Sierra Leone

Country Overview

Politics

Sierra Leone is a presidential republic in West Africa. The most recent elections in 2012 saw the re-election of President Ernest Bai Koroma as the ruling All People’s Congress (APC) won an expanded majority in parliament. International observers of the election regarded it as free and fair, commending the country’s progress to increased fairness and transparency.

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. The government’s National Ebola Recovery Strategy is a five-year development framework which aims to attract private sector partners for projects in agriculture, fisheries, tourism, transport, energy and mining. Additionally, the government provides tax incentives for investors in agribusiness, infrastructure, mining and tourism.

Of the 2.68 million people comprising the labor force, 61.1 percent and 33.4 percent are employed in agricultural and service sectors, respectively. Key exports for the country include fish, dairy produce, wheat gluten, meat and cocoa. Other valuable exports include iron ore, diamonds and rutile but the collapse of iron ore prices in 2014 and the closure of two of the largest iron ore mines in the country have contributed to its lack of prominence as a key export.

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, or a third of the population. Shortly after the end of the civil war, the 2005 UN Human Development Index gave Sierra Leone the lowest score in their ranking. Today, poverty remains pervasive. The Ebola epidemic in 2015 placed significant strain on Sierra Leone as government forces implemented aggressive tactics such as lockdowns, curfews and collective quarantines to contain the spread of the disease.

There are two dominant ethnic groups in the country, the Mende and Themne who compose 35 and 31 percent of the population, respectively. Ethnic affiliations strongly influence political party
membership with mostly Mende belonging to the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) and Themne to the AP, where the two ethnic groups have historically struggled for political power.¹¹


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/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2017/271275.htm

Migrant and Other Vulnerable Populations

Sierra Leone has negative net migration and 1.4 percent of the population are migrants.¹² The largest source country, by far, is Guinea.¹³ Other prevalent but less significant migrant source countries include Liberia and Gambia.¹⁴
Top destination countries for migrants are the United States, the United Kingdom and Guinea.\textsuperscript{15}
Migrants from Sierra Leone

- United States of America: 36,561
- United Kingdom: 25,281
- Guinea: 15,098
- Senegal: 14,398
- Liberia: 11,413

Legend:
- United States of America
- United Kingdom
- Guinea
- Senegal
- Liberia
Exports and Trade

Sierra Leone’s top exports for 2016 include fish, honey, starches, and cocoa.16

The top importers of all goods from Sierra Leone include China, Belgium, Romania, the Netherlands and the United States of America.17
Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers’ Rights

Freedom of Association

The right to freedom of association is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. 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.19 According to the World Bank and Statistics Sierra Leone, 91.9 percent of the workforce is employed in the informal sector where labor regulations are difficult to monitor due to a lack of adequate resources.20 The law does not explicitly protect workers from anti-union discrimination and the law permits such discrimination.21 Protests occur frequently as workers have limited means to pursue redress through the judicial process.22

Working Conditions

According to the U.S. Department of State Human Rights Report, there is a national minimum wage, including in the informal sector, of SLL 500,000 per month.23 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.24 Violations of wage, overtime and occupational health and safety standards reportedly occur most frequently in the artisanal diamond-mining sector.25

Discrimination

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, tribe, sex, place of origin and political opinion, yet discrimination is not prohibited based on religion or national origin or citizenship.26 Non-African residents in Sierra Leone have reportedly faced institutionalized discrimination related to citizenship and nationality.27

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.28

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.29 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.30 Almost half of children in rural areas engage in child labor, as opposed to 36 percent of urban children.31

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.32 Education is not compulsory.33
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.34

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventions</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ILO 29 Forced Labor</td>
<td>In force</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO 87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize</td>
<td>In force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO 98 Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining</td>
<td>In force</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO 100 Equal Remuneration</td>
<td>In force</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor</td>
<td>In force</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO 111 Discrimination</td>
<td>In force</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO 138 Minimum Age</td>
<td>In force</td>
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<td>ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies</td>
<td>Not ratified</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor</td>
<td>In force</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO 97 Migration for Employment</td>
<td>Not ratified</td>
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Political Risk Factors

Political Instability or Conflict

Sierra Leone ranks 34th out of 178 countries on the Fragile States Index for 2016.36 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.37 Sierra Leone has peaceful relations with neighboring countries Guinea and Liberia.38 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.39 Additionally, there is a population of more than 9,000 persons of concern in Guinea, 97 percent of which are refugees coming from mostly Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone.40
Level of Crime and Violence

