

# Sierra Leone

## Country Overview

### Politics

Sierra Leone is a constitutional republic with a directly elected president and unicameral legislature in West Africa. In March of 2018, Julius Maada Bio, of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP), won the Presidential Election, defeating former President Ernest Bai Koroma, of the All People’s Congress (APC), by a narrow margin.<sup>1</sup> After a high court ruling in May, it was determined that the SLPP maintained a slim majority of seats in the legislature with 59 representatives while the APC seated 57 representatives.<sup>2</sup> International observers of the election regarded it as largely free and fair.<sup>3</sup>

### Economy

Sierra Leone is classified by the World Bank as a low-income country. Recently, Sierra Leone has been regarded as one of the fastest-growing sub-Saharan African countries, with a real GDP growth of 20.1 percent in 2013. This growth, however, was decimated by the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak, with the IMF estimating that the economy contracted by 24 percent.<sup>34</sup> In 2019, former President Bio enacted a medium-term National Development Plan for 2019- 2023 which focuses on improving human capital by supporting economic diversification and competitiveness in agriculture, fisheries, and tourism.<sup>45</sup> This initial five-year plan of a 20-year long-term national development plan which strives to attain middle-income status by 2039.<sup>6</sup>

Of the 132,000 people comprising the formal labor force, 61.1 percent and 33.4 percent are employed in agricultural and service sectors, respectively, but it should be noted that 90 percent of Sierra Leone’s employment occurs in the informal sector.<sup>7</sup> Key exports for the country include iron ore, wood and timber, precious metals, cocoa, and fish.<sup>8</sup> Mineral’s account for over 80 percent of exports and contributed 2.7 percent to the country’s GDP.<sup>9</sup>

### Social/Human Development

Sierra Leone suffered a civil war from 1991-2002 which resulted in the death of thousands of people and the displacement of more than two million, roughly a third of the population.<sup>10</sup> Shortly after the end of the civil war, the 2005 UN Human Development Index gave Sierra Leone the lowest score in their ranking. The Ebola epidemic in 2015 placed significant strain on Sierra Leone, making poverty a pervasive issue that still occurs in the country today.<sup>10</sup>

There are two dominant ethnic groups in the country, the Mende and Themne who compose 35 and 31 percent of the population, respectively.<sup>11</sup> Ethnic affiliations strongly influence political party



membership with mostly Mende belonging to the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) and Themne to the APC, where the two ethnic groups have historically struggled for political power.<sup>12</sup>

## U.S. Department of State TIP Report Summary (2021)

### U.S. Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 2

The *Trafficking in Persons Report* noted trafficking in potentially exported supply chains including artisanal diamond mining and granite mining, fishing, and agriculture.

Read the full TIP Report at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/sierra-leone/>

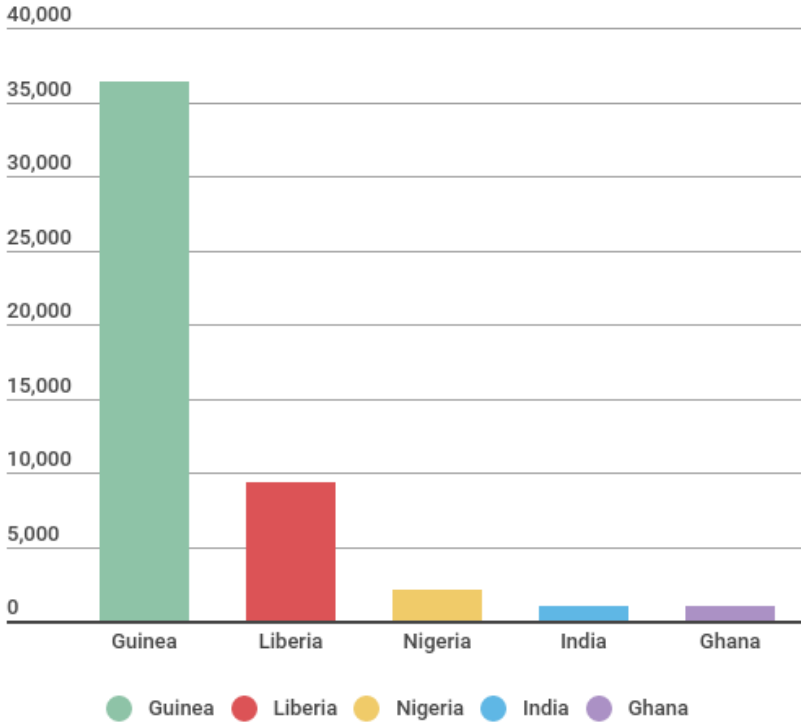
## Migrant and Other Vulnerable Populations

