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Committee on the Rights of the Child

Combined sixth and seventh periodic reports submitted by Sierra Leone under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2023^{*}, ^{}**

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

** The present document was submitted pursuant to the simplified reporting procedure. It contains the responses of the State Party to the Committee's list of issues prior to reporting ([CRC/C/SLE/QPR/6-7](#)).



Replies to the list of issues prior to submission of the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Sierra Leone (CRC/C/SLE/QPR/6-7)

Introduction

1. As part of its reporting obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Government of Sierra Leone submits relevant responses to the list of issues concerning its combined sixth and seventh periodic reports. This report presents a frank and comprehensive overview of the rights, well-being, and welfare of children in Sierra Leone. The State Party welcomes dialogue on the information provided to advance the fundamental enjoyment of human rights by children. It also incorporates recommendations from the Committee's concluding observations on the third to fifth periodic reports, adopted on November 1, 2016.

I. New developments

A. Legislative and policy reforms

2. Sierra Leone remains committed to strengthening child protection laws and policies. The Child Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2024 is expected to be tabled in Parliament following extensive national and regional consultations with child protection stakeholders, including children. Upon enactment, the Child Rights (Amendment) Act, 2024 will provide a robust legal framework addressing child justice and prohibiting female genital mutilation (FGM) and corporal punishment in all settings.

3. Additional legislative advancements include amendments to key laws:

- (a) Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (amended in 2019);
- (b) Cyber Security and Crime Act, 2021;
- (c) Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act, 2022;
- (d) Overseas Employment and Migration Workers Act, 2023.

4. The government has also implemented several strategic frameworks to protect and promote children's rights, including:

- (a) Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (2022–2024);
- (b) National Strategy for Addressing Issues of Children in Street Situations;
- (c) Education Sector Plan (2022–2026);
- (d) Policy on Radical Inclusion (2021);
- (e) National Migration Policy (2022);
- (f) Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Social Welfare (2024–2028);
- (g) Strategic Plan of the National Commission for Children (2024–2028);
- (h) National Medium-Term Development Plan (2024–2030), aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

B. COVID-19 response measures for women and children

5. To mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs expanded its capacity by assigning Gender Experts to the Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance Unit of the National COVID-19 Emergency Response

Centre (NaCOVERC). Their roles included supporting gender-specific data collection and analysis, mainstreaming gender considerations, and integrating programmatic indicators into COVID-19 response mechanisms.

6. Further initiatives included:

(a) Establishment of an Education Emergency Taskforce (EET) by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to counter disruptions in learning;

(b) Collaboration between the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, UNICEF, and the National COVID-19 Secretariat to develop and disseminate key awareness messages addressing adolescent pregnancy, child marriage, gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy, and child protection. These were integrated into national COVID-19 campaign efforts.

C. Justice system response during COVID-19

7. In alignment with the April 8, 2020, statement by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the government implemented policies to prevent the detention of children during the pandemic. Additional efforts included:

(a) Enhanced education outreach through electronic and social media;

(b) Deployment of social workers to locked-down communities, ensuring psychosocial support for children;

(c) A commitment from the justice system to fast-track trials and facilitate early release of eligible detainees.

II. Rights under the Convention and the optional protocols thereto

A. General measures of implementation (articles 4, 42, and 44(6))

Legislation

8. Sierra Leone remains fully committed to integrating the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law, including national legislation and customary law. The Child Rights Act (CRA) 2007 is undergoing amendment to strengthen child protection by addressing legislative gaps and harmonizing national laws. The proposed Child Rights (Amendment) Act, 2024, expected to be tabled in Parliament, aims to enhance protections against violence, abuse, harmful traditional practices, and child marriage, thereby reinforcing children's fundamental rights.

9. Key legislative amendments include:

(a) Strengthening child justice, including provisions for diversion and alternative sentencing;

(b) Clarifying the age of criminal responsibility – set at 14 years under the CRA (2007). 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 (Amendment) Act, 2024 seeks to address this issue.

Comprehensive policy and coordination

10. Sierra Leone plans to review National Policies on Child Welfare, Alternative Care, 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.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. The National Commission for Children (NCC), established under Section 4(1) of the Child Rights Act (2007), plays 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 complaints mechanism for reporting violations.

Allocation of resources

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

- (a) Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs (MoGCA);
- (b) Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW);
- (c) Ministry of Health (MoH);
- (d) Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation (MoWRS);
- (e) Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE).

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

- (a) 30% of the payroll budget;
- (b) 2% of the recurrent government budget (goods and services);
- (c) 16% of the capital budget.

17. 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.

18. A Citizen’s Budget ensures that children’s needs are prioritized in national and local budget allocations, fostering transparency in government spending.

19. 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

20. 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

21. The government supports the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2025) and 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.

22. 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

23. The Persons with Disability Act (2011) has significantly contributed to reducing stigma against children with disabilities. Key initiatives include:

- (a) Establishment of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities;
- (b) Formation of the National Steering Committee on Disability;
- (c) Creation of the Consortium on the Enhancement of Persons with Disabilities;
- (d) Development of the Committee on Special Needs Education.

