



UPR Info Pre-Session 52 – Sierra Leone

Recommendations on the Right to Quality Education, Gender Equality, Sexual and Gender Based Violence, Right to Health and Right to an Adequate Standard of Living in Sierra Leone.

Right to Quality Education in Sierra Leone

Progress since the last UPR

- ❖ **Free Quality School Education Programme**
- ❖ **Radical Inclusion Policy**
- ❖ **Increased education spending of about 21% of the national budget**

Challenges Today

- ❖ **Rural and marginalized communities** face overcrowded classrooms, unsafe infrastructure, poor WASH facilities, and shortages of qualified teachers, while pre-primary enrolment remains low and senior secondary out-of-school rates high.
- ❖ **Gender-related barriers** such as early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and harmful practices such as FGM persist
- ❖ **Fiscal pressures and weak monitoring systems** threaten sustainability and accountability

Right to Quality Education in Sierra Leone

Recommendations:

We urge Member States to recommend that Sierra Leone

- ❖ **Focus investment** in education infrastructure and teacher development, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, ensuring safe and inclusive classrooms, adequate WASH facilities, disability-accessible learning environments, and accelerated recruitment and training of qualified teachers
- ❖ **Enhance education monitoring, accountability** and data-collection systems to track enrolment, retention and learning outcomes effectively, with particular attention to girls, children with disabilities and learners living in poverty, to ensure recent reforms deliver equitable and sustainable results.

Gender Equality In Sierra Leone

Progress since the last UPR

- ❖ **The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act, 2022**
- ❖ **Expanded** women's economic and land rights under **Customary Land Rights Act (2022)**
- ❖ **Gender mainstreaming** into national frameworks including **Medium-Term National Development Plan (2024–2030)**
- ❖ **The Prohibition of Teenage Marriage and Child Protection Laws**

Challenges Today

- ❖ **Customary law, cultural norms like child marriage and harmful practices like FGM still dominate**
- ❖ **Women face barriers** to education, healthcare, economic opportunities
- ❖ **Institutional weakness and limited resources**

Gender Equality In Sierra Leone

Recommendations:

We urge Member States to recommend that Sierra Leone

- ❖ **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
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **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-centered support services.

Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Sierra Leone

Progress since the last UPR

- ❖ **2019 declaration of rape** as a national emergency, amendments to the Sexual Offences Act, integration of SGBV into national development plans
- ❖ Established **Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs**, Sexual Offences Model Courts, One-Stop Centers and the 116 GBV hotline
- ❖ **Expanded prevention efforts** through community engagement, male involvement strategies, and the EU–UN Spotlight Initiative

Challenges Today

- ❖ **SGBV remains widespread with significant gaps** between policy commitments and lived realities.
- ❖ **Deep-seated cultural and social norms** that normalize violence against women and girls
- ❖ **High prevalence** of FGM, Child marriage and adolescence pregnancy
- ❖ **Inconsistent enforcement of laws** and weak institutional capacity

Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Sierra Leone

Recommendations:

We urge Member States to recommend that Sierra Leone

- ❖ **Strengthen the effective implementation of the Sexual Offences Act** through timely investigation and prosecution of cases, reinforced survivor protection measures and adequate resourcing of law enforcement and justice institutions, in line with international human rights standards.
- ❖ **Increase sustainable financing and trained personnel** for comprehensive, survivor-centered SGBV prevention and response, including equitable access to medical, psychosocial, legal, and shelter services, while intensifying community-based prevention initiatives to address harmful social norms.

Right to Health in Sierra Leone

Progress since the last UPR

- ❖ **Free Health Care Initiative** for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under five
- ❖ **Adopted the National Health Sector Strategic Plan 2021–2025** to advance universal health coverage
- ❖ **Increased health budget allocations** from about 6% in 2019 to around 11% by 2023

Challenges Today

- ❖ **The maternal mortality ratio remains critically high** at 354 deaths per 100,000 live births with significant disparities between rural areas and the Western region
- ❖ **The child mortality rate in 2024 was estimated at 68.4 per 1,000 live births.** Neonatal deaths account for 30% of all under-five deaths
- ❖ **Underfunding and weak health infrastructure persist** - Many rural facilities lack essential medicines, diagnostics, electricity, water, and sanitation.
- ❖ **More than 30% of rural clinics without full-time staff** and widespread reliance on underqualified providers

Right to Health in Sierra Leone

Recommendations:

We urge Member States to recommend that Sierra Leone

- ❖ **Increase sustainable public investment in the health sector**, with particular emphasis on primary health care, maternal and child health services, and the consistent availability of essential medicines, emergency obstetric care, and functional referral and emergency response systems, especially in rural and underserved areas
- ❖ **Strengthen the health system by recruiting, deploying, and retaining qualified health workers** through improved conditions of service and incentives for rural postings, while reinforcing regulation, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms to ensure equitable, accessible, and quality health services for women, children and marginalized populations.

Right to Adequate Standard of Living in Sierra Leone

Progress since the last UPR

- ❖ **Feed Salone initiative under the MTNDP 2024–2030 to boost food security**
- ❖ Adoption of the **National Social Protection Strategy 2022–2026** with a unified social registry
- ❖ Enactment of **Customary Land Rights Act (2022)** and the **GEWE Act** to strengthen women's land and economic rights
- ❖ **Infrastructure Development:** including the construction of roads, bridges, and schools

Challenges Today

- ❖ **The national poverty rate increased from 57.8% in 2023 to nearly 60% in 2024**
- ❖ **Rural poverty is disproportionately higher** (73.9%) compared to urban areas (34.8%)
- ❖ In 2024, approximately 1.57 million (20% of the population) required **urgent food assistance** during the July-October lean season.
- ❖ While 63% of citizens have **access to basic water**, only 23% have access to safely managed water within their premises.
- ❖ **Persistent inflation and rising food prices** continue to erode household purchasing power, undermining food security and offsetting gains from Feed Salone and social protection programmes, especially for urban poor and low-income rural households.

Right to Adequate Standard of Living in Sierra Leone

Recommendations:

We urge Member States to recommend that Sierra Leone

- ❖ **Strengthen and expand social protection systems** to ensure effective, inclusive, and shock-responsive coverage of vulnerable and marginalized groups, including children, women, persons with disabilities, older persons, and rural populations, with a view to reducing poverty and inequalities and ensuring an adequate standard of living.
- ❖ **Accelerate equitable access to basic services and sustainable livelihoods** by improving access to safe water and sanitation, affordable energy, adequate housing, and essential services; increasing targeted support to smallholder farmers through access to credit, markets, and climate-resilient agricultural practices; and investing in rural infrastructure to promote food security, resilience, and poverty reduction.

CONCLUSION

While Sierra Leone has demonstrated political will and legislative progress, urgent and sustained action is required to translate commitments into lived realities especially for women, girls and rural communities.

We call on Member States to make strong, measurable recommendations to support Sierra Leone in fulfilling its human rights obligations.

Thank you for your attention and a special word of gratitude to UPR Info for making it possible for me to present at the Pre-Session in Geneva, thanks to their funding programme.