The World Economic Forum’s Global Competitive Index 2016-2017 ranks Sierra Leone 132nd out of 138 in terms of competitiveness. With regard to business costs of crime and violence and business costs of organized crime, the country scored 3.8 and 4.2 respectively, where a score of seven indicates that business is not impacted at all.\(^4\) Sierra Leone improved its position in the GCI by five places, mainly due to recovering health conditions in the wake of the Ebola crisis. Sexual and gender-based violence is persistent in Sierra Leone as there are no laws against hate crimes based on sexual orientation and public discontent with the government’s complicit stance in its occurrence sparked protests in the capital city.\(^4\)

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.”\(^4\) 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.\(^4\) 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 impact access to public services or result in statelessness.\(^4\)

Level of Corruption

Transparency International ranks Sierra Leone 123rd out of 176 countries on the Corruption Perceptions Index for 2015 and its value is 30, where a score of zero indicates “Highly Corrupt” and a 100 “Very Clean”.\(^4\) According to the U.S. Department of State, corruption is seen as endemic and prevents economic growth as foreign investors see it as a risk.\(^4\) Public officials have made efforts to combat corruption through the Sierra Leone Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), but the Commission has been criticized for its poor prosecutorial record and leniency toward the President’s family, friends and political allies.\(^4\) Additionally, public officials have continued to use libel and sedition laws to target journalists, activists and members of the public, especially when they expressed dissent for President Koroma. One individual was imprisoned for six months after allegedly insulting Koroma in public.\(^4\)

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 181 out of 188 countries and a score of 0.420 for 2015.\(^5\) However, when adjusted for inequality, the HDI falls to 0.262, a loss of 37.8 percent due to inequality in the distribution of the HDI dimension indices.\(^5\) Most migrants originate from Guinea, whose 2015 HDI value was comparatively worse than Sierra Leone’s at 0.414, which may explain why Guineans choose Sierra Leone as their destination country.\(^5\)
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 2013. In Sierra Leone, 77.5 percent of the population are multidimensionally poor while an additional 14.6 percent live near multidimensional poverty. The breadth of deprivation, which is the average score experienced by people multidimensionally poor, is 53 percent. Overall, Sierra Leone’s MPI is 0.411. According to UNDP 52 percent of the population live below the income poverty line of USD 1.90 a day.

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. Sierra Leone scores a 0.650 on the UNDP’s Gender Inequality Index (GII), ranking 151 out of 159 countries in the 2015 index. There are disparities in educational attainment, with 16.8 percent of women compared to 29.7 percent of men having reached secondary education. 72 percent of men aged 15-24 are literate as opposed to 54 percent of women. Dismissal based on pregnancy is legally permitted.

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. There is a dual system of land ownership in Sierra Leone, one based on customary laws and the other on statutory laws. 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. Paramount chiefs are generally men, although there are some women chiefs of the Mende ethnic group. The paramount chiefs prohibit women from inheriting land and property where wives are considered to be “strangers” or otherwise excluded from rights to land ownership. However, customary laws vary depending on region, thus women’s ability to own land is inconsistent and varies across the country. 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.

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. In 2014, Human Rights Watch reported that hundreds of families had been forcibly relocated by government officials and the London-based mining company African Minerals. Additionally, 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. In early 2017, 1,486 acres of land that was acquired by a Chinese company, Orient Agriculture Limited, was ordered to be restored to 70 families in the Nimiyama Chiefdom, Kono District. The company reportedly acquired the land through a
deal with the Paramount Chief and local leaders who agreed to sell the land without informing the landowners.69

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Fish

Fish Overview

The fisheries sector in Sierra Leone contributes to about ten percent of GDP.70 The sector has high rates of foreign fishing, some of it illegal.71 There is reportedly corruption that allows illegal fishing to flourish.72

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Fish

In 2010, the Environmental Justice Foundation documented South Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Sierra Leonean workers experiencing indicators of labor trafficking on board a Korean flagged ship operating off of Sierra Leone. Sierra Leonean workers reported that they were not given contracts and were not paid in cash, but instead were compensated in bycatch that they could sell in markets. They reported that any expression of grievances could result in termination and even abandonment.73 EJF reported that Chinese and Vietnamese workers has also been recruited by labor brokers in their home countries.74

This report was funded by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.
Endnotes

12 http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.NETM
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