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

Dissemination, awareness-raising, and training

25. 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.

26. 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.

B. Definition of the child

27. The Child Rights Bill, 2024 seeks to prohibit child marriage and once enacted, will repeal the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act. This legislative reform aims to strengthen protections against early marriage, ensuring children's fundamental rights are upheld.

C. General principles (Articles 2–3, 6, and 12)**Non-discrimination**

28. Sierra Leone prohibits all forms of discrimination, as outlined in Section 27(1) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone Act No. 6, 1991. National policies in education, health, and social services are designed to be inclusive and non-discriminatory. However, challenges persist in ensuring full accessibility for persons with disabilities due to financial and human resource constraints.

29. A 2024 report by the Institute for Governance Reform (IGR) on the status of education in Sierra Leone (2023) confirms positive outcomes from the implementation of the Radical Inclusion Policy by the government and its partners. Findings include:

- (a) 79% of schools have successfully introduced “inclusion champions” and support groups for marginalized students;
- (b) 84% of pregnant girls and child-mothers have returned to school and now receive equal treatment;
- (c) 85% of leadership programs promote girls’ confidence and empowerment;
- (d) 66% of children with disabilities receive additional support from the government.

30. These are significant strides toward ensuring educational access for previously marginalized children.

31. Additionally, the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage (2018–2022) has contributed to a notable decline in child marriage:

- (a) Child marriage before age 18 decreased from 51% (1994) to 30% (2019);
- (b) Child marriage before age 15 fell from 21% (1994) to 9% (2019).

32. A new strategy cycle is currently under development to further reduce adolescent pregnancy and early marriage.

Best interests of the child

33. The best interests of the child principle is embedded in key legislation, including the Child Rights Act (2007) and the proposed Child Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2024. This principle is also applied in judicial and administrative decisions, particularly in case management and educational reforms (e.g., the Radical Inclusion Policy).

34. Efforts to strengthen child protection include:

- (a) Development of a National Child Safeguarding Mechanism to ensure ongoing welfare and protection;
- (b) Establishment of the Sexual Model Court, created under the leadership of the Chief Justice, to provide justice in a child-friendly environment;
- (c) Implementation of sentencing guidelines for children to uphold fairness and legal safeguards.

Respect for the views of the child

35. The National Policy on Positive Parenting promotes child participation at the family level. Furthermore, child representation is ensured through:

- (a) Child Welfare Committees established at the community level across the country;
- (b) 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.

36. The Board of the National Commission for Children includes:

- (a) One male and one female representative from the Children’s Forum Network (CFN);
- (b) One male and one female parent representative.

37. These mechanisms ensure children’s voices are heard in matters affecting their rights and development.

D. Civil rights and freedoms

Birth registration

38. 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.

39. 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.

40. 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.

41. 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.

42. 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.

E. Violence against children (Articles 19, 24(3), 28(2), 34, 37(a), and 39)

Freedom of the child from all forms of violence

Legislative and policy framework

43. 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:

- (a) Domestic Violence Act, 2007;
- (b) Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019;
- (c) Child Rights Act, 2007;
- (d) Basic and Senior Education Act, 2023;
- (e) Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, 1926;
- (f) Anti-Human Trafficking, Migrant, and Smuggling Act, 2022;
- (g) Disability Act, 2011
- (h) National Strategy for Addressing Issues of Children in Street Situations;
- (i) National Policy on Alternative Care (2014);
- (j) National Policy on Child Welfare (2014);
- (k) Children's Forum Network (CFN), serving as a national platform for child advocacy;
- (l) National strategy on positive parenting educational programme;
- (m) Code of conduct for teachers;
- (n) National policy on interim care centres and facilities.

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

School safety and protection from corporal punishment

45. 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.

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

47. 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.

48. 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.

Reporting mechanisms and child protection measures

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

- 8060 Hotline.
- 116 Hotline.

50. 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

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

52. Specialized support services include:

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

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

COVID-19 and allegations of security force violence

54. 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.

55. 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

56. 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.

57. To resolve inconsistencies, the Child Rights Bill, 2024 proposes:

(a) Repealing provisions in the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act (2009) that legalize customary marriage with parental consent for persons under 16 years;

(b) Establishing 18 years as the statutory minimum age for marriage with clear penalties for violations;

(c) 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.

58. 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

59. 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.

60. Additional data systems include:

(a) Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS);

(b) Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS);

(c) GBVIMS+, piloted in three districts.

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

Reporting and referral mechanisms

62. 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

63. 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 for survivors

64. 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:

- (a) Psychosocial counselling by trained professionals;
- (b) Legal assistance provided by assigned police officers;
- (c) Medical support for survivors;
- (d) Age-appropriate psychosocial care tailored to children.

65. Currently, 14 OSCs 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

66. 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:

- (a) Safe child-friendly accommodation;
- (b) Post-rape counselling;
- (c) Social reintegration programs.

