSW, MBSSE) allocated funds in 2025 budget; piloting child-friendly budgeting in 3 districts.	MTNDP 2019–2025; Annual National Budget.
Strengthen MoGCA & MoSW	Increased staffing; Directorate of Children's Affairs restructured; district-level child protection desks created.	MoGCA/MoSW Strategic Plans 2023–2025.
National reporting mechanism	National Child Rights Reporting Taskforce established under MoGCA.	Policy directive 2023.
Best interest principle	Integrated in FSU procedures, Sexual Offences Model Courts, and CRA 2025.	CRA 2025, SOPs for FSUs.
Life, survival & development (poverty, nutrition, WASH)	Free Healthcare Initiative expanded (0–5 years, pregnant women); WASH programmes in 8 districts.	FHCI, National Nutrition Policy 2021–2025.

Child participation structures	Children's Parliament relaunched 2023; Child Network Forum institutionalized.	MoGCA Child Participation Framework 2023.
Disability inclusion	NCPD decentralization ongoing; training of teachers in SNE, sign language, Braille.	Persons with Disability Act 2011; Radical Inclusion Policy 2021.
Child justice & diversion	Diversion Policy piloted; Child Justice Strategy 2024 launched; 2 new juvenile courts established.	CRA 2025; Diversion Policy 2022; Child Justice Strategy 2024–2028.
Foster care & adoption	Review of Alternative Care Policy 2012 ongoing; draft Foster Care Guidelines 2025.	MoGCA foster care regulations.
FGM	Draft National Strategy on FGM (2024–2028) validated; nationwide consultations ongoing.	Sexual Offences Act 2019 (amended); draft FGM Bill 2025.
Child marriage & SRH	Ongoing awareness campaigns; CSE piloted in 150 schools; SRH corners in health facilities expanded.	Marriage Act (review pending), MBSSE CSE Framework.
Teacher recruitment & training	5,000 teachers recruited 2023–2025, including SNE teachers; CSE and inclusion training rolled out.	FQSE Programme; Teachers' Code of Conduct.
Anti-trafficking	ATIP Task Force Secretariat strengthened; NAP against TIP extended to 2025; training on 2022 ATIP Act ongoing.	Anti-Human Trafficking & Migrant Smuggling Act 2022; NAP-TIP 2021–2025.
Child protection & GBV data systems	CPIMS+ and GBVIMS+ strengthened; district-level caseworkers trained.	CPIMS+ roll-out plan 2024; GBVIMS+ SOPs.