

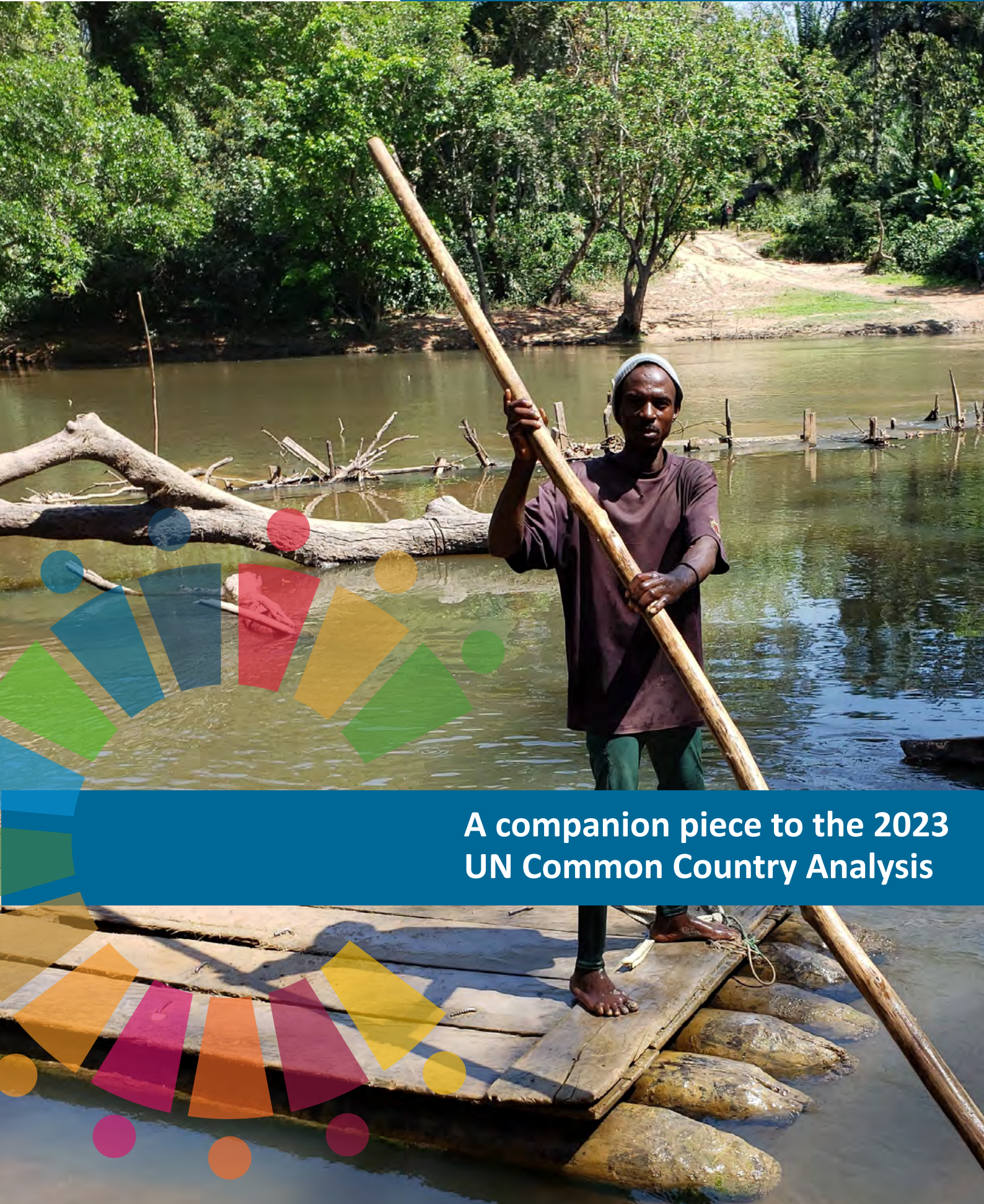


UNITED NATIONS  
SIERRA LEONE



# LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

## ANALYSIS SIERRA LEONE



A companion piece to the 2023  
UN Common Country Analysis

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This report was prepared by Joseph Kamara, PhD as a consultant for the UN Resident Coordinator Office in Sierra Leone. The findings and conclusions represent those of the consultant, however key inputs were received from UN agencies, as well as from persons in civil society, government, and LNOB groups.

# List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AU	African Union
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms Discrimination Against Women
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease
CPES	Comprehensive Package for Ebola Survivors
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CWD	Children with Disability
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
DPP	Director of Public Prosecution
ECOWAS	Economic Community for West African States
ETC	Ebola Treatment Centre
EU	European Union
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FHCI	Free Healthcare Initiative
FQSE	Free Quality School Education
FSW	Female Sex Worker
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Rates
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GPC	Growth for Peace Consolidation
HIV	Human Immune Virus
HTR	Hard to Reach
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KP	Key Population
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Secondary School Education
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MSM	Men who have sex with men
MSME	Micro and Small Medium Enterprises
NASSIT	National Social Security & Insurance Trust
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
PCS	Persons Living in Close Settings
PLHIV	Persons Living with HIV
PRC	The People's Republic of China
PWID	Persons who inject Drugs
PWD	Persons with Disability
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
SLIHS	Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey
SSN	Social Safety Net
STI	Sexually Transmitted Disease
TB	Tuberculosis
TECH/VOC	Technical and Vocational
TG	Transgender
TOCU	Transnational Organized Crime Unit
TVPA	Trafficking of Victims and Violence Protection Act
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office
UNSDF	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
WHO	World Health Organization



# Executive Summary

Inequalities within and across countries makes sustainable development difficult to achieve by, threatening economic and political stability, undermining social progress, and undercutting human rights. The need to address and reduce these gaps is at the core of the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) objective of Agenda 2030, a collective commitment by the United Nations (UN) member countries to “reach the furthest behind first” and recognize the need to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, and end discrimination by addressing root causes. The main thrust of the LNOB concept is that every individual and groups of people everywhere across the globe, especially the very poor, should progress in life.

The primary objective of this LNOB analysis for Sierra Leone is to understand who is being left behind and why, considering factors such as vulnerability, poverty, deprivation, and in what geographic areas the most vulnerable are located. It considers the main gaps and challenges to greater inclusion and support for LNOB groups and what opportunities exist to present actionable program recommendations.

## Methodology

The research methods used were mixed and cross-sectional, making use of qualitative data collection approaches in addition to quantitative data, and triangulating data from different sources. Data collection methods included desk/literature review, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Content analysis was also used to analyze the inputs. The first step was to identify the unsegmented groups left behind, which drew heavily on the inputs of sector technical experts within the UN country team (UNCT) familiar with the country context.

The research then progressed to examining challenges faced by different groups, including root causes. Finally, analysis was done on how to address the root causes of why different groups are left behind.

## Unsegmented Groups Left Behind

Groups left behind in Sierra Leone are predominantly impacted by poverty, especially multidimensional poverty and deprivation issues, as was revealed when developing profiles of the different unsegmented LNOB groups listed below. Many are deprived of basic services and live in precarious conditions. Specific groups also face discrimination due to factors such as gender or sexual orientation, age, disability status, or location in the country. These factors together result in LNOB groups being excluded from development and perpetuate poverty from generation to generation, resulting in not only deprivation, but also violation of their rights.

## LNOB Groups identified for Sierra Leone:

- Children living in poverty;
- Informal Workers;
- Homeless Persons;
- Persons with Disability;
- Persons living with HIV/AIDS;
- Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV);
- Adolescent Girls impacted by Child Marriage and Harmful Practices;
- Migrants and Returned Migrants;
- Those living in Hard-to-Reach (HTR) Communities;
- Inmates of Correctional Institutions;
- Youths in Conflict with the Law/Youth Gang Members;
- Persons with Substance Abuse Issues;
- Ebola Virus Disease Survivors with latent Health Issues;
- Children who left Primary or Secondary School;
- Persons Trafficked, including Children; and
- Vulnerable Persons negatively affected by Climate Change

## Reasons why these groups are left behind

Global LNOB frameworks identify the common reasons why people are left behind. There are five factors that represent the central driving forces of exclusion – 1) discrimination based on assumed or ascribed identity or status; 2) geography, that is groups isolated or excluded due to location with aggravating factors such as environmental degradation, lack of transport, or technology; 3) vulnerability to shocks such as natural disasters, conflict, and economic shocks; 4) socio-economic status, especially multidimensional poverty and inequalities; and 5) governance, that is, laws, policies, and institutions preventing participation in decision making.

**For Sierra Leone, a table in Chapter 5 shows why different groups are left behind using these five causal factors. Discrimination and Socioeconomic Status are the primary factors.**

### Addressing the Root Causes

Addressing the challenges and deprivations these groups face requires a shift to targeted approaches, a people-centred approach, an improved governance environment, and ensuring that LNOB groups participate in discussions around solutions. LNOB should be a consideration in all phases of a project cycle – design, implementation, and monitoring/evaluation – for all programmes led by the UN, Government, or other development partners. Such an approach would be advanced by development of programme indicators geared towards these groups and collection of more disaggregated data for LNOB groups, including by age, sex, and location. In addition to this, the following specific actions are proposed to help address the root causes of why groups are left behind:

- Strengthen socioeconomic empowerment of the key population groups through targeted approaches to eliminate discrimination and promote empowerment of groups.
- Address gender and social norms that perpetuate the vulnerability of some groups left behind.
- Develop awareness raising campaigns and increase knowledge about human rights, gender equality and economic rights, including strengthening the consideration and voice of girls and women in society.
- Create a more conducive environment for job creation and doing business, ultimately for promotion of decent work for all, irrespective of their status in society, which would help solve many related social problems.
- Enact, and bring into force, laws, policies, practices, and institutions based on human rights, with greater attention to enforcing these laws and avenues for justice for those who are deprived of their rights.
- Improve governance to address weak law enforcement, institutional incapacity, ill-resourced institutions, and lack of policy coherence on key issues.
- Create supportive environments that foster community cohesion and political inclusiveness, to overcome discriminative practices and promote accountable institutions.
- Give greater voice to LNOB groups to express their views, including strengthening civil society organizations representing these vulnerable groups, to allow for greater participation community and sectoral decision-making.
- Improve data collection for LNOB groups to improve understanding of the needs of those left behind and to develop context specific LNOB approaches and instruments. Strengthened national data collection systems can be a tool for monitoring and measuring multidimensional poverty and inequality.