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

Investigation and legal action against sexual violence

68. 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.

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

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

70. 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

71. 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:

- (a) Case Management Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs);
- (b) Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS);
- (c) Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS+).

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

73. 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

74. 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:

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

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

National campaign against sexual and gender-based violence

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

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

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

- (a) Paramount chiefs and traditional leaders;
- (b) Government institutions;
- (c) Civil society organizations (CSOs);
- (d) Girls and youth advocacy groups.

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

Harmful practices

Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

79. The Child Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which is set to be tabled in Parliament for passage, explicitly prohibits and criminalizes Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). 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

80. 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.

81. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2024, once passed, will 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.

82. 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.

F. Family environment and alternative care (Articles 5, 9–11, 18(1)– (2), 20–21, 25, and 27(4))

Children deprived of a family environment and adoption

Residential care and alternative care policy review

83. 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:

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

84. 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

85. 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:

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

86. 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

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

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

Child adoption legal framework

88. 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:

- (a) Section 108 of the Child Rights Act, 2007;
- (b) Part X (Sections 53, 54, and 55) of the National Civil Registration Act, 2016.

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

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

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

Ongoing review of adoption legislation

91. The 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.

92. 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

93. Adoption procedures in Sierra Leone are overseen by:

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

94. These entities collaborate with additional agencies, including:

- (a) Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- (b) Family Support Unit;
- (c) Anti-Human Trafficking Unit;
- (d) Transnational Organized Crime Unit;
- (e) Interim Care Centres (ICCs);
- (f) Local Councils.

95. 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

96. 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

97. Prospective adoptive parents must undergo:

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

Fostering and custody requirements

98. According to Section 4(a) and (b) of the Adoption Act, 1989 and Section 108 of the Child Rights Act, 2007:

- (a) An adoption order cannot be granted unless the applicant and the child reside in Sierra Leone;
- (b) 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

99. 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

100. 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:

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

101. Inter-country adoptions require strict oversight, including:

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

Adoption registration and documentation

102. All adoption orders granted by the High Court of Sierra Leone must be registered with:

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

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

Post-adoption monitoring and support

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

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

G. Children with disabilities (Article 23)

Data collection and institutional mechanisms

105. The Government of Sierra Leone has strengthened data collection and analysis related to disability, particularly concerning children with disabilities. Key initiatives include:

- (a) Implementation of the Washington group questions on disability during the 2015 census, enhancing data collection accuracy;

(b) Standalone focus on disability incorporated into the 2021 mid-term census, improving monitoring and reporting;

(c) National efforts led by the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), ensuring access to education for children with disabilities through school censuses.

106. Additionally, Sierra Leone has made progress in combating stigma through coherent institutional mechanisms, including:

(a) The Persons with Disability Act, 2011;

(b) Establishment of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, which has contributed significantly to addressing stigma and ensuring inclusion.

Social protection initiatives for children with disabilities

107. Social welfare programs have expanded to provide financial and social support to children with disabilities and their families. Key interventions include:

(a) Cash Transfer Program by the National Commission for Social Action, extending coverage to families of children with disabilities;

(b) Social Safety Net Programme, implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, prioritizing support for families of children with disabilities;

(c) Radical Inclusion Policy and Free Quality School Education Programme, ensuring educational access for all children, including those with disabilities;

(d) School mentoring program, where English and Mathematics teachers observe classes to identify students with difficulties, impairments, and disabilities using a new disability checklist.

108. To enhance learning accessibility, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) has initiated:

(a) Medical screenings for visual impairment in Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) nationwide;

(b) Provision of assistive devices, including glasses and solar lamps, to support students with mild and moderate visual impairments in school and at home;

(c) Distribution of assistive tools to 2,270 visually impaired children, with plans to extend interventions to Senior Secondary Schools (SSS).

Learning resources and assistive technology for visually impaired students

109. The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) continues efforts to ensure accessible learning materials for visually impaired students, including:

(a) English handbooks in braille, distributed to visually impaired pupils and students;

(b) Voice recorders, enabling students to record and playback lessons across subjects;

(c) Distribution of voice recorders to personnel at six national special needs schools for the visually impaired.

110. Since the adoption of the Radical Inclusion Policy, budgetary and technical support from both the government and donor partners has significantly increased. Over the past three years, this funding has facilitated:

(a) Recruitment and training of more teachers;

(b) Construction of additional classrooms, improving learning environments.

Accessibility and infrastructure improvements

111. The Ministry of Works and Public Assets is actively implementing legislation on accessibility and reasonable accommodation, ensuring that new facilities incorporate:

- (a) Ramps for mobility access;
- (b) Wide doors for easier navigation.

112. These accessibility standards apply to the construction of educational, healthcare, and other essential facilities.

113. To promote awareness, the Ministry of Social Welfare and the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities have organized media engagements addressing reasonable accommodation concerns.

