

# Sierra Leone

## Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

An estimated 69.1 percent of children aged 5 to 14 years in Sierra Leone were counted as working in 2000. Approximately 69.6 percent of all boys were working compared to 68.5 percent of girls in the same age group.<sup>4243</sup> Children in Sierra Leone assist family businesses and work as vendors and on family subsistence farms.<sup>4244</sup> Street children are employed by adults to sell, steal and beg. Children also mine alluvial diamond fields.<sup>4245</sup> Child prostitution is an ongoing problem.<sup>4246</sup> Children continue to be trafficked from rural areas to the capital city of Freetown and to diamond mining areas for purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor.<sup>4247</sup>

The law mandates primary school attendance for children aged 6 to 12 and the government promotes a policy of free primary education.<sup>4248</sup> In 2000, the gross primary enrollment rate in Sierra Leone was 79 percent. Gross enrollment ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and therefore do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. As of 2000, 42.7 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years were attending school.<sup>4249</sup> Despite government policy on free education, schools charge formal and informal fees that many families cannot afford to pay.<sup>4250</sup> Among the factors that reduce children's access to school are school fees and associated costs, serious overcrowding in existing schools, a shortage of trained and qualified teachers, and shortages of materials.<sup>4251</sup>

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<sup>4243</sup> UCW analysis of ILO SIMPOC, UNICEF MICS, and World Bank surveys, *Child Economic Activity and School Attendance Rates*, October 7, 2005. Reliable data on the worst forms of child labor are especially difficult to collect given the often hidden or illegal nature of the worst forms, such as the use of children in the illegal drug trade, prostitution, pornography, and trafficking. As a result, statistics and information on children's work in general are reported in this section. Such statistics and information may or may not include the worst forms of child labor. For more information on the definition of working children and other indicators used in this report, please see the "Data Sources and Definitions" section of this report.

<sup>4244</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices- 2004: Sierra Leone*, Washington, D.C., February 28, 2005, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41626.htm>.

<sup>4245</sup> Ibid. Section 6d.

<sup>4246</sup> Ibid. Section 5.

<sup>4247</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2005: Sierra Leone*, Washington, D.C., June 2005, 192; available from <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/47255.pdf>.

<sup>4248</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Sierra Leone*, Section 5. See also *Supplement to the Sierra Leone Gazette Vol. CXXV, No. 19; dated 1st April, 2004; The Education Act, 2004*; available from [http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia/3\\_strat/3\\_3/GosL\\_Act03\\_Education.pdf](http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia/3_strat/3_3/GosL_Act03_Education.pdf). See also Inaugural Address by His Excellency Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, First Session of the First Parliament of the Third Republic, July 12, 2002; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/kabbah071202.html>. See also Government of Sierra Leone, *Letter of Intent and Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies*, Freetown, August 12, 2002, para 5; available from <http://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/2002/sle/02/index.htm>. See also Women's Commission for refugee women and children, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, New York, February 2004, 62; available from [http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/Ed\\_Emerg.pdf](http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/Ed_Emerg.pdf).

<sup>4249</sup> UCM analysis of ILO SIMPOC, UNICEF MICS, and World Bank surveys, *Child Economic Activity and School Attendance Rates*, October 7, 2005.

<sup>4250</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports-2004: Sierra Leone*, Section 5.

<sup>4251</sup> Women's Commission for refugee women and children, *Global Survey- 2004*, 62 and 64. See also International Monetary Fund, *Sierra Leone: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, Washington, D.C., June 2005, para 333; available from <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2005/cr05191.pdf>.

## Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The official minimum age for employment in Sierra Leone is 18. However, children between the ages of 12 and 18 may perform work in certain non-hazardous occupations, provided that they have parental consent.<sup>4252</sup>

The worst forms of child labor may be prosecuted under different statutes in Sierra Leone. The use of forced and bonded labor, including children, is prohibited by the Constitution.<sup>4253</sup> The “Prevention of Cruelty to Children” section of the Laws of Sierra Leone prohibits commercial sexual exploitation of children and defines a child as a person under the age of 16. For any person over the age of 16, procuring a woman or girl for prostitution is punishable by up to 2 years in prison, and soliciting of prostitution is punishable by fine.<sup>4254</sup> The Anti-Human Trafficking Act, enacted in August 2005, defines human trafficking as an offense and criminalizes all forms of human trafficking.<sup>4255</sup> The Sierra Leone Forces Act of 1961 prohibits any person under the age of 17 and a half from enlisting in the armed forces.<sup>4256</sup>

The Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Industrial Relations is charged with administering existing labor laws and preventing the worst forms of child labor.<sup>4257</sup> The Ministry of Mineral Resources enforces prohibitions against the use of child labor in mining activities.<sup>4258</sup> The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs advocates for the rights and welfare of children. According to the U.S. Department of State, the government lacks the resources to enforce existing labor laws or provide children with a basic education.<sup>4259</sup>

## Current Government Policies and Programs to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor

In the area of trafficking, the government convened a legislative working group and approved comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation.<sup>4260</sup> The Sierra Leone Police host biweekly meetings of the Trafficking in Persons Action Committee and are working to coordinate anti-trafficking measures throughout the country.<sup>4261</sup>

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<sup>4252</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2003: Sierra Leone*, Washington, D.C., February 25 2004, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27750.htm>.

