



Migration Profile

SIERRA LEONE

A. Executive Summary

The country played a central role in the transatlantic slave trade, as it was used as a transit point for thousands of West African captives. The naming of the capital city, Freetown, was very significant as it was founded in 1787 as a home for repatriated former slaves. In addition to being a country of origin, destination, and transit for migrants, Sierra Leone has experienced the return of more than 3,000 Sierra Leoneans who fled the country during the civil war.

Sierra Leone has a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.452, and it is ranked at 182 out of 189 countries, which puts the country in the low human development categoryⁱ. The unemployment rate in Sierra Leone for 2021 stood at 4.6%ⁱⁱ, with nearly two in three youths unemployed or underemployedⁱⁱⁱ, and that is one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Africa, driving their urge to seek work abroad via irregular migration. The agriculture sector, though largely traditional and subsistent, remains a critical component of the local economy as it employs about two-thirds of the labour force and contributes to more than 60% of the GDP^{iv}.

Hit by civil war for eight years (1991-1999) and after two health crises (Ebola and Covid-19), Sierra Leone continues to face massive development challenges, like attracting more foreign direct investment, developing infrastructures, and diversifying the economy.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Sierra Leone is a western African country bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, Guinea to the north and east, and Liberia to the south. Its capital city, Freetown, was home to free slaves. It has a total surface area of 71,740 sq. km, and a population of over 6.5 million people. Its ethnic composition is as follows: Temne 35.4%, Mende 30.8%, Limba 8.8%, Kono 4.3%, Korankoh 4%, Fullah 3.8%, Mandingo 2.8%, Loko 2%, Sherbro 1.9%, Creole 1.2% (descendants of freed Jamaican slaves who were settled in Freetown), and other groups 5%^v. English is the country's official language, although it is regularly used only by the literate minority. Mende is the main vernacular language spoken in the south and in the north, while Creole is used by

descendants of the freed Jamaican slaves in Freetown and is understood by 95% of the population^{vi}. Muslim is the predominant religion in Sierra Leone (77.1%), while the others are Christian (22.9%)^{vii}.

II. International and Internal Migrants

In Sierra Leone, approximately 1.4 million people (25% of the total population) live outside their district of birth^{viii}. While the western region (Freetown) is most popular for lifetime and recent migrants, partly because it is the economic, financial, and cultural hub of the country as most companies are located there, and it prides itself on a high level of urbanisation (a potential source of employment), the northern region (Bombali, Kambia, Koinadugu, Port Loko, and Tonkolili) is popular for sending out the most migrants^{ix}. Most migrants are between the age of 20 and 44, and their sex representation is fairly equal. However, the migrant population is predominantly male between the age of 25 and 60. The eastern region (precisely Kailahun) is the hub of diamond mining, which mostly employs men, while in the western region the difference between men and women is fairly equal^x.

In 2019 there were an estimated 54,300 international migrants in Sierra Leone, representing 0.7% of the total population^{xi}. 97% of them were of West African descent arriving from Guinea, Liberia, Gambia, Nigeria and Ghana^{xii}. Nationals from Britain, America, India and Lebanon constituted also a significant minority. The economic centre of the country (western area and eastern province) hosted about 80% of all immigrants in the country^{xiii}. For example, the Kailahun District had a third of the immigrant population and, together with Freetown and Kenema District, accounted for 67% of all immigrants^{xiv}. 43.5% of international migrants in Sierra Leone were female^{xv}.

In 2021, Sierra Leone made strides in recognizing, promoting, and implementing decent work for women and men, by rectifying 8 International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions and one protocol^{xvi}.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Recent emigration trends from Sierra Leone are largely determined by the search for economic opportunities and security. The World Bank in 2016 estimated the number of Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora to be 336,000 which is 5.5% of the population^{xvii}. In 2019, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) estimated that Sierra Leone diaspora population was 187,100^{xviii}. Four of the 5 top destination countries of Sierra Leone emigrants are other African countries (Guinea, Liberia, Senegal, Nigeria), and the UK in Europe comes in fifth place^{xix}. 33.7% of Sierra Leone emigrants living in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries have a tertiary qualification, and women account for 31.9% of them^{xx}. 53% of tertiary-educated Sierra Leoneans physicians and nurses live abroad^{xxi}, while there are only 1.4 doctors, nurses, and midwives per 10,000 people in contrast to the sustainable development goals threshold of 44.5. Many Sierra Leoneans who have benefited from state scholarships to study abroad do not return back home, causing a financial loss to the state. The 2021 human flight and brain drain in Africa indicates that Sierra Leone is above the world average of 5.25 index points, being currently at 7.4^{xxii}.

IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced People)

Due to the protracted civil war (1991–1999), Sierra Leone was a source country of refugees. However, with stability restored, the country now has been hosting refugees. As of September 1, 2020 Sierra Leone had 364 refugees^{xxiii}, coming mostly from Liberia and Cote d’Ivoire, and 2 asylum seekers from Togo and Pakistan^{xxiv}. Around 54% of asylum seekers and refugees are women, while 46% are men. Refugees are located mainly in the rural areas of the Kenema District; in Jembe, Gerihun, Gondama, and Jimmy Gbagbo in the Bo District; Taiama in Moyamba; Bandajuma and Pujehun District^{xxv}. Most refugees reached Sierra Leone by land, and many Ivorian refugees arrived in the country because they were running away from post-election violence.

Since 2017, IOM has provided assistance to over 3,000 Sierra Leoneans returnees, with a majority (70%) of them registered in Freetown, in the western urban section, and Waterloo in the western rural area of Sierra Leone^{xxvi}.

The main drivers of internal displacement in Sierra Leone are conflict/violence and natural disasters. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reports that, as of December 2020, there were 5,500 internally displaced persons in Sierra Leone because of conflict and violence, with no details regarding the nature of the conflict and violence^{xxvii}. In addition, the report also states that as a result of flash flooding in Freetown in 2019, 5,300 people were internally displaced^{xxviii}.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Sierra Leone is a source and transit country for human trafficking. It is a Tier 2 country and does not entirely meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking despite efforts to do so. The key driver of human trafficking in Sierra Leone is poverty. Victims of human trafficking mostly come from rural areas and are trafficked into urban areas, where they are subjected to sexual exploitation, forced labour in domestic service, artisanal diamond and granite mining, petty trading, begging, street crime, sex trafficking, and exploitation in the fishing and agriculture sectors^{xxix}. Some are trafficked into neighbouring countries, for example, Mali, Niger, and Guinea, and others to Gambia, Mauritania, Egypt, the Middle East, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Iraq, and Europe, where they are employed in domestic service, sex exploitation, begging, and street crime.

In 2021, the government reported investigating 72 cases, prosecuting 30 defendants in 33 cases, and convicting one trafficker. In 2021, the government identified 73 trafficking victims – 29 women, 22 children, and 22 foreign males^{xxx}. Women and children are referred to NGOs for shelter services, and in some cases law enforcement officers temporarily shelter child victims in their homes, while authorities temporarily host victims at law enforcement facilities^{xxxi}. For example, 22 foreign male adult victims in 2021 stayed at the Transnational Organised Crime unit (TOCU) facilities during the investigation^{xxxii}. During investigations, the government sometimes provides adult male victims with funds to rent a place. The

government relied on NGOs to provide care for victims, getting in shelters medical, psycho-social, educational, legal, vocational, family tracing, and reintegration support.

The government assisted with 50 million Leones (\$5,000) and in 2020 limited its food assistance to an NGO, operating a shelter established specifically for female and child trafficking victims^{xxxiii}. The government also provides immigration relief, legal services, and transportation for trafficked victims.

VI. National Legal Framework

In January 2022 Sierra Leone, in partnership with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), launched the country's national migration policy. The most important piece of legislation governing immigration and emigration in Sierra Leone is the 1965 Non-Citizens (Registration, Immigration, and Expulsion) Act, which regulates the exit, entry, and residency to and from the country^{xxxiv}. The 2007 Refugee Act provides for recognition and protection of refugees, the General (Business Start-up) Act regulates the issuance of work permits to foreign workers, the 2005 Anti-Human Trafficking Act criminalizes all forms of trafficking and facilitates the prosecution of traffickers, protection of victims and prevention of trafficking, the 1973 Sierra Leone Citizenship Act, as amended in 2006, grants the right of dual citizenship and citizenship by birth directly through the mother^{xxxv}.