114. Additionally, in 2018, an accessibility audit—conducted by the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD), and other partners—assessed the status of public buildings. The audit report was shared with relevant authorities, accompanied by recommendations for modifications within a specified period to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities.

H. Basic health and welfare (Articles 6, 18(3), 24, 26, 27(1)–(3), and 33)

Health and health services

Health policies and strategies

115. The National Policy on Health and Sanitation (2021) and the National Health Sector Strategy (NHSS) 2021–2025 aim to:

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

116. Other key policy documents include:

- (a) School health policy (2021);
- (b) Sierra Leone health information system policy (2021);
- (c) Reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health strategy (2017–2021).

Reduction in child and infant mortality

117. 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:

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

118. 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.

119. Of the 5,608 stillbirths reported:

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

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

Free health care initiative and infant mortality reduction

121. 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.

122. 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.

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

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

Implementation of universal health coverage (UHC) road map (2021–2030)

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

- (a) Construction of district hospital laboratories;
- (b) Procurement of laboratory equipment;
- (c) Operationalizing the Sierra Leone Social Health Insurance (SLeSHI) scheme to provide healthcare coverage for all citizens;
- (d) 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.
- (e) Strengthening the Health Management Information System (HMIS) to provide quality healthcare data for informed decision-making;
- (f) Increasing childhood vaccinations (ages 12–23 months) for tuberculosis, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, and measles;
- (g) Provision of cost-recovery drugs, ensuring accessibility nationwide.

Expansion of healthcare workforce

125. The government has significantly improved employment in the healthcare sector. From 2018 to 2020:

- (a) 4,000 health workers were employed;
- (b) Plans are in place to employ an additional 3,000 healthcare workers.

126. 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

127. The Secretariat for HIV Prevention developed:

- (a) Guidelines for integrating mother-to-child HIV transmission elimination into RMNCAH, TB, and Nutrition programs;

- (b) 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.

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

Pluralistic health service delivery model

129. Sierra Leone's health system is pluralistic, involving:

- (a) Government institutions;
- (b) Private healthcare providers;
- (c) Local and international NGOs;
- (d) Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs);
- (e) Traditional medicine practitioners.

130. Healthcare services are delivered at three levels:

- (a) 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.
- (b) Secondary health care – provided at district and non-governmental hospitals;
- (c) Tertiary health care – offered at regional hospitals and specialized non-governmental institutions.

Increased budget allocation for healthcare

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

132. 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.

133. 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

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

- (a) Children (ages 6–59 months);
- (b) Adolescent girls (ages 10–14 and 15–19);
- (c) Adolescent boys (ages 10–19);
- (d) Women of reproductive age (15–49).

135. The survey also evaluated contributing factors, including:

- (a) Infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices;

- (b) Dietary diversity and meal frequency;
- (c) Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) conditions.

UHC Road map 2020–2030 and child healthcare expansion

136. The UHC Road Map (2020–2030) aims to expand free health care for children, ensuring better health outcomes:

- (a) The National Health Policy (2021) and National Health Sector Strategic Plan (2021) were launched to guide health program implementation;
- (b) A Health Financing Strategy was introduced to enhance Free Health Care and improve health equity;
- (c) 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

137. 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.

138. 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

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

Adolescent sexual and reproductive health programme

140. 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.

141. Key aspects include:

- (a) Free contraceptive methods provided to all individuals, regardless of age, across government institutions;
- (b) Post-abortion care services available to all;
- (c) 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

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

143. CSE is integrated into the following seven subjects:

- (a) Language Arts;
- (b) Social Studies;
- (c) Integrated Sciences;
- (d) Religious Moral Education;
- (e) Home Economics;

- (f) Practical Arts;
- (g) Physical Health Education.

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

- (a) Linking schools with adolescent sexual health services;
- (b) Teacher training;
- (c) Community engagement;
- (d) Monitoring and research;
- (e) Curriculum development;
- (f) Communications strategies.

Adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health hubs

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

- (a) Free sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services;
- (b) Family planning services and counselling;
- (c) Sexually transmitted infection (STI) treatment;
- (d) Community outreach on gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and referral services for survivors.

Efforts to eradicate female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage

146. Sierra Leone remains committed to eliminating FGM and child marriage nationwide. In the build-up to the passing of the Child Rights Act of 2025, efforts were intensified to:

- (a) Conduct district and regional consultative meetings with Paramount Chiefs, Soweis, and Religious Leaders;
- (b) Secure a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the abolition of child FGM;
- (c) Develop alternative sources of income for FGM practitioners to encourage them to abandon the practice;
- (d) Harmonize laws preventing child marriage and strengthen awareness campaigns on its negative consequences;
- (e) 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;
- (f) 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.

Tobacco control and adolescent health risks

147. The School Health Policy addresses tobacco-related health risks among adolescents and young people. Supported by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Ministry of Health facilitated the enactment of the Tobacco and Nicotine Control Act, 2022, which regulates:

- (a) Production, manufacturing, importation, and sale of tobacco and nicotine products;
- (b) Packaging and labelling requirements to promote public health awareness.