- Promote agreements among government institutions to facilitate marginalized individual's access to programs that enhance their rights (for example, civil registration), and to basic services (for example, health and education).
- Encourage bottom-up dialogue and inclusive discussions when developing programmes, including social protection approaches, and employ LNOB principles in the design.
- Promote wide-ranging sensitivity to the needs of LNOB groups in trainings of those providing social services and social protection at different levels of government, to raise awareness of the issues of people who are left behind.
- Stimulate a national dialogue on developing a Unique Social Register (USR) starting with people who are left behind and marginalized, to create an efficient data collection system using technology.
- Strengthen the national social protection strategy and approaches to better meet the needs of vulnerable groups.
- Disseminate information and ramp-up communication campaigns in communities related to understanding and claiming of rights, including information on legal forms of protest and legal access if rights are violated.

To ensure that no one is left behind, government, development partners, and the UN, through its new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, should adopt the above recommendations, while also reflecting the human rights-based approach to address the issue of LNOB in Sierra Leone. The state and their institutions, by applying these principles, will uphold their responsibility as duty-bearers who are accountable for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling human rights. Successful LNOB programs and initiatives will also depend on meaningful inclusion and engagement of groups left behind in support of social and economic advancement for all.



# Introduction

This Leave No One Behind (LNOB) report is a companion piece to the Common Country Analysis (CCA) report prepared by the UN Country Team (UNCT) in 2023. The CCA is an independent, forward-looking, analysis of Sierra Leone's positioning towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national development priorities. The 2023 CCA, alongside the LNOB report, will inform prioritization of interventions in the upcoming UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for the years 2025 to 2030, providing the analytical foundation for all UN development programs in the coming years.

LNOB is a key commitment of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs and will be a priority consideration during the design of the new UNSDCF. Therefore, this LNOB report was prepared to examine, in greater depth than the CCA, the challenges faced by certain groups in Sierra Leone who are at risk of being left behind in the country's path towards SDG realization. It was prepared by a consultant, drawing on analytical work done by the UNCT, key informant interviews with partners, and select focus group discussions. It considers underlying root causes of LNOB and proposes approaches to address them.



# Chapter 1: Background

**“Development must be more equitable if it is to be sustainable”.**

**(United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, Statement of Commitment)**

Despite decades of efforts of socioeconomic development across the globe, gaps exist between countries and groups of people within and outside countries that have widened seriously. The world has witnessed deepening, divisive and destabilizing inequalities within and among countries that are threatening the gains made over the decades, hence, serving as an obstacle to sustainable development and achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>1</sup> These heightened inequalities within and among countries are putting sustainable development at risk, fueling social unrest, undermining social progress, threatening economic and political stability, and undercutting human rights.<sup>2</sup>

The scope of the problem is daunting: inequalities of wealth and income have reached historic proportions; and inequalities in opportunities and outcomes relating to education, health, food security, employment, housing, health services and economic resources are having equally devastating effects.<sup>3</sup> These inequalities disproportionately affect particular groups, including on the basis of race, sex, language, religion, age, ethnicity, disability, and migrant or economic status. In addition, gender-based discrimination remains one of the most prevalent forms of discrimination across the globe.<sup>4</sup>

There is a need to reduce these inequalities for which the LNOB concept is a relevant and useful approach. LNOB is a commitment by the UN member countries embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and has an imperative to “reach the furthest behind first” and recognize the need to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, and end discrimination and their root causes within and amongst countries.<sup>5</sup> LNOB provides a sound basis for inclusive policy development to boost equality of opportunity across countries.<sup>6</sup>

The overall focus of the LNOB concept is to ensure that every individual and groups of people, especially the poorest amongst the poor, progress in life.<sup>7</sup> Focusing on the people at the bottom of society, and on closing the gaps between the “highest citizens” and the “lowest ones”, is the central theme of LNOB.<sup>8</sup> The global commitment operates through policies, laws, programs and strategies aimed at ending discrimination and exclusion, and reducing the inequalities and vulnerabilities that make people to be left behind and simultaneously erode the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

1 The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) 2017 Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development.

2 Ibid 3 Ibid 4 Ibid

5 UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) 2019, *Leaving No One Behind, A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Team*. <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Interim-Draft-Operational-Guide-on-LNOB-for-UNCTs.pdf>

6 <https://lnob.unescap.org/>

7 Ibid

8 OECD (2018), *Development Co-operation Report 2018: Joining Forces to Leave No One Behind*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dcr-2018-en>

9 UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) 2019, *Leaving No One Behind, A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Team*. <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Interim-Draft-Operational-Guide-on-LNOB-for-UNCTs.pdf>





To achieve the SDGs as set out in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development agreed by UN member states in 2015, UN member states and the organizations supporting them must prioritize the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society. Hence, the imperative to combat inequalities and discrimination is central to these missions.

For countries to achieve the SDGs, governments must work tirelessly to implement sustainable development programs that benefit all that are being excluded and discriminated against.

Considering the need to implement a national approach that breaks the cycles of exclusion and deprivation of the poor from development and opportunities, the scope of this LNOB Analysis for Sierra Leone is to inform efforts by the UN, government, and other partners of those left behind and why. The purpose of this is to develop future interventions and appropriate measures to overcome the barriers and boost the inclusion of the most vulnerable.

## 1.1 Country Context of Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is a West African coastal country with a population of approximately 8.8 million<sup>11</sup> and an annual population growth rate of 2.2 percent.<sup>12</sup> Seventy-five percent of the population is below age of 35, and 40 percent below age 15 while only 3 percent are age 65 and older. Up to 44 percent of the population lives in urban areas. Life expectancy at birth is 59 years for males and 62 years for females. Sierra Leone has four political regions divided into 16 districts, and there are also 190 traditional chiefdoms that were first established under British colonial rule.

Sierra Leone is part of the 193 countries who are signatory to the 2030 Agenda for the SDGs and has since domesticated the 17 SDGs and integrated them into the country's National and Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019- 2023. The plan has its basis with global and regional frameworks, and they are critical for strengthening development cooperation and financing for Sierra Leone's development.<sup>13</sup>

Sierra Leone endured 11 years of civil unrest that brought untold sufferings and destruction of the social fabrics of the country and lasted from 1991 – 2002. During this period, there was total breakdown in law and order and destruction of infrastructure and loss of lives. Since the end of the civil conflict in 2002, Sierra Leone as held 5 general elections and has made significant strides toward peacebuilding and strengthening of state institutions. Sierra Leone has lagged in terms of human development and considered as one of the least developed countries in the world according to the UNDP Human Development Report.

The LNOB national commitment of Sierra Leone is reflected in policies, laws, programs, and strategies aimed at ending discrimination and exclusion, and reducing the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole .

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11 <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/SL>

12 World Bank, 2022 World Development Indicators for Sierra Leone

13 Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plan 2018/2019-2023



# Poverty and Inequalities

Despite the significant efforts and progress made by Sierra Leone to reduce poverty and inequalities, the context is very complex. Rapid population growth may work against improvement in gender equality and a human rights-based approach to development, contributing to inequality and discrimination among the Sierra Leonean population related to shared resources, the protection of rights, and access to development. In addition, the country is realizing the negative effects of climate change on already precarious livelihoods of most of the population, especially among most marginalized groups. This exposes the Sierra Leonean population to the risk of a vicious system of inequalities and continued deprivation of human rights that underpin multidimensional poverty.

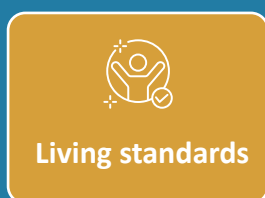
The CCA report discusses the pervasiveness of poverty in Sierra Leone. As this is a contributing factor to intersecting vulnerabilities among many of the sub-groups discussed in this report, select observations related to a key poverty index for Sierra Leone, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) are relevant. The MPI has 5 dimensions:



Health



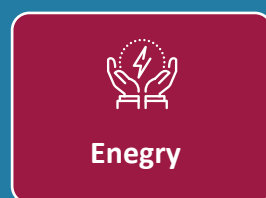
Education



Living standards



Housing



Energy



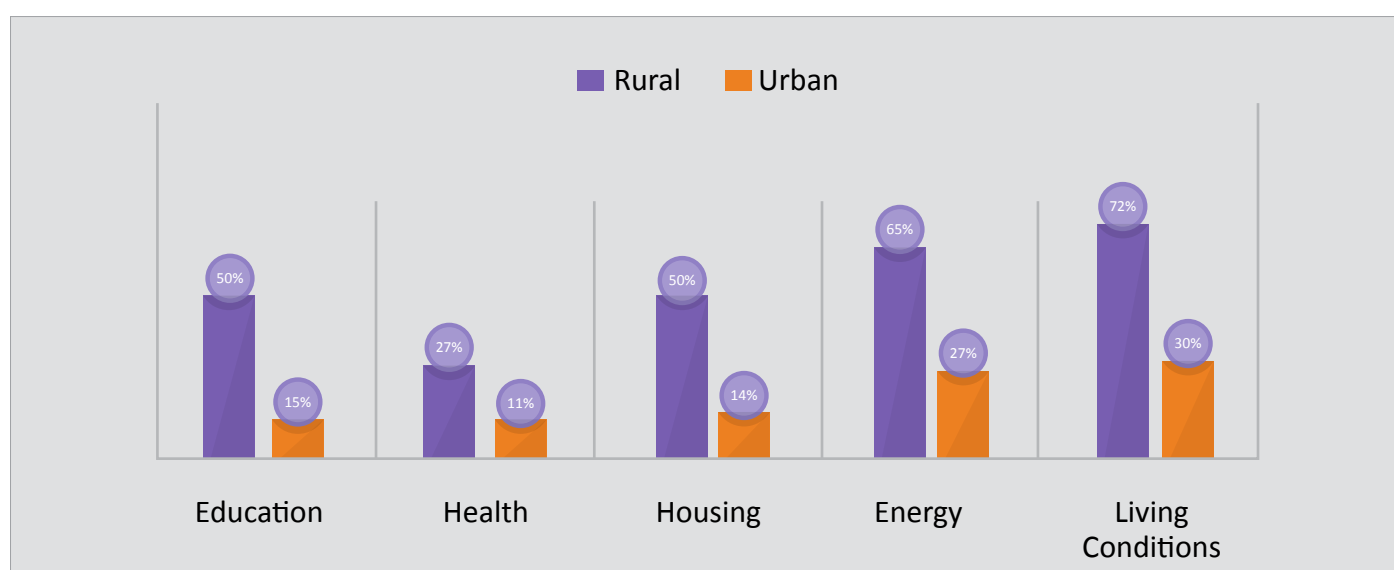
Table 1 presents the incidence and intensity of poverty by showing the MPI by gender and age group. Children younger than 14 years have the highest levels of multi-dimensional poverty (72 percent), followed by the elderly above 65 years (69 percent). The group with the lowest levels of poverty is the youth (56 percent), followed by the middle-aged (36 to 64 years) group at 65 percent. Child multidimensional poverty is high in Sierra Leone, as about 7 out of every 10 children experience deprivation in one way or the other.