<sup>4253</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Sierra Leone*, Section 6c.

<sup>4254</sup> Government of Sierra Leone, *Prevention of Cruelty to Children Ordinance*, 1926 [cited July 1, 2005]; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/preventionofcrueltytochildren.html>.

<sup>4255</sup> UNICEF, *Sierra Leone Signs Anti-Trafficking Act*, UNICEF, [online] n.d. [cited September 23, 2005]; available from [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_28011.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_28011.html).

<sup>4256</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers Global Report 2004*, London, March 2004, 96; available from [http://www.child-soldiers.org/document\\_get.php?id=966](http://www.child-soldiers.org/document_get.php?id=966).

<sup>4257</sup> Government of Sierra Leone, *MLSSIR State of the Nation Report*, Freetown, August 14, 2003, 1; available from [http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia/5\\_gov/5\\_2/MLIRSS/MLIRSS\\_state\\_of\\_nation.pdf](http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia/5_gov/5_2/MLIRSS/MLIRSS_state_of_nation.pdf).

<sup>4258</sup> Government of Sierra Leone, *Core Mineral Policy*, Freetown, November 2003, 8; available from [http://www.mmr-sl.org/1\\_acts/SL\\_core\\_policy\\_Nov03.pdf](http://www.mmr-sl.org/1_acts/SL_core_policy_Nov03.pdf). See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Sierra Leone*, Section 6d.

<sup>4259</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Sierra Leone*, Sections 5 and 6d.

<sup>4260</sup> UNICEF, *Sierra Leone Signs Anti-Trafficking Act*.

<sup>4261</sup> *Ibid.* See also U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report: Sierra Leone*, 193.

The government finalized a poverty reduction strategy in 2005, in collaboration with the IMF and the World Bank that emphasizes expanding access to basic education, improving teacher education, improving the learning environment, and improving capacity in the education sector.<sup>4262</sup>

USAID is implementing a scholarship program that will award 3,000 scholarships to primary school girls. The program, which is part of the African Education Initiative announced by President George Bush in 2002, focuses on improving girls' retention and completion of primary education.<sup>4263</sup> The World Bank is implementing a program to assist schools to achieve a basic operational level and build the capacity of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to plan and manage the delivery of education services.<sup>4264</sup> UNICEF is engaged in projects to renovate schools, distribute teaching materials and equipment, retrain teachers, and promote girls' education.<sup>4265</sup>

The U.S. Department of State awarded UNICEF a grant in 2005 to conduct a nationwide public awareness campaign against human trafficking that targets children.<sup>4266</sup> USDOL awarded the International Rescue Committee a USD 6 million grant in September 2005 to implement a Child Labor Education Initiative project in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and is working in collaboration with the Government of Sierra Leone.<sup>4267</sup>

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments	
Ratified Convention 138	
Ratified Convention 182	
ILO-IPEC Member	
National Plan for Children	✓
National Child Labor Action Plan	
Sector Action Plan	

<sup>4262</sup> International Monetary Fund, *Sierra Leone: Poverty Reduction Strategy*, para 331.

<sup>4263</sup> USAID, *Girls' scholarship program begins in Sierra Leone*, Relief Web, [online] n.d. 2005 [cited July 1, 2005]; available from <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/EGUA-6DMRAU?OpenDocument>.

<sup>4264</sup> World Bank Projects Database, *Sierra Leone- Rehabilitation of Basic Education Project*; accessed September 26, 2005, July 1; available from <http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?pagePK=64312881&piPK=64302848&theSitePK=40941&Projectid=P074320>.

<sup>4265</sup> UNICEF, *At a glance: Sierra Leone*, UNICEF, [online] n.d. [cited July 15, 2005]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone.html>.

<sup>4266</sup> U.S. Department of State, *United States Government Funds Obligated in FY 2005 for Anti-Trafficking in Persons Projects*, Washington, D.C., 2006; available from <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/65484.pdf>.

<sup>4267</sup> The IRC project aims to improve quality and access to basic and vocational education for children who are working or are at risk of working in the worst forms of child labor. *Notice of Award: Cooperative Agreement*, U.S. Department of Labor/International Rescue Committee, Washington, D.C., September 28, 2005, 1-2.