Substance abuse emergency and mental health services

148. Recognizing the rising abuse of synthetic drugs such as kush, the government declared a national emergency on substance abuse. A specialized unit was established within the Ministry of Social Welfare to:

- (a) Provide psychological support for adolescents, young people, and families at risk;
- (b) Address mental health challenges associated with substance abuse.

149. Additionally, the Directorate of Non-Communicable Diseases and Mental Health was created within the Ministry of Health, overseeing national mental health initiatives and coordinating with partner organizations.

Impact of climate change

150. Sierra Leone has developed a robust framework of policies, strategies, and legal instruments to safeguard the environment, protect livelihoods, and ensure the wellbeing of residents. These include:

- (a) Land and Environmental Protection:
 - (i) National Lands Policy (2015);
 - (ii) Sierra Leone Environmental Protection Act (2008, 2010, 2022);
 - (iii) National Environmental Policy (1994, Revised Edition).
- (b) Forestry and Wildlife Conservation:
 - (i) Forestry Act (1988);
 - (ii) National Forestry Policy (2010);
 - (iii) Wildlife Conservation Amendment Act (1990);
 - (iv) National Protected Area Authority & Conservation Trust Fund Act (2022).
- (c) Disaster Management and Climate Adaptation:
 - (i) National Disaster Management Agency Act (2020);
 - (ii) National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan (2003);
 - (iii) Water Resources Management Act (2017);
 - (iv) National Policy on Development-Induced Resettlement (2021);
 - (v) Establishment of a National Sea-Level Observing System.

151. To address deforestation and promote sustainable forestry, Sierra Leone enforces strict regulations against illegal logging while supporting reforestation initiatives, eco-tourism, and agroforestry as alternative livelihood strategies.

152. Climate adaptation projects include urban growth planning, coastal ecosystem preservation, and disaster preparedness, implemented through the National Disaster Management Agency-Sierra Leone (NDMA-SL).

Standard of living and social protection

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

154. Poverty Reduction & Youth Employment:

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

155. 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.

156. Medium-term national development plan (Targets by 2023):

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

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

158. It incorporates three pillars of social protection:

- (a) Social Insurance (for formal workers);
- (b) Social Assistance (for the extreme poor);
- (c) Traditional Social Protection (community-based systems).

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

I. Education, leisure, and cultural activities (Articles 28–31)

Education, rest, leisure, recreation, and cultural & artistic activities

160. 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.

161. The purpose of the FQSE is to ensure free quality basic and senior secondary education for all children. Key components include:

- (a) Free admission to government and government-assisted schools;
- (b) Free basic school materials;
- (c) Expansion of the school feeding programme;
- (d) Introduction of a national school bus system;
- (e) Increasing the number of trained and qualified teachers;
- (f) Phasing out the two-shift system in urban schools to allow longer school hours.

162. 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.

163. The Teachers' Code of Conduct strictly prohibits teachers from charging extra fees for lessons.

164. 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.

165. 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.

166. 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.

(a) Unapproved schools, which represent 50% of schools in Western Area and 65% in Northern districts, charge fees and often employ fewer qualified teachers;

(b) Additional costs – such as transportation, uniforms, and personal learning materials – are prohibitive for families in poverty.

167. 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.

168. 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

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

(a) These programmes increase enrolment and reduce absenteeism;

(b) They enhance learning by preventing hunger and improving cognitive abilities.

170. 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

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

172. 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.

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

Asylum-seeking, refugee, and migrant children

173. 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.

174. 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.

175. 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.

176. 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.

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

- (a) Implementing the National Action Plan on Statelessness, aiming to regularize 80% of persons at risk of statelessness by 2026;
- (b) Increasing access to social rights and documentation for at least 1,500 individuals by 2026;
- (c) Mobilizing funding for ninety-three socio-economic infrastructure projects in nineteen refugee host communities through the Tenki Salon project (2024–2026);
- (d) 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

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

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

179. The National Plan of Action On The Worst Forms Of Child Labour promotes:

- (a) Awareness campaigns;
- (b) Enforcement of child labour laws;
- (c) Social protection schemes;
- (d) Integration and rehabilitation programs.

180. 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:

- (a) Prevention through awareness campaigns;
- (b) Strict enforcement of laws;
- (c) Institutional coordination for lasting solutions.

181. 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

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

- (a) Prohibition of child sexual exploitation in tourism;
- (b) Prevention of fraudulent adoption;
- (c) Criminalization of cross-border trafficking for sexual and labor exploitation.

183. 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.

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

- (a) 45.7% of children in Kono;
- (b) 32.9% of children in Kailahun;
- (c) 26.6% of children in Kenema.

185. 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.

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

187. 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.

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

189. 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.

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

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

191. 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.

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

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

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

- (a) A decline in the number of trafficking investigations;
- (b) Inadequate shelter and victim services, with support primarily limited to Freetown;

- (c) No reported government funding to support NGOs providing victim shelter and services.