Age Group / Gender	Gender Share (percent) of the Age Group	MPI Value	Poverty Headcount (percent)	Intensity of Deprivation (percent)
<b>Male</b>				
0 – 14 Years	50.4	0.431	72.5	59.4
36 – 64 Years	49.4	0.362	63.1	57.4
65+ Years	46.7	0.387	68.2	56.7
<b>Female</b>				
0 – 14 Years	49.6	0.415	70.7	58.6
15 – 35 Years	55.4	0.342	60.0	56.9
36 – 64 Years	50.5	0.383	66.8	57.4
65+ Years	53.3	0.396	70.4	56.3

**Table 1: Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) by Age Group in Sierra Leone**

Source: MPI Report Sierra Leone 2019

The multidimensionality of poverty and deprivation among communities in rural areas is considerably higher than their counterparts in urban areas as reported in Figure 1



**Figure 1: Severity of Deprivation across the five Dimensions of Poverty by Location**

Source: Sierra Leone Multidimensional Poverty Index Report 2019

## Chapter 2: The Leave No One Behind (LNOB) Conceptual Framework

Three closely linked and distinct concepts underpin the idea of LNOB: equality (the state of being equal in terms of status, rights, and opportunities), non-discrimination (just and unprejudiced treatment of different categories of people) and equity (fairness in the distribution of resources). Inequalities can exist in both opportunities and outcomes. Inequalities disproportionately affect individuals and groups of people based on their race, gender, language, religion, age, colour, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, migrant or economic status, and so on. Moreover, gender discrimination in all forms remains one of the most prevalent forms of discrimination worldwide.<sup>15</sup>

The LNOB concept is intrinsically linked to social exclusion which has two main characteristics. First, it is a multidimensional concept; implying people can be excluded in many areas of life, such as education, food security, employment, housing, health services, economic resources, and citizenship. Secondly, social exclusion involves a focus on social relations, processes, and institutions that cause deprivation.<sup>16</sup> For example, a group of people may be excluded due to their identity or by landowners who prohibit access to land or habitat; political elites may exclude other groups based on legal rights; and labour markets may prevent categories of individuals from obtaining access to employment.

In 2016, the UN Chief Executives Board adopted a Shared UN System Framework for Action, with LNOB as one of six Guiding Principles, as follows:



<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> I. Hathie (2019) Global State of the SDGs, Leave No One Behind: a cross-country synthesis. Available at <https://southernvoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Leave-No-One-Behind-1.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF (2021) A guidance note for Leaving No One Behind

The principle of the LNOB is a commitment by the UN member states to leave no one behind in human development. This implies that they should take clear measures to undertake the following as the backbone of the LNOB objective:

- The eradication of all forms of poverty and allow all those left behind to catch up with those that have made progress;
- End discrimination and exclusion that leads to unequal outcomes for the marginalised; and
- Reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities that undermine a person’s ability to live a life of dignity.<sup>18</sup>



It is an anti-poverty as well as anti-discrimination agenda –that recognises the naivety of expecting progress to trickle down the socio-economic scale. Instead, it necessitates explicit and proactive attempts to ensure that the populations left out by progress are now not only included but placed at the forefront.<sup>19</sup>

Any analysis of who is being left behind, and why, should be based on evidence and irrefutable data covering five intersecting factors that are used to understand who is left behind, to what degree, and why.<sup>20</sup>

### Common LNOB Factors:

- 1 Discrimination based on assumed or ascribed identity or status;**
- 2 Geography, that is groups isolated or excluded due to location with aggravating factors such as environmental degradation, lack of transport, or technology;**
- 3 Vulnerability to shocks such as natural disasters, conflict, and economic shocks;**
- 4 Socio-economic status, especially multidimensional poverty and inequalities;**
- 5 Governance i.e. laws, policies, institutions preventing participation in decision making.**



<sup>18</sup> I. Hathie (2019) Global State of the SDGs, Leave No One Behind: a cross-country synthesis. Available at <https://southernvoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Leave-No-One-Behind-1.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> E. Stuart, OECD, Development Co-operation Report 2018, Joining Forces to Leave No One Behind, Chapter 2. Why leaving no one behind matters, 2018. Available online at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/dcr-2018-7-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/dcr-2018-7-en>

<sup>20</sup> The analysis of these 5 factors is methodologically based on two main documents, namely:

- a) The Guide of UNDP "WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND? A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation" published in July 2017;
- b) The Guide of UNSDG "Leaving No One Behind. A UNSDG operational Guide for UN Country Teams"

It is imperative that the data from these is considered in determining the driving factors for exclusion in Sierra Leone. A brief definition of these concepts is given below:

- 1. Discrimination:** Who are those being discriminated against in Sierra Leone based on ethnicity, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, etc.? What are the causes of these?
- 2. Geography:** Who is excluded or deprived of opportunities, increasing isolation, vulnerability, environmental degradation, absence of public services or other gaps and problems caused by their place of residence in Sierra Leone? Where, how and why does it happen?
- 3. Vulnerability to shocks:** Who is exposed or is more vulnerable to the cause/effects of climate change, violence, social conflicts, health emergencies or economic crisis in Sierra Leone and why.
- 4. Socio-economic Status:** Who is facing deprivation or other disadvantages in terms of income, life expectancy, as well as school and educational benefits in Sierra Leone? Who is less likely to stay healthy, nourished and educated? Who has fewer opportunities in the job market? Who is deprived of economic improvement or the benefits of good quality health services, clean water, sanitation, energy, social protection and financial services in Sierra Leone? Why does it happen?
- 5. Governance:** Who is at a disadvantage due to the inefficiency and weak capacity of institutions at a national or local level in Sierra Leone? Who is affected by unequal, inadequate or unfair laws, policies, processes or budgets? Who is less able to influence or significantly participate in judicial processes and other decisions that impact them both in political and social life? <sup>21</sup>



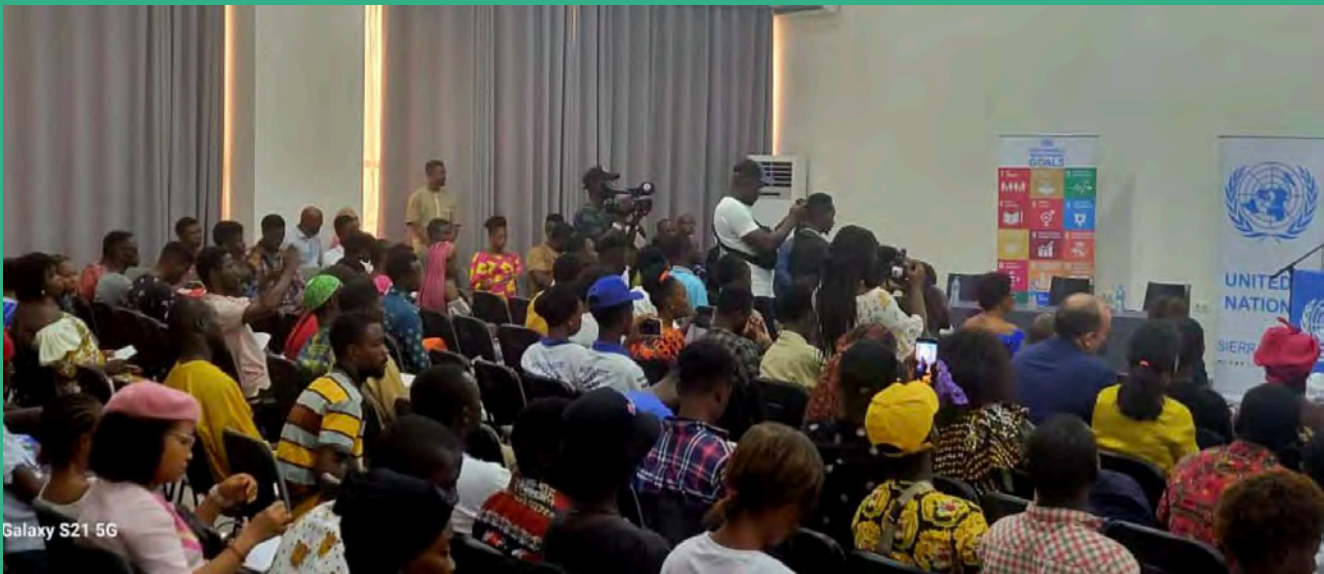
<sup>21</sup> UNDP (2018) what does it mean to leave no one behind? A UNDP Discussion paper and framework for implementation.

## Chapter 3: Who is left behind in Sierra Leone and Why

This chapter discusses several groups perceived as having been left behind in Sierra Leone, based on the factors discussed in Chapter 2. The groups profiled are based on consultations within the UN country team and with key external partners. It is however acknowledged, that not all groups subjected to LNOB factors are covered here. The focus is on those groups that strongly manifest the five central driving forces behind the process of exclusion, particularly those groups affected by multiple forms of deprivation, disadvantage and discrimination.