Sierra Leone is part of the Mano River Union (MRU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and is a signatory to the 1979 ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement, Right of Residence, and Establishment. These regional organisations seek to ensure the free movement, residence, and work for its citizens in all member states. Under the current immigration framework, visitors from the ECOWAS member states have the right to enter, reside, and establish themselves in Sierra Leone without the need to obtain permission. Sierra Leone is also a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the 1969 AU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugees Problems in Africa. Sierra Leone is also a signatory to the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention)

VII. Main Actors

The State

Four ministries are in charge of migration affairs in Sierra Leone: the Ministry of Internal Affairs is in charge of immigration management; the Ministry of Labour and Social Security issues work permits to foreigners and develops the National Labour Migration Policy; the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs fights against trafficking in persons; and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is in charge of protection of nationals abroad^{xxxvi}. Other relevant departments involved in migration-related issues include the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), which enacts the 2007 Refugees Protection Act, an eligibility committee and an appeal committee which is responsible for refugee status determination, the work permit committee that provides advice on work permit related issues, the National Platform for Migration, an inter-ministerial working

group, that is in charge of providing policy guidance on migration-related issues, and the National Task Force on Human Trafficking that coordinates the implementation of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act (2005).

International Organisations

The leading international organisation dealing with migration related issues in Sierra Leone is IOM, focusing on services to immigrants, healthcare, refugee resettlement, humanitarian assistance, labour migration, and migration policies and research. It also cooperates with border management. IOM provided financial and technical support for the realisation of Sierra Leone's first comprehensive migration policy.

Other migration-related international organisations in Sierra Leone include UNHCR which supports the government in providing protection for people of concerns through policy framework, UNICEF working towards the protection of children's rights and lives, including access to education, sanitation, water, nutrition, health, protection services, and the reunification of families, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) that provides complementary education programs to refugee children enrolled in public schools. Other project partners include the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Save the Children, and the World Food Programme (WFP).

Other Organisations

Other NGOs involved in migration matters include the Organisation of Master Trainers, a team of facilitators and mobilisers working for an improved culture of democracy and rights in Sierra Leone. Chariot Eight is a law firm providing legal services to nationals and international clients. It also offers assistance to lawyers representing asylum seekers, for example, confirming Sierra Leonean legal documents and providing general legal information about Sierra Leone. The Centre for Human Rights (CFHR) seeks to enhance human rights, good governance, and the rule of law. CFHR also provides free legal services, psychosocial counselling, public interest litigation and advocacy.

The Catholic Church

There are currently three dioceses (Bo, Kenema, and Makeni) and one archdiocese (Freetown) in Sierra Leone. Despite being a largely Muslim state, the presence of the Catholic Church through its humanitarian organisations makes a difference in the lives of so many people living in Sierra Leone, especially the most vulnerable.

Caritas Sierra Leone works in the areas of peacebuilding, trauma counselling, and resettlement support for refugees. Caritas also supports initiatives and lobbying efforts to combat sex crimes against women and vulnerable persons - as rape and female genital mutilation are a chronic concern in Sierra Leone. In the health sector, Caritas provides medicines to people in dire need of health care, promotes HIV and AIDS awareness^{xxxvii}.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is one of the forerunners in promoting health, education, agriculture, and urban resilience in Sierra Leone and has been recognised and awarded diplomatic status by the government for its role in contributing to the development of the country. CRS supports the government's Free School Education Program through the implementation of the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition "All Pikin for Learn" project, looking to increase the literacy of school-age boys and girls and improve health and dietary practices in the Koinadugu and Falaba Districts^{xxxviii}. In the area of health, CRS through training and sensitisation programs seeks to change people's mentality in relation to malaria treatment and prevention and also the prevention and management of the spread of COVID-19^{xxxix}. In the area of urban resilience, CRS and its partners (Caritas) focus on solid waste management, nature-based reforestation, and repair of the communities' water points and integrated water management from the catchment area to water point access^{xl}.

The Catholic Agency for Oversea Development (CAFOD) assists marginalised and vulnerable families with life-saving prevention information through, for example, radio sensitisation programs^{xli}, hygiene kits, and food to quarantined and vulnerable families during the outbreak of COVID-19^{xlii}.

The Salesian Mission in Sierra Leone offers food, clothing, crisis intervention services, shelter to displaced people, educational opportunities to vulnerable people, counselling, and family reunification. For example, in 2018 the Salesian Mission with Don Bosco Fambul provided relief efforts (outdoor tents and portable solar lights) to 296 individuals affected by flooding and mudslides in the Regent District on the outskirts of Freetown^{xliii}.

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