K. Implementation of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography

Strengthening the legal framework

194. Sierra Leone has made significant strides in implementing the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (OPSC) by developing a robust legal framework. Key legislations include the Sexual Offences Act (2012, amended 2019), the Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling Act (2022), and the Cyber Security and Crime Act (2021), which address crimes related to OPSC.

195. The Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling Act (2022) comprehensively defines crimes related to the sale of children, including offering, delivering, or accepting a child for sexual exploitation, organ trafficking for profit, forced labor, and improper adoption practices that violate the OPSC. Additionally, the government is reviewing the Adoption Act (1989) to align adoption procedures with the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption.

Strengthening monitoring and awareness

196. In response to the 2010 UNCRC Committee's Concluding Observations, the government has included provisions in the Child Rights Bill (2022) to expand the mandate of the National Commission for Children. The Commission will monitor and investigate child rights violations, receive communications from children in accordance with the Paris Principles and OP3, and will be equipped with adequate staff and resources. The Government and its partners continue to conduct awareness-raising programs on crimes related to OPSC.

Regional and international cooperation

197. Sierra Leone has ratified regional conventions to bolster its legal framework, including the 1994 ECOWAS Convention on Extradition and the 1992 ECOWAS Convention on Judicial Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters. The Criminal Procedures Act (2024) aligns with extradition procedures outlined in the ECOWAS Convention.

Support mechanisms for victims

198. The government has established comprehensive support mechanisms to facilitate access to justice, rehabilitation, and reintegration services for victims. These include:

- (a) Case management systems and clear referral pathways;
- (b) Toll-free helplines;
- (c) One-Stop Centres providing free medical and psychosocial services;
- (d) Safe homes for victims of sexual violence and trafficking, managed by NGO partners.

Combating online exploitation

199. The Ministry of Information and the National Cyber-Security Coordination Centre have led information sessions on child pornography and facilitated the implementation of the Cyber Security and Crime Act.

200. Additionally, the Ministry of Information and Civic Education, alongside the National Cyber-Security Coordination Centre, continues to raise awareness on online abuse issues, strengthening national efforts against child exploitation.

L. Implementation of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict

201. The State Party confirms that, during the reporting period, there have been no recorded instances of children being recruited or involved in armed conflict in Sierra Leone.

III. Statistical information and data

202. 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.

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

- (a) JSS3: 358 students (28%);
- (b) JSS2: 212 students (17%);
- (c) Class 4: 6 students (0.5%) (the lowest reported figure).

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

- (a) Class 6 for primary school;
- (b) JSS3 for junior secondary school;
- (c) SSS3 for senior secondary school.

205. The reported mean ages of pregnant schoolgirls were:

- (a) Primary: 15 years;
- (b) JSS: 17 years;
- (c) SSS: 19 years.

206. The minimum ages of pregnant girls recorded were:

- (a) Primary: 12 years;
- (b) JSS: 12 years;
- (c) SSS: 14 years.

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

- (a) Teaching workforce: Only 28% were women;
- (b) Health professionals: 61% were women;
- (c) Overall employed population: 53% were women.

208. 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.

209. 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.

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- (b) JSS: 12 years;
- (c) SSS: 14 years.

215. Teacher gender distribution.

216. 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

<i>School Level</i>	<i>Female Teachers</i>	<i>Male Teachers</i>
Pre-Primary	5 408	879
Primary	13 692	30 055
Junior Secondary	3 398	16 637
Senior Secondary	1 002	9 722

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

Progress in Nutrition

217. 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).

Table 2: Key nutrition indicators (2021–2023)

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>
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%)

Table 3: SLNNS Nutrition indicators (2014–2021)

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2021</i>
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

218. 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

<i>Disability Type</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Visual Impairment	92	103
Hearing Impairment	99	103
Speech Impairment	164	157
Physical Impairment	104	78
Learning Disabilities	106	93
Hunchback	4	5
Albinism	8	3
Dwarfism	7	1

Primary school – Disability distribution

<i>Disability Type</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
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).

A. General measures of implementation (Articles 4, 42, and 44(6))

219. 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:

- (a) Payroll Budget: 30%;
- (b) Other Recurrent Government Budget (Goods and Services): 2%;

- (c) Capital Budget: 16%.

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

221. In the education sector, the government has prioritized Free Quality Education, allocating 22% of the total national budget to this initiative (refer to paragraph 20 above for details).

B. General principles (Articles 2–3, 6, and 12)

222. 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.

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

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

224. 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.

C. Civil rights and freedoms (Articles 7–8 and 13–17)

225. 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.

- (a) 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;
- (b) The Completeness Rate for 2022 (52.1%) was 1% lower than in 2021;
- (c) The Total Fertility Rate (adjusted) remains around six children per woman, consistent with the 2015 Census findings;
- (d) Crude birth rate and general fertility rate have remained unchanged;
- (e) The mean age at childbearing is approximately 27 years;
- (f) 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).