As discussed in Chapter 2, some factors that cause individuals and groups to be at risk of being left behind, notably socio-economic status, apply broadly to persons in the country and are therefore covered in the main CCA report in the context of overall development priorities of the country.

In this chapter, we focus primarily on groups subjected to the other elements of LNOB, such as discrimination, and attempt to profile each group, the challenges they face, and the root causes of the challenges.



<sup>22</sup> Multidimensional Child Poverty in Sierra Leone 2019

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Global report on Child Poverty in the Developing World, 2003

<sup>25</sup> Multidimensional Child Poverty in Sierra Leone 2019

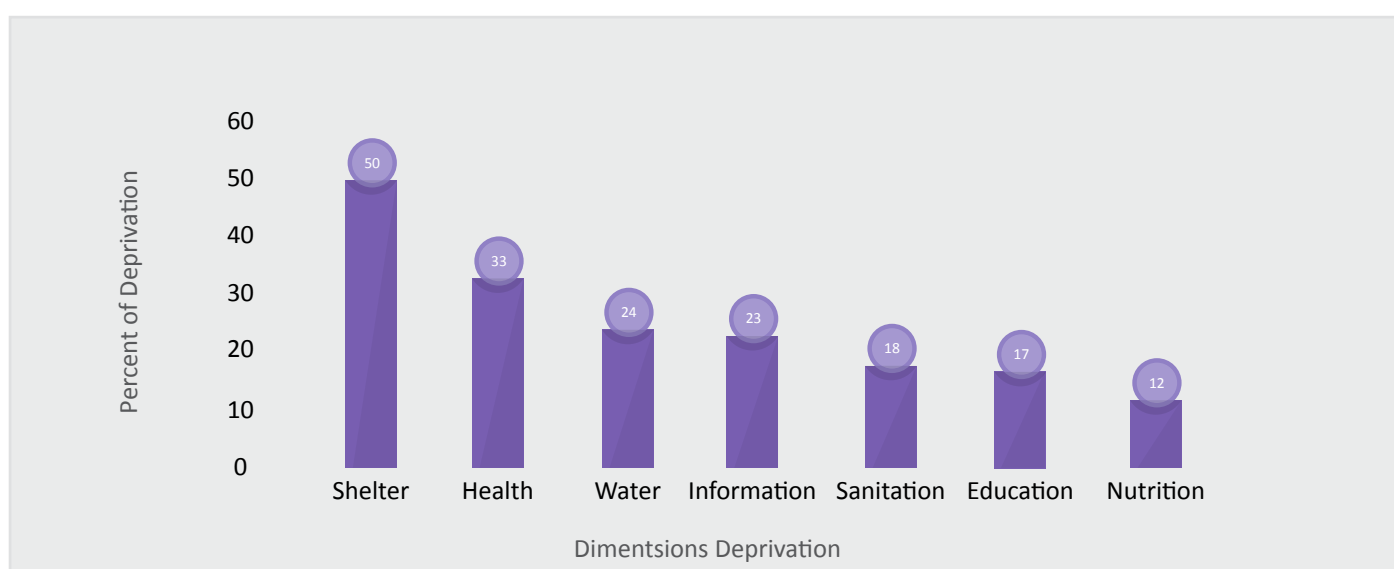
<sup>26</sup> Ibid



## Chapter 3.1: Children Living in Poverty

As of 2017, 66 percent of children in Sierra Leone are considered as living in poverty.<sup>22</sup> A child is considered in poverty if they are deprived of at least one of the following rights: shelter, education, information, water, sanitation, health and nutrition.<sup>23 24</sup> Figure 2 shows the percent of children deprived in each dimension. Children living in rural areas are twice as poor than their urban counterparts; hence, poverty is a primarily a rural phenomenon in Sierra Leone.<sup>25</sup> Koinadugu (85.4 percent), Moyamba (83.9 percent), Bonthe (83 percent), Pujehun (83 percent) and Tonkolili (81.7 percent) districts are the most affected by child poverty according to the Child Multidimensional poverty report.<sup>26</sup> The implication is that about 8 out of 10 children are poor in these districts.

Children living in poverty are also more likely to engage in child labour which hinders their ability to study, since families need the additional income. The 2018 Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) found that most children help within the household work without pay (91.0 percent) or are self-employed (7.9 percent).



**Figure 2: Incidence of Child Poverty: Percent of Children Deprived in each Dimension**

Source: Sierra Leone Child Poverty Report

From Figure 2 above, deprivation in the shelter dimension affects children the most, with half of the children in Sierra Leone living in shelters that are overcrowded and/or have poor flooring material. Behind the poverty figures are hidden socioeconomic disparities among children. The mother's level of education is the main socioeconomic driver of child poverty in Sierra Leone. Other drivers include the number of children living in the house and whether a child has a birth certificate. The gender of the child is not significant in determining whether a child is poor or not.

Two groups worth mentioning here: children with disability and children not under any parental care and protection. Their situations are worse because children with disability face double risk: first, as children and, secondly, as children with disability, whereas those without parental care suffer because they are easily exposed to various dangers, including violence.

## 3.2 Informal Workers

The informal sector in Sierra Leone comprises all economic activities outside formal institutions and cuts across both the rural and urban informal sectors. Informal workers have incomes that are highly vulnerable to economic fluctuations and other shocks. The group includes sub-groups such as uneducated youth, child laborers, urban slum dwellers, women, and the elderly.

The informal sector is dominated by different small – scale enterprises and business activities which include cookery, tailoring, carpentry, metal work, shoe making, baking, photography, watch and radio repairs, hair dressing, subsistence farming, commercial bike riding (“okada”), petty trading, cattle rearing etc. However, petty trading and subsistence agriculture are the hallmarks of the informal sector in Sierra Leone.<sup>27</sup> The World Bank estimates the size of the informal sector in Sierra Leone to be 37.3 percent of GDP, representing approximately US\$9 billion.<sup>28</sup>

Table 2 provides some characteristics of the informal sector economy, where most workers (92 percent) are employed.<sup>29</sup> The gender disparity shows that men dominate in formal sector jobs (73 percent), and women dominate in the informal sector (57 percent). Significantly, only formal sector employees benefit from government social security and insurance coverage provided by the government agency NASSIT. This factor contributes to the economic vulnerability of informal workers over their lifetime.

Informal work sector workers are generally characterized by: fragmentation and diversity; low income, irregular and insecure employment; exposure to a variety of diseases and health risks; poor access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities; overcrowding and poor housing hence making them vulnerable to waterborne and communicable diseases; high dependence on risk coping mechanisms in order to sell their assets.<sup>30 31</sup> According to the International Labor Organization, the sector is further distinguished by: (a) ease of entry, (b) reliance on indigenous resources, (c) family ownership of enterprise, (d) small scale of operation, often defined in terms of hired workers less than ten, (e) labor-intensive methods of production and adapted technology, (f) skills acquired outside the formal school system, and (g) unregulated and competitive markets.



Indicator	Percentage
Proportion of Informal Employment in Total Employment (2018)	92
Proportion of Informal Employment in Total Non-agriculture Employment (2018)	88
Informal Employment covered by NASSIT (2021)	0.2

**Table 2: Status of Sierra Leone’s Informal Sector**

Source: ILO, The World Bank, IMF (2021) and Statistics SL Thematic Report on Economic Characteristics 2017

<sup>27</sup> Kamara, F. S (2008) Economic and Social crises in Sierra Leone: The role of small-scale entrepreneurs in petty trading as a strategy for survival

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/sierraleone>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/sierraleone>

<sup>30</sup> Ghosh, S., and S. Mondal, (2011) Morbidity, Health Expenditure and WTP for HI amongst the Urban Poor: A Case Study. Journal of Health Management

<sup>31</sup> Arhin-Tenkorang, D. (2001) Health Insurance for the Informal Sector in Africa: Design Features, Risk Protection, and Resource Mobilization. Health, Nutrition and Population Discussion Paper, World Bank



Entry into the informal sector is often influenced by poor access of students to educational programs of their choice upon entry into secondary schools. Also, a large portion of those who continue the educational programs do not complete these for economic or social reasons. Households in the informal sector are generally poor, not well educated, and deprived both economically (e.g., without access to credit), and socially (e.g., limited access to health care due to its high cost). There is gender disparity, as more women than men are engaged in agriculture, service shops, market sales and other elementary occupations.

The micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) in Sierra Leone provides livelihoods to about 70 percent of Sierra Leone's labour market and represents over 90 percent of the private sector.<sup>32</sup>

However, majority of the people operate in the informal economy, of which only 10 percent are registered.<sup>33</sup> Studies have revealed that the MSMEs' growth is impeded by lack of access to finance and land, unreliable electricity, high tax rates, as well as customs and trade regulations.<sup>34</sup> The government has created the Sierra Leone Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDA) whose role is to coordinate MSME's activities.