Sierra Leone has negative net migration and 0.7 percent of the population are migrants.<sup>13</sup> The largest source country, by far, is Guinea.<sup>14</sup> Other prevalent but less significant migrant source countries include Liberia and Nigeria.<sup>15</sup>

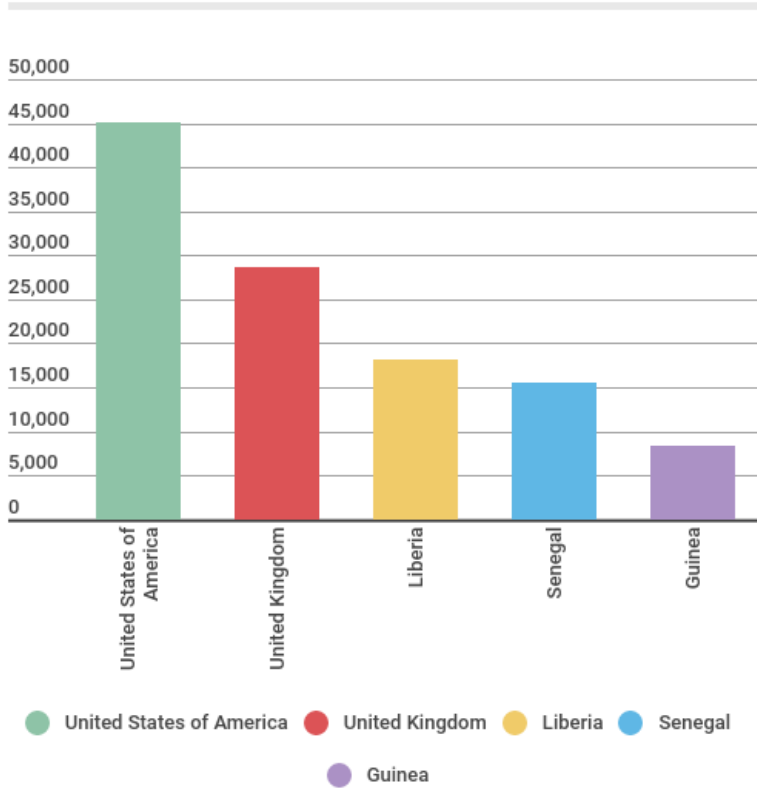
Top destination countries for migrants are the United States, the United Kingdom and Liberia.<sup>14</sup>



## Migrants to Sierra Leone



## Migrants from Sierra Leone



## Exports and Trade

Sierra Leone's top exports for 2019 include ore products, wood, semi-precious stones & metals, cocoa, and fish.<sup>17</sup>

