

Cycle 4: UPR of SIERRA LEONE



Fact Sheet 2:

GENDER EQUALITY

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES FROM THIRD UPR CYCLE

Supported Recommendations

Key Theme 1: Strengthening Gender Equality Frameworks and Legislation

Focuses on enacting, accelerating, or strengthening legal and policy frameworks on gender equality.

States: Plurinational State of Bolivia; Georgia; Iceland; Albania; Indonesia; Latvia

Key Theme 2: Implementation of National Gender Policies and Women's Empowerment

Emphasizes effective implementation of existing strategies and broader women's empowerment initiatives.

States: China; Egypt; Pakistan

Key Theme 3: Women's Participation and Representation in Public and Political Life

Targets increasing women's representation, leadership, and participation in decision-making.

States: Cambodia; Cameroon; Iraq; South Africa

NOTED – 43 recommendations on elimination of FGM by as many States (between recommendations 143.175 to 143.257)

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

- ❖ The **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022 (GEWE)**, has been described as a "revolutionary" law for women's rights and empowerment. The law mandates improvements in women's access to finance, employment opportunities, equal pay, maternity leave and political representation, including a 30% quota for women in government, encompassing all 146 seats in parliament.
- ❖ The **Customary Land Rights Act, 2022** protects customary land rights, eliminates discrimination under customary law, and regulates land administration. It guarantees women equal land rights and access. It prohibits industrial development in protected or ecologically sensitive areas, and sets rules on investor-induced displacement requiring free, prior and informed consent from adult women and men in affected communities.
- ❖ The **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2024**, makes marriage for anyone under 18 a criminal offense, seeks to protect girls from a harmful practice that has long violated their rights and hindered their development.
- ❖ The **Child Rights Act 2025** marks a landmark reform that strengthens Sierra Leone's framework for protecting and promoting the rights and well-being of every child. The Act aligns national law with international child rights standards advancing justice, social welfare, education, and health systems to better protect children from violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect.

CHALLENGES AND THEIR IMPACTS

- ❖ **Women's Access to Finance, Employment, Equal Pay, Education & Political Representation:** As of 2020, the United Nations ranks Sierra Leone 155 out of 162 countries for gender equality. Before 2023, women held 12.3% of seats in Sierra Leone's Parliament. Women's human capital wealth is estimated at only 78.8% of men's. Women are less likely to own a phone (58% vs 78% for men) or a bank account (9% vs 25% for men). Women are overrepresented in informal and low-paid work accounting for 96.6% of female employment. 33% of men in Sierra Leone have reached at least a secondary education; only 20.1% of women will do the same. These gender equality gaps disproportionately affect girls and women, their educational attainment, health outcomes, and long-term economic prospects increasing economic vulnerability.

- ❖ **Customary law & cultural norms still dominate:** Even though formal legal frameworks now guarantee women equal land rights under the Customary Land Rights Act (2022), many rural areas still follow customary practices like widow inheritance issues, daughters being excluded, preference for male heirs which discriminate against women’s economic security, bargaining power, and protection from displacement.
- ❖ **Cultural Norms and Harmful Practices:** Child marriage remains widespread in Sierra Leone, particularly in rural communities, with 30 per cent of girls and 4 per cent of boys married before age 18. An estimated 800,000 girls are married, half before age 15. Child marriage drives high adolescent pregnancy rates, where pregnancy complications are the leading cause of death among girls aged 15–19. Teenage pregnancy disrupts education, limits opportunities, and heightens risks of violence, HIV, and continued poverty. As of 2019, about 83% of women aged 15-49 have undergone FGM despite legal prohibitions, often as part of initiation into secret societies.
- ❖ **Institutional weakness and limited resources:** The Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs remains under-resourced, with budget allocations historically below 1% of the national budget and limited staffing, leading to limited capacity to monitor, enforce, and support implementation of gender equality laws.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Christian Brothers Development Office, Sierra Leone; Edmund Rice International and VIVAT International **urge Member States to recommend** to Sierra Leone:

1. **Strengthen and focus on the effective enforcement of laws** prohibiting child marriage and female genital mutilation through targeted monitoring in high-prevalence areas and by engaging traditional and religious leaders.
2. **Engage with Traditional leaders** and strengthen implementation of the Customary Land Rights Act (2022) ensuring **equal inheritance rights** for women and daughters especially in rural areas.
3. **Ensure sustained, gender-responsive budgetary allocations and adequate staffing for the Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs** to enhance enforcement of gender equality laws, coordination of prevention efforts, and delivery of comprehensive, survivor-centred support services.

ADVANCE QUESTIONS

1. What measures are in place for the effective implementation, monitoring, and enforcement of the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act (2023) at national, local, and chiefdom levels, and what measurable accountability mechanisms track progress on women’s employment, equal pay, access to finance, and political representation?
2. What steps are being taken to align statutory law with customary practices to eliminate discrimination against women—particularly in land inheritance, child marriage and FGM and how are traditional and religious leaders being systematically engaged to drive sustained cultural and behavioural change?

SOURCES:

- Statistics Sierra Leone (Demographic and Health Survey)
- UNICEF and UNFPA Sierra Leone
- World Bank Gender Data Portal
- Afrobarometer (Sierra Leone)
- Government of Sierra Leone legislation: GEWE Act 2022; Customary Land Rights Act 2022; Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024

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