<sup>32</sup> Labour Market Profile Sierra Leone 2023/2024

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> The World Bank (2022) Sierra Leone Economic Update: Leveraging SME Financing and Digitization for Inclusive Growth

## The IMF highlighted the following that underpin informal economy generally and Sierra Leone in particular:



The informal economy consists of activities that have market value but are not formally registered. Over 90 percent of the working population in Sierra Leone is in this economy;

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The informal economy is difficult to measure as activities cannot be measured directly as participants in the informal economy do not want to be accounted for;

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The COVID-19 pandemic hit informal workers particularly hard, especially women. This disparity impact of the pandemic is because the majority of informal workers are employed in contact-intensive sectors (such as domestic workers, market vendors, and taxi drivers) and in insecure jobs that do not offer paid leave or the ability to work from home which are dominated by women. Poverty and gender inequality have risen due to the pandemic;

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The informal economy is central to the economic development process. Understanding the drivers and consequences of informality is central to sustainable and inclusive development, as informality is critically related to how fast countries grow, and to poverty and inequality, including gender inequality. Whereas some individuals and firms operate informally by choice, majority of all informal workers are in precarious employment, not through choice but due to a lack of opportunities in the formal sector. This has important economic consequences. Informal firms tend to remain small, with low productivity and limited access to finance. Second, informal workers are more likely to be poor and to earn lower wages compared to their peers in the formal sector. They lack social protection, access to credit and are generally less educated. Third, informality is related to gender inequality. Globally, 58 percent of employed women work in the informal sector, and are more likely to be in the most precarious and low-paid categories of informal employment; and

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The informal economy represents the only source of income and a critical safety net for millions of people.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2021/07/28/na-072821-five-things-to-know-about-the-informal-economy>

### 3.3 Homeless persons

Homelessness occurs in all nations, is growing in many parts of the world, and has severely negative impact on individuals and communities. It is a complex issue, sitting at the intersection of public health, housing affordability, domestic violence, mental illness, substance misuse, urbanization, racial and gender discrimination, infrastructure, and unemployment. The interplay between these elements is expressed in a host of ways depending upon the local context. Levels of homelessness rise and fall dependent on shifts in, and changes to, any one of the elements.

In Sierra Leone, an estimated 70 percent of the homeless population is made up of young people, following the global trend. The country's crises and disasters including the civil war, the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), and COVID-19 have increased the homeless population. Some of the drivers of homelessness among young people in Sierra Leone includes being forced out by parents or caregivers, willfully leaving foster care environments or family homes, peer influence, poverty, lack of job and shelter, mental health issues (individuals with mental health challenges are left homeless and uncared for on the streets), lack of housing, and land ownership. Alcoholism and substance abuse are also risk factors for homelessness.

The National Social Protection Policy asserts the need to respond to the mass phenomenon of homelessness by establishing collective shelters as a last resort for vulnerable groups. Government and Development partner efforts can help to advance these types of practical solutions for persons experiencing homelessness.

### 3.4 Persons with Disabilities

According to the 2018 integrated household survey, the disability prevalence in Sierra Leone is 4.3 percent, of which 50.1 percent and 49.9 percent are females and males respectively.<sup>37</sup> Women and girls with disabilities face double discrimination – first as a woman or girl, and second, as a person living with disability, hence affecting their ability to achieve their life goals. Children with disabilities are also especially vulnerable and this often increases the poverty of their carers because of their reduced ability to engage in income-earning livelihoods while caring for their children.

According to the 2018 survey, the most prevalent types of disability were lower limb impairments (32 percent), visual impairments (29 percent), and hearing impairments (9 percent). The main causes of disability were diseases or illness (42 percent), followed by congenital causes (17 percent).<sup>38</sup> Of the 4.3 percent Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), 31 percent are from the northern region while 71 percent live in rural areas with entrenched multidimensional poverty of over 80 percent.<sup>39</sup> Of the 52 percent in the working age, only 6.7 percent are in paid formal employment, mainly in agriculture and fishing.

The majority of PWDs are from Tonkolili (20 percent) and Kailahun (9.8 percent) districts while the lowest prevalence is recorded in Bonthe district (1.6 percent). In terms of education, about 67 percent of PWDs did not go to school whereas 37 percent did, of which 15.6 percent, 8 percent and 9 percent completed primary, lower, and upper secondary education, respectively.

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<sup>36</sup> Frazer, A (2021) Homelessness in Sierra Leone: A brief overview

<sup>37</sup> Statistics Sierra Leone (2018) Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) report

<sup>38</sup> Statistics Sierra Leone (2018) Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) report

<sup>39</sup> Ibid



An in-depth Situational Analysis on Persons with Disabilities in Sierra Leone was completed in 2021 under a UN program and provides additional insights.<sup>40</sup> Poverty poses special challenges for PWDs, notably the lack of basic adaptive environments and assistive devices found in more developed countries. Linked to the high poverty rate is the fact that many PWDs survive through begging and may also be homeless. The living conditions of PWDs in the provinces differs from that of those in the city. Begging is mostly concentrated in urban areas.


PWDs consulted for the UN study mentioned housing as one of the greatest challenges and crosscutting categories of disability, especially in urban areas. settings, where often it is a collective activity of PWDs. Many PWDs who have migrated to the city from the rural regions of Sierra Leone, have the impression that the city represents a promise of escape from the hardship and lack of education experienced in their original communities. Yet, many live on the streets, sleeping under market tables or shop doors. Women with disabilities living in the street are more vulnerable than their male peers due to the risk of sexual abuse and violence.<sup>41</sup> Many of them have children they raise in undignified conditions due to poverty, without any form of financial support. Single parenthood puts an additional burden on women with disabilities, especially those living in vulnerable conditions.

Accessibility to public buildings often poses threats to PWDs as the buildings are not disability friendly. Despite a few examples, PWDs occupying public office are rare. Some hold positions in national government, parliament, and local councils. There can be more efforts initiated to promote more PWDs in social leadership roles, drawing on positive role models and inclusive practices for inspiration.

PWDs are entitled to free public health care in all levels of service, however, frequent lack of accessibility to service locations, the scarcity of essential drugs covered under the free health care program, and the varying quality of health services makes this prerogative rather weak in outcome.

<sup>40</sup> Sierra Leone Situational Analysis Report (2021) UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNPRPD)

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



The National Social Protection Policy does not treat disability as a unique category, instead it refers to disability in different sections, at times reducing disability to specific types of impairments, reinforcing stereotypes, while at other times acknowledging special needs in a progressive manner. Persons with disabilities are taken into consideration in various sections, and persons with disabilities constitute a priority target group for some social protection measures, namely cash transfers and food provision. Apart from the invalidity pension provided by the National Social Security & Insurance Trust (NASSIT) for formal sector workers, there is no established social protection program for people living with disabilities. The policy does state the need to improve the accessibility of public spaces and buildings and recognizes that physical rehabilitation should be part of social protection.

Education in public institutions has been made free at both the primary and secondary levels for all children, and persons with disabilities can benefit from special grants if they want to further their education at the tertiary level. The Radical Inclusion Policy of the government aims at bringing all children who have been left out so far for free education into mainstream schooling and preventing their departure. In principle, all barriers preventing children with disabilities from getting free and quality education should be addressed but, here too, the overall low quality of education and the lack of specialized education at the tertiary level limit the possibility of meaningful inclusion.

### 3.5 Persons Living with HIV/AIDS

The HIV epidemic in Sierra Leone is considered as mixed, generalized, feminized and heterogeneous but concentrated in key population groups (KP). The HIV epidemic affects different population subgroups through multiple and diverse transmission dynamics. The national adult prevalence rate stood at 1.7 percent (with women 2.2 percent and men 1.1 percent).<sup>42 43</sup> HIV prevalence is higher in urban (2.3 percent) than in rural (1.2 percent) areas; concentrated in the western region (2.5 percent) and lowest in the east (1.2 percent); HIV prevalence is three times higher among younger females aged 15 – 24 years (1.5 percent) than their male (0.5 percent) counterparts; HIV is more prevalent in women residing in urban areas (3.0 percent); HIV prevalence is 2.1 percent and 1.3 percent among married women and men respectively.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Sierra Leone Demographic Health Survey (2019)

<sup>43</sup> National AIDS Secretariat Sierra Leone (2020) The Sierra Leone National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan 2021-2025

<sup>44</sup> Sierra Leone Demographic Health Survey (2019)

Globally, HIV is most prevalent amongst the following KP groups: Female Sex Workers, Transgender, Men who have sex with Men, People who Inject Drugs, and Persons Living in Close settings. These KP groups face stigma and discrimination that limits uptake of HIV services in many communities across the globe, of which Sierra Leone is not an exception.

For example, HIV prevalence is 11.8 percent among female sex workers.; 3.4 percent prevalence among men who have sex with men, and higher in western area urban (9.2 percent) than the other regions; 4.2 percent among transgender people; 4.2 percent among persons who inject drugs; and, inmates have a prevalence of 3.7 percent, notable six times higher for female inmates (5.51 percent) compared to their male counterparts (0.92 percent).<sup>45</sup>

The disproportionately high HIV prevalence among the key populations and young women is largely attributable to the repressive laws on loitering, sodomy, drug control and age of consent coupled with high rates of stigma, discrimination and physical attacks against these population groups, that pushes them underground and limit their access to HIV prevention and treatment services.

HIV/AIDS is one of the social diseases that have been met with high level of human rights related barriers of which stigma and discrimination are the most heinous acts. Sixty-four percent of women and 58 percent of men do not think that children living with HIV should be able to attend school with children who are HIV negative. Similarly, 76 percent of women and 65 percent of men would not buy fresh vegetables from a shopkeeper who has HIV.<sup>46</sup>

Stigma is a complex social phenomenon that encompasses negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors directed towards individuals or groups based on perceived differences or characteristics that deviate from societal norms.<sup>47 48</sup> HIV-related stigma is multifaceted in its expression – perceived and enacted. HIV stigma can have profound impacts on the psychosocial well-being, mental health, quality of life, and clinical outcomes of persons living with HIV (PLHIV).<sup>49 50</sup> HIV stigma leads to increased levels of depression and anxiety, unwillingness to test for HIV, fear of status disclosure, poor treatment adherence, and the fear of stigma contributes to poor retention in HIV care, and compromising treatment outcomes.<sup>51 52 53</sup> Thus, understanding and addressing the various dimensions of HIV stigma is essential for comprehensive approaches to HIV prevention, care, and psychosocial support.

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<sup>45</sup> Sierra Leone Integrated Bio-Behavioral Surveillance Survey (IBBSS) (2021)

<sup>46</sup> DHS(2019)

<sup>47</sup> Scambler G. (2009) Health-related stigma

<sup>48</sup> Yendewa et.al. (2023) Perceived and Enacted HIV-Related Stigma in Eastern and Southern Sierra Leone: A Psychometric Study of an HIV Stigma Scale

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Kelly JD, Weiser SD, Tsai AC (2016) Proximate Context of HIV Stigma and Its Association with HIV Testing in Sierra Leone: A Population-Based Study. AIDS Behaviour

<sup>51</sup> Vanable PA, Carey MP, Blair DC, Littlewood RA (2006) Impact of HIV-related stigma on health behaviors and psychological adjustment among HIV-positive men and women. AIDS Behaviour

<sup>52</sup> Scambler G. (2009) Health-related stigma.

