

# STATUS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN SIERRA LEONE:

## Facts, Gaps and Priority Actions: Pre-session 52/26

Geneva, February, 2026

DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN  
INTERNATIONAL  
SIERRA LEONE



CHILD RIGHTS COALITION SIERRA LEONE

8 DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH



5 GENDER  
EQUALITY



16 PEACE, JUSTICE  
AND STRONG  
INSTITUTIONS



4 QUALITY  
EDUCATION



### OVERVIEW:

This child centered UPR report is developed by the Child Rights Coalition of Sierra Leone. Established in 2007, the coalition constitutes national and international NGOs to monitor and advocate for children's rights. The report specifically focuses on Child Exploitation, Child Justice and Access to Education, and constitutes the outcomes from national consultations with children, young people and adults across Sierra Leone's 5 regions.

### Exploitation of Children

Despite significant progress, many children remain engaged in street hawking, begging with adults with disability, stone mining, and farming during school hours and prostitution at night, with major hotspots in Freetown, Bo, Kenema, Makeni, and Koidu. Most of these children have been trafficked from rural communities. 16.4% of children aged 12-14 years are engaged in 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work and nearly half (41%) of Children aged 15-17 years are engaged in 43 hours of economic, domestic, or hazardous labour. Child trafficking continues to be among the highest forms of child abuse and exploitation, yet prosecution rates remain extremely low, while victim rehabilitation services are largely donor-dependent.

#### Government Actions include:

- Enactment of the Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling Act (2022) and the Child Rights Act (2025) which criminalize Child Trafficking, Child Labour and Child Prostitution.
- Establishment of a Trafficking in Persons Secretariat to respond and prevent to cases of trafficking in persons

- Adoption of a National Policy on Street Children.
- Capacity-building for judges, magistrates and prosecutors in collaboration with UNODC, DCI, IOM and WHI.

#### Key gaps Include:

- Open street hawking and child prostitution, including at night.
- Children engaged in mining and farming during school hours.
- Weak enforcement of laws and limited state-funded rehabilitation programmes.
- Absence of a clear legislative ban on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

#### Key Recommendations include:

- Empower social workers and labour inspectors to monitor and regulate child work and rescue victims of child labour for rehabilitation.
- Enforce legislative ban on night child street hawking and child prostitution and prosecute perpetrators in accordance with the relevant laws in Sierra Leone.
- Implement community-based policies and programs involving community leaders that regulate transfer of children from rural to urban areas.
- Strengthen border security and immigration checks particularly at road borders to combat both internal and cross border trafficking of children by road.
- In the absence of legislative ban on FGM, government should pronounce its position on FGM and instruct paramount chiefs to protect girls at risk.

### Child Justice

Despite the fact the Government has passed the Child Rights Act 2025 and the Criminal Procedure Act 2025, with progressive and child friendly provisions improve access to justice for children in conflict with the law, access to justice for children remains a challenge. For instance, only one juvenile court exist in the entire country (in Freetown), while investigation and trial processes remain slow, expensive and heavy for children, which often results to prolonged trials and pre-trial detention of children under horrible conditions. On average, 20 children are confined in single rooms in Remand Homes in Freetown and Bo and Approved School in Freetown, whilst others are jointly locked up together with adults in police cells and or correctional facilities.

#### Government Actions include:

- Passage of the Child Rights Act (2025) with child friendly justice provisions.
- Enactment of the Criminal Procedure Act (2025) with child-friendly justice and accountability provisions.

#### Key Gaps include:

- Lack of regulations and financing for implementation of new laws.
- Overcrowding and poor detention conditions.
- Limited diversion and rehabilitation programmes.
- Inadequate food, health care, education, and psychosocial support in detention facilities.

## Key Recommendations include:

- Implement the new Child Rights Act 2025 by developing regulations that guide effective implementation of the Act.
- Develop and finance implementation of plan of action through the various institutions concerned.
- Implement diversion programmes in accordance with the Diversion Policy and Child Rights Act.
- Improve detention conditions, including food, sanitation, and health care and sanitation supplies for inmates at the detention facilities.
- Provide education and rehabilitation programmes in all child detention facilities.
- Provide need based educational and rehabilitation programmes at the detention facilities.
- Strengthen child-led prevention and life-skills programmes.
- Provide regular child rights in service training for professionals handling child justice.

## Access to Education

Since 2018, Sierra Leone has achieved remarkable progress, including the introduction of the Free Quality Education Policy, the passage of a new Education Act 2022, enrolment of over 2.5 million children, especially girls in schools nationwide; the recruitment of additional new teachers; the resuscitation of school feeding for thousands of children; the approval of over 3,000 new schools; lifting of ban on pregnant girls from attending school and the provision of teaching and learning materials. Notwithstanding the progress, significant gaps continue to exist that makes schools ineffective, prohibitive, and challenging learning environment continues for many students.

## Government Actions include:

- Introduced of the Free Quality Education Policy (2018)
- Increased enrolment of over 2.5 million children, especially girls
- Passed into law the Education Act (2022)
- Recruited additional teachers and approval of 3,000+ schools
- Re-introduced school feeding programmes in community and rural schools
- Lifted of ban on pregnant girls attending school

## Key Gaps include:

- Delays in subsidy transfers affects running of schools under free education system.
- Corruption including regular extortion of money from students has increased school dropout of students
- Inadequate trained and qualified teachers especially in rural schools. On average one trained teacher per 59 students
- Only 62% of the overall teachers are qualified teachers, which challenges to quality education.
- Lower enrolment rates in rural districts such as Pujehun, Falaba, and Kailahun districts.
- Inadequate provision for children with special educational needs.

## Key Recommendations include:

- Recruit and equitably deploy trained and qualified teachers, especially to rural areas to benefit rural schools.
- Enforce sanctions against teachers' corruption and extortion of money from students.
- Identify and reintegrate out-of-school children into education or vocational training.

- Improve learning outcomes using evidence-based and technology-enabled teaching methods.
- Expand access to education for children with special needs through inclusive and specialised schools especially at tertiary level.



## Legal Reforms

Enactment of key legal frameworks, notably the Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling Act (2022) and the Child Rights Act (2025), criminalising child trafficking, labour and prostitution. \*

## INCLUSION

There is a need to strengthen inclusion and accountability, by addressing corruption, reintegrating out-of-school children, and expanding access to education for children with special needs.\*

## GAPS

Weak enforcement, widespread street hawking, child labour, and commercial sexual exploitation with very low prosecution rates. Limited state-funded protection and rehabilitation services, with support for victims largely dependent on donor-funded projects. \*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Empowering and resourcing labour inspectors and social workers to monitor, rescue, and rehabilitate exploited children and prosecute perpetrators. Prevent trafficking through community and border-level interventions.\*

## Access to Education

Implementation of the Free Quality Education Policy, resulting in enrolment of over 2.5 million children and increased participation of girls.. \*

## IMPROVED

Institutional and policy measures, including the establishment of the Trafficking in Persons Secretariat and adoption of a National Policy on Street Children. Enactment of key legal frameworks, notably the Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling Act (2022) and the Child Rights Act (2025), criminalising child trafficking, labour and prostitution. \*