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

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

227. Concerning registration of children under five years:

- (a) 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.

(b) This figure dipped to 81.1% in 2020 and 2021, rose to 84%, and later returned to 90% in 2022;

(c) Most registrations occur after hospital births, while children born at home are less likely to be registered (Apland et al., 2014).

228. Child marriage rates have declined significantly over the years:

(a) Marriage before age 18 decreased from 51% in 1994 to 30% in 2019, with the downward trend beginning in 2004;

(b) Marriage before age 15 fell from 21% in 1994 to 9% in 2019;

(c) The adolescent birth rate has declined in parallel with child marriage rates.

D. Violence against children (Articles 19, 24(3), 28(2), 34, 37(a), and 39)

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

(a) 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;

(b) 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.

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

(a) Based on 2019 DHS data, 61% of women aged 15–49 reported experiencing physical violence in their lifetime;

(b) 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.

(c) Sierra Leone continues to have one of the highest rates of physical violence in West Africa;

(d) 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%.

231. 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.

232. Legal Aid Board representation for juveniles has increased:

(a) Between 2015 and 2020, the Legal Aid Board represented 1,788 juveniles;

(b) In just the first six months of 2022, 1,136 children (976 boys, 160 girls) received legal representation – a significant increase.

233. Child victims of crimes:

(a) Family Support Units oversee child victims of offences and collect disaggregated data;

(b) 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).

234. Most common crimes against children (2019–2022):

(a) Sexual violence: 10,822 cases (196 males, 10,626 females);

(b) Physical abuse: 4,141 cases (1,747 males, 2,394 females).

235. Violence cases reported to authorities:

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

236. Out-of-court settlements:

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

237. 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.

238. Children affected by harmful practices:

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

E. Family environment and alternative care (Articles 5, 9–11, 18(1)–(2), 20–21, 25, and 27(4))

239. 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.

240. In Sierra Leone, children living in single-parent households are more likely to experience poverty:

(a) 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);

(b) Surviving spouses of individuals who previously received old-age or disability pensions are entitled to 40% of the pension;

(c) 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.

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

(a) 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.

(b) 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.

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

(a) The data does not specify the source of these transfers or the exact programs under which they fall;

(b) However, the majority of social transfers were provided in-kind, including:

- Seeds;
- Bed nets;
- Livestock.

243. 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)

244. 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:

Social transfers for households with disabilities (2019)

<i>Program</i>	<i>Total Transfers (Le)</i>
Cash for work	625 000
Cash transfers (No work)	544 781
Food for work	578 701
Food (No work)	588 471
Medicines or medical supplies	580 917
Micro-loans	592 395
Other in-kind transfers (seeds, bed nets, livestock)	1 212 819

Source: National Commission for Social Action, 2019.

245. 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:

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

Children in family-based care, residential care, and informal care

246. 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.

Distribution of children in alternative care (2022)

<i>Location/District</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
Western Area Urban	259	339	598
Western Area Rural	242	275	487

<i>Location/District</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
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	7	9	16
Kenema	47	52	99
Port Loko	88	101	189

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

F. Children with disabilities (Article 23)

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

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

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

250. 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").

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

(a) 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%.

(b) Despite these challenges, educational attainment levels between students with and without disabilities show only minor differences;

(c) In some cases, such as among boys at JSS level, children with disabilities appear to perform better academically.

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

(a) The Annual School Census (ASC) 2022 identified 44,792 pupils with disabilities enrolled at different education levels;

(b) 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).
- (c) 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%).

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

- (a) Group 1: Seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care, communication;
- (b) Group 2: Child functional difficulties such as anxiety, depression, difficulty accepting change, controlling behavior, concentration issues, and social interactions;
- (c) 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”).

G. Basic health and welfare (Articles 6, 18(3), 24, 26, 27(1)–(3), and 33)

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

- (a) 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.
- (b) 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.
- (c) 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).

255. 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).
256. 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.
257. 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:
- (a) On average, children receive food from only two of six major food groups;
 - (b) Consumption of legumes, nuts, pulses, dairy, fruits, and vegetables is low;
 - (c) Food insecurity, cultural beliefs, and dietary taboos further restrict access to nutritious foods, particularly during the nine-month rainy season.
258. The Government of Sierra Leone has prioritized nutrition as part of its key development agenda, incorporating it into:
- (a) Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plans (2019–2023 & 2024–2030);
 - (b) Multi-Sectoral Plan for the Reduction of Malnutrition;
 - (c) Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement;
259. According to the 2019 DHS survey and WFP Survey 2023:
- (a) Stunting among children under five decreased from 38% in 2013 to 23% in 2023;
 - (b) Wasting decreased from 9% to 5%;
 - (c) Underweight prevalence declined from 16% to 14%;
 - (d) Exclusive breastfeeding for children under six months increased by 30% from 2013 to 2019;
 - (e) Breastfeeding for children aged 6–23 months increased from 7% to 9%;
 - (f) Anemia among children aged 6–59 months reduced from 80% in 2013 to 68% in 2019.
260. 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.
261. Vaccination coverage among children aged 12–35 months:
- (a) 56% of children (12–23 months) and 51% (24–35 months) received all basic vaccinations;
 - (b) 49% (12–23 months) and 40% (24–35 months) received all basic vaccinations by age 12 months;
 - (c) 2% (12–23 months) and 3% (24–35 months) received no vaccinations (Source: *SLDHS 2019*).
262. HIV continues to affect children and infants disproportionately:
- (a) Mother-to-child transmission prevention coverage: 69%;
 - (b) In 2022, only 4,549 out of 6,600 HIV-positive pregnant women received treatment;
 - (c) Vertical transmission rate: 15.79%, leading to nearly 1,000 infant and child deaths (under 14 years) in 2022;
 - (d) 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*).