<sup>53</sup> Yendewa et.al. (2023) Perceived and Enacted HIV-Related Stigma in Eastern and Southern Sierra Leone: A Psychometric Study of an HIV Stigma Scale



Sierra Leone officially guarantees many fundamental rights, including freedom of religion, freedom of association, and equal treatment under the law. As enshrined in the Sierra Leone Constitution, Article 27 also prohibits discrimination by race, tribe, sex, place of origin, political opinions, colour or creed, with people allowed to file discrimination complaints in court. Moreover, the Constitution also affirms ideals of health and welfare of all persons, but affords no legal or enforceable rights to these.<sup>54</sup> This is a factor in the following significant human rights-related barriers impeding access to HIV services for KPs:

Stigmatizing attitudes and discriminatory practices against transmissible health conditions of those living with HIV and TB, other disabling health conditions (including mental illness and drug dependency), poverty, illiteracy, and certain professions such as female sex workers. These stigmatizing attitudes and discriminatory practices are influenced by prevailing social, cultural, political and economic forces and expressed by families and communities, local governments, law enforcement, religious institutions, service providers, and public media;

Self-stigma among key and vulnerable communities and relatively weak community-led organizations that can directly challenge stereotypes, discrimination and violence, and encourage tolerance and respect;

Gender inequality, including bias against adolescent girls and women based on their marital status, age, reproductive choices, or expressions of gender and sexuality. For example, women and girls face unequal treatment under traditional and customary laws, do not have equal access to education, and face other human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence;

Lack of knowledge, or uneven knowledge, among all stakeholders, including parliamentarians, journalists, police, military, judiciary, local leaders, civil society organizations, and key and vulnerable populations, about human and legal rights related to health and HIV;

Structural barriers including repressive laws in the penal code such as sodomy provision, loitering, benefiting from prostitution and age of consent for minors accessing HIV and other reproductive health services.

Consequent rights violations by duty bearers and impunity in cases of abuses, including illegal practices by police in the form of harassment, extortion, arbitrary arrest and detention, violence, rape, and/or failure to protect from violence;

Under-resourced systems for health and legal justice, such that legal justice is not served, and health facilities, including prison health services, struggle to ensure that infrastructure, staffing, training, or supervision fully comply with rights principles;

Insufficient budgeted resources directed toward the needs of key and vulnerable populations; and

Poverty, food insecurity, lack of literacy and education, and lack of economic opportunity.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Global Fund (2018) Scaling up Programs to Remove Human Rights-Related Barriers to HIV and TB Services Baseline Assessment Report- Sierra Leone- June 2018

<sup>55</sup> Global Fund (2018) Scaling up Programs to Remove Human Rights-Related Barriers to HIV and TB Services Baseline Assessment Report- Sierra Leone



GBV, as defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC, 2015) is:

*“an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private”.*

Due to the many cases of rape and sexual violence the country experienced in 2019, the issue of SGBV was declared a “national emergency” in 2019 by the President.<sup>57</sup> Although all genders are at risk of becoming victims of SGBV, women and children especially girls are the most victimized groups, at risk of suffering the worst forms of mistreatment and consequences.<sup>58</sup>

GBV in its physical and structural form is endemic in Sierra Leone, and some key facts are presented in the CCA report. In Sierra Leone gender inequalities are exacerbated by discriminatory customs in relation to marriage, property rights and sexual offences.<sup>59</sup> The prevalent forms of GBV include domestic violence, sexual assault, including rape of adults and minors, rape in marriage and school-related sexual abuse, as well as harmful practices such as Child Marriage and FGM.

One of the effects of GBV is teenage pregnancy which has been one of the societal problems which often triggers a vicious cycle of poverty.

### 3.6 Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

Sierra Leonean women are at risk for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the form of domestic violence, sexual assault of adults and minors, marital rape, school-related sexual abuse, and harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation. Many Sierra Leoneans indicate that women are likely to face criticism or harassment if they report such violence to the police.<sup>56</sup>

The Sierra Leonean society is patriarchal and evidence of the centrality of males can be seen in every aspect and sector, resulting in widespread horizontal and vertical inequalities. The gender inequality in Sierra Leone is evidenced in health and nutrition; education, skills and labour participation; entrepreneurship and financial inclusion; and political empowerment.

<sup>56</sup> Afro Barometer Report (2022)

[https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/R9-News-release-Gender-based-violence-a-top-priority-in-Sierra-Leone\\_2\\_Nov22.pdf](https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/R9-News-release-Gender-based-violence-a-top-priority-in-Sierra-Leone_2_Nov22.pdf)







<sup>57</sup> Capturing the Socioeconomic and Cultural Drivers of Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Sierra Leone

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> Barnes K, Albrecht P and Olson M, (2007) Addressing

Gender-Based Violence in Sierra Leone: Mapping Challenges, Responses and Future Entry Points

## The drivers of SGBV in Sierra Leone include: <sup>60</sup>

-  **1) Individual Drivers** – The lack of personal autonomy and the economic stress generated by a shock like the Ebola Virus Disease/COVID-19 can increase the risk of domestic violence. The social norms socialize females as passive, nurturing, submissive, and emotional which also reinforce women's roles as weak, powerless, and dependent upon men. The socialization of both men and women resulted in an unequal power relationship between men and women.
-  **2) Relational Drivers** – Younger girls are more vulnerable to experiencing SGBV because of economic vulnerability and cultural beliefs. Harmful practices such as Child Marriage and FGM are also most common among the least educated women who come from the poor households. Women with little or no education are more vulnerable to experience physical violence and higher percentage of experiencing sexual violence than those with higher level of education. GBV is more common among women and girls and linked to damaging women's confidence resulting in fear of venturing into public spaces (this can often curtail women's education, which in turn can limit their income-generating opportunities). The excessive alcohol drinking by men was found to be a cause of SGBV in Sierra Leone.
-  **3) Relationship Drivers** - In terms of decision-making, while asymmetrical decision-making power within the household on its own does not explain SGBV, women's limited autonomy and participation in decision-making is a factor that can exacerbate family or relationship tensions and put women at risk of sexual transgressions. For instance, 56 percent of decisions regarding a woman's own health are taken by their husband.
-  **4) Community Drivers** - Sierra Leone is a highly patriarchal society and the gender inequalities noted above in relationships are exacerbated by discriminatory customs in relation to marriage, property rights and sexual offences. Urban environment characteristics are also a driver of SGBV, as the absence of essential facilities and the inadequate provision of public services have a significant impact on women's and girls' movements and quality of life.
-  **5) Institutional Drivers** - Lack of justice after the conflict and historical corruption have raised doubts about the functioning of mechanisms to prevent and eradicate SGBV. 85 percent of people believe that one of the causes of widespread SGBV is the lack of fear of the consequences on the part of the perpetrators.
-  **6) Limited safe homes** - The poor quality and limited number of one stop centers and safe home, which limits SGBV survivor's access to psycho-social, medical and legal support services.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

Working against these drivers, progress has been made in Sierra Leone in expanding opportunities for women and girls to promote gender equality and empowerment of women and they include: legislative reforms like Domestic Violence Act 2007, Devolution of Estates Act 2007, Registration of Customary, Marriage and Divorce Act 2009, Child Rights Act 2007, the Sexual Offences Act 2012, and the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act (GEWE) 2022.<sup>61</sup>

There was a decrease in GBV-related cases reported at support centres operated by Rainbo Initiative NGO from 3,292 cases in 2021 to 2941 cases in 2022.<sup>62</sup> Sexual assault was highest in Western Area (40.6 percent), followed by Kenema district (18.8 percent) and Bo district (15.6 percent). Data shows that about 99 percent of the GBV survivors are females.<sup>63</sup>

SGBV is one of the most pervasive forms of human rights abuses in Sierra Leone and, while this section focused on women and girls, it is also recognized that men and boys can be subjected to this type of violence and there should be avenues for them as survivors to access a full range of support without stigma. Across the country, there are only six centres that provide comprehensive support to ease the burden on SGBV survivors, which means that these services are not readily available for most survivors in the country. A scaled-up network of centres providing comprehensive services are needed to ensure support to all who need it.



<sup>61</sup> [https://ministerialleadership.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023-Forum\\_Sierra-Leone-Case-Study\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ministerialleadership.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023-Forum_Sierra-Leone-Case-Study_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Rainbo Initiative (2022) Rainbo Centre GBV Data

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

## 3.7 Adolescent Girls impacted by Child Marriage and Harmful Practices

Child Marriage, defined as any marriage or union where in one or both parties are below the universally accepted age of 18 years, is deeply gendered and a violation of human rights. It is rooted in gender inequality and ineffective laws. It is a threat to the girl child's right to make choices in life, health, education, right to survival and equal opportunities. Each year, 12 million girls, globally, are married before attaining age 18. This has devastating consequences at a social and economic level, but also economically.<sup>64</sup> Countries have recommended ending child marriage at the UN and declaring it a human rights abuse; furthermore, adopting the SDG to reinforce the end child marriage by 2030.

When girls marry early, they are likely to experience domestic violence, less likely to remain in school, have more children over their lifetime, are at greater risk of intimate partner violence, deprived of rights to quality education and health care, have worse economic and health outcomes than their unmarried peers. They are often isolated, with limited opportunity to participate in the development of their communities.

Data and anecdotal evidence have shown that girls who are victims of child marriage face life threatening health challenges like being susceptible to HIV and other sexual diseases, higher chances of infant and maternal mortality, having unhealthy children, abrupt end to their educational pursuit, lack of empowerment, face abject poverty and higher chances of GBV associated crimes. Generally, a high prevalence of child marriage negatively affects the economic, health and development outcomes of countries and continues a cycle of poverty, violence, and injustice.<sup>65</sup>

In Sierra Leone as in other countries, the victims of child marriage, girls, suffer for the majority of their lifetime and the perpetrators go unpunished. The laws relating to child marriage are pluralistic and undermine each other (the child rights states age 18 as the age of marriage but traditional law can accept marriages for as low as 15 years), hence providing limited protection against child marriage.