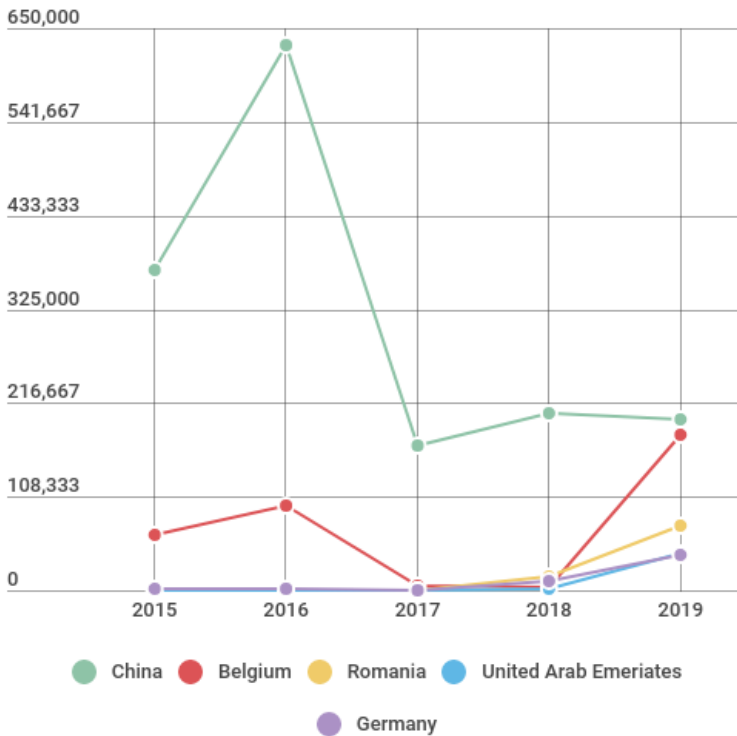
The top importers of all goods from Sierra Leone include China, Belgium, Romania, the United Arab Emirates, and Germany.<sup>18</sup>

### Top Commodity Exports (USD/Thousands)

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Sierra Leone Export Partners (USD/Thousands)



## Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors Analysis

### Legal/Policy Risk Factors

#### Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers' Rights

##### Freedom of Association

The right to freedom of association is constitutionally guaranteed, but there are no laws protecting union members from discrimination.<sup>19</sup> Workers in both public and private sectors may join independent unions of their choice without prior authorization, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The Ministry of Labor estimates that 35-40 percent of



workers in the formal economy are unionized across various sectors, including: agricultural, health and mineworkers.<sup>20</sup> Approximately 90 percent of the workforce is employed in the informal sector, predominately in the agricultural sector, where labor regulations are difficult to monitor due to a lack of adequate resources.<sup>21</sup> Protests occur frequently as workers have limited means to pursue redress through the judicial process.<sup>22</sup>

## Working Conditions

According to the U.S. Department of State *Investment Climate Statement*, the minimum wage in Sierra Leone was raised from SLL 500,000 per month to SLL 600,00 per month (approximately 60 USD) in November of 2019 and applies to both the formal and informal employment sectors.<sup>23</sup> The standard workweek is 40 hours and employers determine workhours and overtime for employers at the time of hiring. In Sierra Leone, there is no statutory definition of overtime wages to be paid and no prohibition on excessive compulsory overtime.<sup>24</sup> Violations of wage, overtime and occupational health and safety standards reportedly occur most frequently in the artisanal diamond-mining sector due to weak enforcement of labor regulations.<sup>25</sup>

## Discrimination

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, tribe, sex, place of origin, political opinion, religion, national origin, and citizenship.<sup>26</sup> However, women continue to face discriminatory practices as most of their rights are largely contingent on customary law and the ethnic group to which they belong.<sup>27</sup> Non-African residents in Sierra Leone have reportedly faced institutionalized discrimination related to citizenship and nationality.<sup>28</sup>

## Forced Labor

Under the law, all forms of forced labor are prohibited, including by children. Under a provision of the Chiefdom Councils Act, individual chiefs may impose forced labor as punishment.<sup>29</sup> Most people who are victims of forced labor are from rural provinces and are recruited to urban areas for the artisanal and granite mining industries.<sup>30</sup>