263. 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.

H. Education, leisure, and cultural activities (Articles 28–31)

264. 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.

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

(a) Free education applies only to government-approved schools, which make up 40% of schools nationwide;

(b) Unapproved schools, which charge fees and often have fewer qualified teachers, vary in ownership:

- Faith-based institutions;
- Community-owned institutions;
- Private institutions.

(c) Regional disparities in school approval status:

- Western Area: 50% of schools are unapproved;
- Northern Districts: 65% of schools are unapproved.

(d) In many areas, the only available schooling option is an unapproved school;

(e) 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.

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

(a) 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.

(b) Poor sanitation facilities and lack of hygiene products also restrict girl's access to education, particularly during menstruation.

267. School attendance trends and out-of-school rates:

(a) 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;

(b) Late enrolment (overage students) is common;

(c) In 2018, 524,000 children were estimated to be out of school, including those with disabilities – representing 22% of children aged 6–18 years;

(d) Two-thirds of out-of-school children had never attended school, while one-third had dropped out prematurely.

Students with disabilities in schools

268. The Ministry of basic and senior secondary education (Annual school census 2021) provides the following distribution of students with disabilities across various school levels.

Percentage of students with disabilities by school level

<i>School Level</i>	<i>Percentage of children with disabilities</i>
Pre-primary	4%
Primary	60%
Junior secondary	26%
Senior secondary	10%

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

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

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

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

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

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

274. 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.

275. Child labor remains a significant concern:

(a) 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);

(b) 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.

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

(a) 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.

(b) The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated children's vulnerability, while limited identification of victims likely contributes to underreported trafficking cases;

(c) The US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report (2022) documented:

- 26 child victims of sex trafficking;
- 23 child victims of unspecified exploitation.

Child victims of trafficking cases by year

<i>Year</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
2019	13	7	20
2020	11	9	20
2021	27	21	48
2022	14	10	24
Total	65	47	112

Source: Family Support Unit (2022).

277. Government efforts to combat child labor and trafficking:

(a) The Employment Act, 2023, sections 95 and 96, provides special protection measures for children, specifically addressing child labor;

(b) Sierra Leone enacted the Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Act, 2023, aimed at protecting migrant workers and reducing human trafficking and smuggling;

(c) 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.

278. Policy advancements in 2023:

(a) 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.

(b) The Ministry of Labour issued overseas recruitment licenses to 15 Private Employment Agencies, enforcing stringent recruitment criteria.

(c) Legislative alignment:

(i) Domestic laws now comply with international standards, including:

- ILO Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age).
- ILO Convention No. 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour).

(ii) The Employment Act, 2023, further aligns minimum age for employment with international labor standards.

279. Investigations and prosecutions related to child labour:

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

280. Children in street situations:

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

281. 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.

282. Rehabilitation and reintegration services:

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

J. Optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

283. Sierra Leone continues to work on both prevention and response programmes, as it relates to both the CRC and the Optional Protocols. Based on the data from the FSU there are 1,711 reported cases involving the sale of children, sexual exploitation of children in prostitution or the use of children in pornographic performances and material.

284. There are (total of sexual offences + trafficking cases) 58% of cases that have been investigated and that have led to prosecution and sanctions. The age of victims of reported sexual offences has been a matter of concern, with an estimated 70 per cent of victims under the age of eighteen. Child victims have found it hard to access justice. Rainbo Initiative, a national NGO, reported that only 1.2 per cent of cases recorded by them in 2019 were successfully prosecuted (Rainbo Initiative, 2021).

K. Optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict

285. During the reporting period, there were no documented cases of children being involved in armed conflict in Sierra Leone:

(a) The number of children returning to Sierra Leone under this category is not available;

(b) Sierra Leone remains a champion of the Global Compact on Migration, actively collaborating with international partners, including:

- International Organization for Migration (IOM);
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

286. The State Party is committed to enhancing programming and support systems for children affected by migration and displacement. As a matter of policy, no child – including those who may have been recruited or used in hostilities – is denied essential services or assistance.