There are 800,000 married girls in Sierra Leone. According to the 2017 Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS), adolescent pregnancy is a driver of child marriage in Sierra Leone – 21 percent of adolescent girls (15 – 19 years) have either had a child or pregnant, and 34 percent have had sex with a man 10 years or more older and common in Koinadugu (49 percent) Moyamba (47 percent), Western Area Rural (45 percent), Bonthe (41 percent) and Tonkolili (41 percent) districts.

About 8 in 10 women have undergone FGM, and maternal mortality is the leading cause of death among girls in this age group. Child marriage is most common in Koinadugu, Tonkolili, Kambia, and Port Loko.<sup>66</sup>

Among the 800,000 married girls, about half were married before age 15. Child marriage has reduced by 38 percent between 2008 and 2019.<sup>67</sup> Child marriage is a highly prioritized issue and government has shown commitment to abolish it by becoming a signatory to the international instruments that protect the rights of girls and women, namely, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Maputo Protocol- the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/>

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/sierra-leone/#:~:text=30%25%20of%20girls%20in%20Sierra,%2C%20Kambia%2C%20and%20Port%20Loko>

<sup>67</sup> UNFPA-UNICEF (2020) Country Profiles Sierra Leone: Global Program to End Child Marriage

In 2016, Sierra Leone reached a significant milestone when it became the 15th country in Africa to launch the African Union (AU) Campaign to End Child Marriage, and the enactment of the Child Rights Act, ramping up its efforts to ban this harmful practice in the country.<sup>68</sup> Child Marriage is a serious issue in Sierra Leone, as shown by the following:

- The country has the 19th highest prevalence rate in the world;
- 21% of adolescent girls (15 – 19 years) have given birth;<sup>69</sup>
- 30 percent get married before age 18;<sup>70</sup>
- 9 percent of girls under the age of 15 are married;
- 34% of adolescent girls (15 – 19 years) have had sex with a man 10 years or more older than her;<sup>71 72 73</sup>
- Maternal Mortality is the leading cause of death among adolescent girls;<sup>74</sup>
- Sierra Leone has a Gender Inequality Index of 0.633 and ranked 162 out of 170 countries in the world;<sup>75</sup>
- The 'age of consent' limits adolescent and young girls' access to reproductive health services.

The social, economic, cultural and patriarchy system fuels child marriage especially in remote and poverty-stricken communities in Sierra Leone. These drivers of child marriage will influence the poor socio-economic position of the girl child, coupled with poor social class and gender inequality. These factors will also lead to girls leaving school, which will influence both the kind of occupation and income levels of the girl.

Programs geared towards ending child marriage will improve girl's educational attainment, lower population growth, increase women's expected earnings, build a healthier and more productive workforce, and reduce the rates of under-five mortality.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>68</sup><https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/sierra-leone/#:~:text=30%25%20of%20girls%20in%20Sierra,%2C%20Kambia%2C%20and%20Port%20Loko>

<sup>69</sup>UNFPA-UNICEF (2020) Country Profiles Sierra Leone: Global Program to End Child Marriage

<sup>70</sup> Government of Sierra Leone (2018) National Strategy on the Elimination of Teenage Pregnancy and Child Marriage 2018- 2022

<sup>71</sup> Sierra Leone 2019 Demographic Health Survey

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> 2017 MICS Sierra Leone

<sup>74</sup> UNICEF Child Marriage Data <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/childmarriage/> Accessed on December 2023

<sup>75</sup> Wodon, Q., Tavares, P., Fiala, O., Le Nestour, A., and Wise, L. (2017b). Ending Child Marriage: Legal Age for Marriage, Illegal Child Marriages, and the Need for Interventions. London and Washington, DC: Save the Children and The World Bank.

<sup>76</sup> Wodon, Q., Tavares, P., Fiala, O., Le Nestour, A., and Wise, L. (2017). Ending Child Marriage: Legal Age for Marriage, Illegal Child Marriages, and the Need for Interventions. London and Washington, DC: Save the Children and The World Bank

## 3.8 Migrants and Returned Migrants

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines the term irregular migration as the movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination.<sup>77</sup> The term is generally used to identify persons moving outside regular migration channels as understood and accepted by the country of origin, those of their intended destination and internationally accepted regulations governing these.<sup>78</sup> Migrants can be considered to have regularly or irregularly migrated as laws and policies change. The fact that they migrate irregularly does not relieve States from the obligation to protect their rights.<sup>79</sup>

From an economic perspective, irregular migration is quite functional for many destination states. As a result of deregulation, liberalization and flexibilization, there is demand for various forms of unskilled and semi-skilled labour employed under precarious conditions.<sup>80</sup> Hence, irregular migrants provide a cheap source of labour and are often willing to work in sectors in which regular migrants and nationals are not.<sup>81</sup> It is not just the process of moving in an irregular fashion that can endanger migrants, but also their irregular status. Aside from their precarious and dangerous occupations, they are also excluded from health, education, and other social welfare provisions, and can be subject to exploitation at large.<sup>82</sup>

Due to many factors, an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 young people from Sierra Leone annually embark on irregular migration to other countries, with over a quarter of those trafficked, including women and children for forced labour and commercial sex exploitation. Sierra Leone is among the top five countries in West Africa, with the highest number of returns of stranded migrants in 2022 and from 2017 to 2022, more than 5,000 Sierra Leoneans stranded along migration routes were assisted to voluntarily return home.

Irregular migration in Sierra Leone is made more complex by insufficient border patrol; the country is only able to control one-fifth of all its crossing points on its south-eastern border. It secures only 37 points on its more than 1,400 km-long borders with Liberia.<sup>84</sup>

Some of the challenges faced by irregular migrants include vulnerability to discrimination, exploitation, abuse, risk of human trafficking (discussed more in a later section) and migrant smuggling. Human rights abuses are associated with trafficking and migrant smuggling. Research on the trafficking of asylum seekers has demonstrated that trafficking can also expose migrants to economic, social and political vulnerability.

Since 2018, the Government of Sierra Leone has developed the Labour Migration Policy and the National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons (2020 – 2023). The National Migration Policy for Sierra Leone of 2022 was the first attempt at setting up a comprehensive basis to manage at large including the migration of Sierra Leoneans internally and externally to tackle the modern challenges of migration in the interest of national development.<sup>85</sup> In addition, as part of government's commitment to tackle human trafficking within the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) region, they hosted the trafficking in person's conference where the members unveiled a roadmap to end human trafficking in the region.

The roadmap set anti-trafficking priorities for the region which includes information sharing and lessons learned, promote stronger data collection mechanisms, and find opportunities for regional mechanisms to strengthen prevention, protection of trafficking victims, and prosecute traffickers.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>

<sup>78</sup> Ibid <sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Koser, K (2005) Irregular migration, state security and human security. A paper prepared for the Policy Analysis and Research Program of the Global Commission on International Migration

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> Le Voy, M., Verbruggen, N., Wets, J (2004) Undocumented Migrant Workers in Europe, Brussels: PICUM

<sup>83</sup> <https://sierraleone.un.org/en/209552-iom-facilitates-safe-return-149-sierra-leoneans-stranded-niger#:~:text=voluntarily%20return%20home-,Sierra%20Leone%20is%2>

<sup>84</sup> Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (2017) Sierra Leone MIGRATION PROFILE: Study on Migration Routes in West and Central Africa.

<sup>85</sup> Labour Market Profile of Sierra Leone, 2023/2024 <sup>86</sup> <https://www.iom.int/news/new-regional-road-map-strengthen-counter-trafficking-west-africa>

## 3.9 Those living in Hard-to-Reach Communities

There are many reasons why certain communities in a country may be hard-to-reach (HTR) for development programs. These include: their remote geographical locations, poor road infrastructure, mistrust by the community of outside assistance, or lack of interest in the program being offered.

In Sierra Leone, HTR communities are usually due to bad road networks, difficult waterway access, seasonal flooding of roads, and/or remote geographical locations such as islands or hilly/mountainous locations. These communities are subsequently deprived of many developmental programs. For instance, there is high inequality in these communities with respect to access to good drinking water, health care, education, electricity, and communication. Some of the HTR communities include riverine communities prone to disasters, informal communities in urban areas that lack infrastructure, border communities, and coastal communities.

Districts such as Koinadugu, Falaba, Karene, Bombali, Tonkolili, Kailahun and Kono in the northeast, northwest and eastern provinces are HTR even in temperate weather, due to poor road conditions and remote locations. It is especially difficult to reach these communities during the rainy season. Some HTR communities have no roads at all, making it almost impossible for vehicles to access them with much needed development services. Others HTR communities include island fishing communities, which can only be accessed through small boats. Reaching these island communities is time consuming, costly, and highly risky.<sup>87</sup>

There are other communities considered HTR due to lack of basic infrastructure and socioeconomic conditions driven by poverty. For instance, those living in densely populated urban slums like Kroo and Susan's Bay in Freetown do not benefit from the same level of public services as other parts of the city.



<sup>87</sup> FHI360 (2012) End Neglected Tropical Diseases in Africa (END in Africa) Annual Work Plan Oct



## 3.10 Inmates of Correctional Institutions

As of August 2022, the total prison population (including pre-trial detainees/remand prisoners) in Sierra Leone was 4,801 prisoners with a prison population rate of 57 prisoners per 100,000 persons. From the total number of prisoners, 57.4 percent amounting to 2,628 are pre-trial detainees/remand prisoners (percentage of prison population) with a pre-trial rate of 31 pre-trial detainees per 100,000 population; and, 1.5 percent of prisoners are females (2019).<sup>88</sup> The official capacity of the prison system is 2,495, giving an occupancy rate of 192.4 percent, much more than the prison can accommodate.<sup>89</sup> This is due mainly to the high number of detainees on remand or awaiting trial.