## Child Labor

The law prohibits children under the age of 13 from working in any capacity but allows for light work at age 13 and full-time nonhazardous work at 15. Hazardous work is only permitted for those 18 and older.<sup>31</sup> Children were reported to have engaged in exploitative activities across various sectors, performing tasks such as: petty trading, carrying heavy loads, breaking rocks, harvesting sand, agriculture, domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation and other tasks considered to be hazardous.<sup>31</sup>

In Sierra Leone, education is tuition free and universal at the primary level for all children, but the junior and secondary levels are exclusively free for girls as part of the government's policy to encourage female education.<sup>32</sup> Completing secondary education is not compulsory.<sup>33</sup>



## Civil Society Organizations

NGOs and CSOs operate freely in Sierra Leone, but a 2008 law requires organizations to submit annual activity reports and to renew registration every two years.<sup>34</sup>

## Ratification of ILO Conventions Related to Human Trafficking or Rights of Workers and Migrants

Conventions	Status
ILO 29 Forced Labor	In force
ILO 87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize	In force
ILO 98 Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining	In force
ILO 100 Equal Remuneration	In force
ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor	In force
ILO 111 Discrimination	In force
ILO 138 Minimum Age	In force
ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies	Not ratified
ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor	In force
ILO 97 Migration for Employment	Not ratified

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## Political Risk Factors

### Political Instability or Conflict

Sierra Leone ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> out of 178 countries on the Fragile States Index for 2020.<sup>36</sup> Aside from the Ebola outbreak, Sierra Leone has experienced peace and stability since the end of civil war in 2002 that claimed the lives of nearly 50,000 Sierra Leoneans.<sup>37</sup> Sierra Leone has peaceful relations with neighboring countries Guinea and Liberia.<sup>38</sup> Interethnic violence in parts of Guinea has resulted in internal displacement, which may be a contributing factor to migrants choosing Sierra Leone as their destination.<sup>39</sup>





## Level of Crime and Violence

The World Economic Forum's Global Competitive Index 2017-18 ranks Sierra Leone 130<sup>st</sup> out of 137 in terms of competitiveness.<sup>40</sup> Sierra Leone and Liberia were omitted from 2018-2019 data but will be included in the 2019 to 2020 data set when it becomes available.<sup>41</sup> With regard to business costs of crime and violence and business costs of organized crime, the country scored 3.7 and 4.1 respectively, where a score of seven indicates that business is not impacted at all.<sup>41</sup> Sexual and gender-based violence is persistent in Sierra Leone as there are no laws against hate crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity, sparking protests in the capital city.<sup>42</sup>

## State Persecution

Although the constitution prohibits discrimination in several areas, including race, tribe and place of origin, the constitution denies citizenship at birth to persons who are not of "Negro-African descent."<sup>43</sup> The Sierra Leone Citizenship Act 1973, as amended in 2006, only allows a Sierra Leonean woman to confer nationality to her child born abroad if the child would otherwise be stateless, yet the law permits Sierra Leonean fathers to confer their nationality on children born abroad.<sup>44</sup> It has been reported that birth registration is not universal due to outdated laws and lack of staffing resources but lack of registration reportedly does not result in statelessness.<sup>45</sup>

## Level of Corruption

Transparency International ranks Sierra Leone 117<sup>th</sup> out of 18 countries on the Corruption Perceptions Index for 2020 and its value is 33, where a score of zero indicates "Highly Corrupt" and a 100 "Very Clean".<sup>46</sup> According to the U.S. Department of State, corruption is seen as endemic and prevents economic growth as foreign investors see it as the primary obstacle to investment.<sup>47</sup> Public officials have made efforts to combat corruption through the Sierra Leone Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), which launched the "Pay no Bribe" initiative in 2016 to encourage citizens to report bribery occurring in the public sector.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, the Anti-Corruption Amendment Act of 2019 increased the ACC's enforcement power as well as increasing penalties associated with committing acts of corruption.<sup>49</sup> In 2018 and 2019, Sierra Leone passed the Millennium Challenge Corporation's Control of Corruption Indicator.<sup>50</sup>

## Socio-Economic Risk Factors

### Level of National Economic Development

Sierra Leone is scored in the low human development category, according to the UN Human Development Index, with a rank of 182 out of 189 countries and a score of 0.452 for 2019.<sup>50</sup> However, when adjusted for inequality, the HDI falls to 0.291, a loss of 34.4 percent due to inequality in the distribution of the HDI dimension indices.<sup>51</sup>



## Level and Extent of Poverty

The most recent survey data that were publicly available for Sierra Leone's multidimensional poverty index (MPI) estimation refer to 2017. In Sierra Leone, 64.8 percent of the population are multidimensionally poor.<sup>52</sup> The intensity of poverty was 58.9 percent which means that, on average, poor people experience almost 60 percent of the possible weighted deprivations considered.<sup>53</sup> Overall, Sierra Leone's MPI is 0.375.<sup>54</sup> According to UNDP 40.1 percent of the population live below the income poverty line of USD 1.90 a day.<sup>55</sup>

## Degree of Gender Inequality

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs reports that women face widespread societal discrimination in areas pertaining to marriage, divorce, property and inheritance.<sup>56</sup> Sierra Leone scores a 0.644 on the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index (GII), ranking 1552 out of 16 countries in the 2019 index.<sup>57</sup> There are disparities in educational attainment, with 20.1 percent are women compared to 33.0 percent of men having reached secondary education.<sup>58</sup> 7 Dismissal based on pregnancy is legally permitted.<sup>59</sup>

The constitution of Sierra Leone grants married and unmarried women equal ownership rights to property, but while women make up more of the population than men, they rarely have full access to land.<sup>61</sup> There is a dual system of land ownership in Sierra Leone, one based on customary laws and the other on statutory laws.<sup>62</sup> The capital of Freetown and the surrounding areas are governed by statutory law but land outside of this jurisdiction is governed by customary law under the heads of the ruling family known as paramount chiefs.<sup>63</sup> Paramount chiefs, who are predominately men, prohibit women from inheriting land and property where wives are considered to be "strangers" or otherwise excluded from rights to land ownership.<sup>64</sup> Customary laws vary depending on region, thus women's ability to own land is inconsistent and varies across the country.<sup>65</sup> Women's limited access to land ownership restricts their access to bank loans despite legally having equal rights to access bank loans and other forms of credit.<sup>66</sup>

## Landlessness and Dispossession

Sierra Leone has attracted an increasing number of international investors over the years but has failed to regulate their activities, which have caused threats to freedom of residence and property rights as well as the outright dispossession of individuals.<sup>67</sup> Amnesty International reported that six landowners who had not consented to the acquisition of their land were imprisoned for destroying palm oil trees during a protest in Pujehun District in 2013 against a project operated by Socfin.<sup>68</sup>



Years later, tensions around land dispossession still run high in Sierra Leone. In January of 2019, two people were shot and killed after violence erupted between local community members and security forces who protected the palm oil plantations of Socfin Group, an agribusiness, in Sahn Malen Cheifdom.<sup>69</sup>

## Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Key Commodity Supply Chains

### Fish

#### Fish Overview

In 2019, the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sector accounted for 54.3 percent of Sierra Leone's GDP.<sup>70</sup> Recent reports of overfishing in the region has forced Sierra Leone to crack down on illegal fishing in the region and tighten regulations.<sup>71</sup>

#### Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Fish

According to the U.S. State Department, Chinese-owned fisheries were tied to both child labor and child sex trafficking in Freetown.<sup>72</sup> It was reported that Chinese-owned vessels brought underage girls to their boats throughout the night for commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>73</sup> Child labor within the deep-sea fishing industry has also been documented.<sup>74</sup>



Gift of the United States Government

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## Endnotes

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## Fair Labor. Worldwide.

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