There is prolonged detention in Sierra Leone as a result of delays in investigation, delays in receiving advice from the Director of Public Prosecution or State Counsels, and unavailability of sureties for some suspects.<sup>90</sup>

The state of the prison facilities and the prisoner's living conditions are deplorable and prone to hazards, as discussed in the CCA. Prison and detention centre conditions are harsh and sometimes life threatening due to food shortages, gross overcrowding, lack of sufficient personnel, physical abuse, lack of clean water, inadequate sanitary conditions, and a lack of proper medical care in prison facilities.<sup>91</sup>

The socioeconomic impact of excessive pretrial detention is profound, affecting not just the individuals detained, but their families, communities, and even the State. Part of the socioeconomic effects of pretrial detainees includes losing their jobs, being forced to abandon their education, being evicted from their homes, being exposed to disease, and suffering physical and psychological damage that lasts long after their detention ends.<sup>92</sup>

In addition, families also suffer from lost income and forfeited education opportunities of the person detained, with a multi-generational effect in which the children of detainees are separated from their parent, experience social stigma and suffer reduced educational attainment.<sup>93 94</sup> Globally, excessive pretrial detention pushes people into poverty, pushes working class people towards unemployment, uncertainty, and the edge of poverty and plunges the already poor into even worse destitution.<sup>95</sup>

### **Some of the findings of the socioeconomic impact on inmates in Sierra Leone show that imprisonment:**

1. Deepens and increases poverty if the family's primary wage earner is in prison;
2. Destabilizes families of inmates and ends up breaking them in many cases;
3. Impedes economic development, as those who could contribute to development are behind bars;
4. Reinforces the inequalities and inefficiencies found in Sierra Leone's justice system;
5. Negatively impacts inmates' health due to overcrowding, poor nutrition, poor access to healthcare and other hazards they are being exposed to, making it harder for inmates to work after release and worsening their socioeconomic position.<sup>96 97</sup>
6. Causes inmates to be faced with societal discrimination and stigma once released, as they are no longer considered trustworthy, posing a challenge of being reintegrated into society.

<sup>88</sup> World Prison Brief Data. Available at <https://www.prisonstudies.org/country/sierra-leone>

<sup>89</sup> Ibid <sup>90</sup> The State of Human Rights in Sierra Leone (2021)

<sup>91</sup> US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour (2021) Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for Sierra Leone

<sup>92</sup> Open Society Foundations (2013) The Socioeconomic Impact of Pretrial Detention in Sierra Leone

<sup>93</sup> Ibid <sup>94</sup> The State of Human Rights in Sierra Leone (2021)

<sup>95</sup> Open Society Foundations (2013) The Socioeconomic Impact of Pretrial Detention in Sierra Leone

<sup>96</sup> Ibid <sup>97</sup> <https://www.undp.org/publications/socioeconomic-impact-pretrial-detention>

### 3.11 Youths in conflict with the law / Youth gang members

Around the world, UNICEF estimates around 1 million children are detained yearly for encountering the law through crimes like minor theft, possession of alcohol or tobaccos, or the violation of truancy. The term ‘children in conflict with the law’ refers to anyone under 18 years who comes into contact with the justice system as a result of being suspected or accused of committing an offence. Most children in conflict with the law have committed petty crimes or such minor offences as vagrancy, truancy, begging or alcohol use. Some of these are known as ‘status offences’ and are not considered criminal when committed by adults. Due to the economic circumstances in Sierra Leone, many children commit these offences stemming from their low economic status.

In Sierra Leone, social networks and social capital can impact the practice of juvenile justice in individual cases and have significant consequence. These include a child offender's status, especially their socio-economic position; the locality where the offence was committed; the patron and client relationships they are embedded in; the strength of their family ties; and how others perceive the child's character. These are characteristics that are interwoven within the social culpability concept. A child offender who lacks such social networks and social capital is rendered socially culpable, and it is this, more than their actual legal offence, that shapes their encounter with the law. Therefore, however robust the legal framework of juvenile justice in Sierra Leone is, the practice itself has weaknesses, as presently children must leverage various other systems to secure justice or liberty.

### 3.12 Persons with Substance Abuse Issues



Freetown is a hub for drug trafficking operations, particularly through maritime routes. Widespread corruption at the port and vulnerabilities within law enforcement contribute to the lack of seizures and inadequate application of laws.

Additionally, significant consumption of cocaine has been observed in recent years. Sierra Leone is now a major producer and exporter of cannabis, with the illegal trade of the drug reaching significant proportions. Cannabis cultivation and consumption has surged across various districts, including the capital city of Freetown and the northern region, particularly Kambia District.

Sierra Leone is a significant player with regards to cannabis production in the sub-region, and a key exporter of the drug in West Africa. Another commonly abused drug in the country is Tramadol. This is predominantly transported via the waterways between Guinea and Sierra Leone, with Kambia serving as a local smuggling hub owing to its strategic location on both a waterway and a main road connecting Guinea's capital of Conakry and Sierra Leone. Tramadol and LSD markets in Sierra Leone primarily rely on supplies from China and Vietnam, facilitated by Indian importers.<sup>98</sup> A new drug called 'kush' has surfaced in Sierra Leone recently and has captured a significant proportion of the drug use market. Due to its cheap cost and availability, its consumption is widespread and common among the youth, inflicting significant damage on the individual and the communities.<sup>99</sup>

Of the difficulties faced, many drug addicts drop out of school, beg on the streets, are homeless, become sex workers, face abuse, and are easily targeted as criminals for crimes they may have not committed. Drug addiction according to a focus group discussion held with drug addicts is fueled in Sierra Leone by poverty, youth unemployment (which stands at 60 percent - one of the highest in West Africa),<sup>100</sup> domestic violence and abuse, loss of one parent or both, lack of parental support, coming from a single parenting home, and peer pressure influence.

Most persons with substance abuse issues who come to Freetown in search of formal employment and education are unable to achieve their primary goal. Their lives are difficult: they see very few opportunities and face a worsening and hunger-stricken environment; hence, they resort to drugs use for an escape.<sup>101</sup>

### 3.13 Ebola Virus Disease Survivors with Latent Health Issues

On 24 May 2014, Sierra Leone reported the first cases of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in Kenema, Eastern Sierra Leone and was declared Ebola free on 17 March 2016.<sup>102</sup> Within 2 years of the EVD in Sierra Leone, over 8,000 cases were recorded with about 4,000 deaths and 4,000 survivors.<sup>103</sup> Sierra Leone was the most affected country and incurred a loss of US\$1.9 billion.<sup>104</sup> In addition, several Sierra Leonean studies have reported a considerable number of EVD survivors who continue to grapple with the Ebola-related physical disabilities and psychopathologies 3–4 years post-discharge from an Ebola treatment centre and such disabilities and psychopathologies are believed to have had untoward effects on their overall quality of life.<sup>105 106</sup> Survivor experiences, emotions and attitudes changed over time as they moved from disease onset to treatment, hospital discharge, and life post-discharge.<sup>107</sup> In 2015, the Government included Ebola survivors as the fourth beneficiary of the existing free healthcare initiative and, in 2016, government introduced a program titled Comprehensive Package for Ebola Survivors. The program ensures that Ebola survivors have free access to needed health and social welfare services including those that aim to address survivors' health and psychosocial issues, livelihoods, community re-integration and risk of a resurgence of the Ebola virus through viral persistent testing and counselling as well as sexual health.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Ibid <sup>99</sup> O'Dwyer, Pauline (2021) Juvenile justice in Sierra Leone: a qualitative study of criminal and customary law

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.iom.int/news/hundreds-unemployed-youth-sierra-leone-receiving-skills-training>

<sup>101</sup> Bøås M, Hatløy A and Bjørkhaug I. (2008) Alcohol and drugs in post-war Sierra Leone. *African Journal of Drug & Alcohol Studies*, 7(1), 2008

<sup>102</sup> World Health Organization (2016) Ebola situation report—30 March 2016 <sup>103</sup> Ibid <sup>104</sup> Bank TW (2014–2015) West Africa Ebola crisis: impact

James PB, Wardle J, Steel A, Adams J (2020) An assessment of Ebola-related stigma and its association with informal healthcare utilization among Ebola survivors in Sierra Leone: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*

<sup>106</sup> Bah AJ, James PB, Bah N, Sesay AB, Sevalie S, Kanu JS (2020) Prevalence of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder among Ebola survivors

<sup>107</sup> Karafillakis E, Jalloh MF, Nuriddin A, et al (2015) 'Once there is life, there is hope' Ebola survivors' experiences, behaviours and attitudes in Sierra Leone

<sup>108</sup> Ministry of Health (2016) Sanitation, National Clinical Guidelines for Healthcare for Ebola Virus Disease Survivors

Post-Ebola sequelae have placed limitations on survivors' ability to function in society. For instance, loss of sight, hearing and experiences of chronic pain can all lead to the inability to perform daily life activities, such as walking and running. In some cases, such physical limitations have led to survivors being unemployed, leading to dependence on others and a loss of self-worth particularly among those with advanced age.

Effect of the EVD on survivors are that many face stigma and discrimination in their families and communities, and thousands more face ongoing mental health and physical health problems like joint pains, fertility concerns and eye problems, as well as livelihood and other economic issues. In August 2014, a national household survey conducted in Sierra Leone showed that 96 percent of respondents held at least one discriminatory attitude towards Ebola survivors.<sup>109</sup>

The psychosocial effects associated with EVD survivors include depression, anxiety, psychological distress and that these sequelae have been associated with stigmatization among survivors and are compounded by psycho-social effects.<sup>110</sup> Six to eight years after infection that stigma was higher (50 percent) than found in reports for EVD survivors in Sierra Leone (32–39 percent) earlier in the post-recovery period (2014–2017).<sup>111</sup>



<sup>109</sup> Follow-up Study on Public Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Relating to EVD Prevention and Medical Care. (KAP 4 Preliminary Findings) Ministry of Health, Sierra Leone. CDC. Focus1000

<sup>110</sup> James PB, Wardle J, Steel A, Adams J (2019) Post-Ebola psychosocial experiences and coping mechanisms among Ebola survivors: a systematic review. *Trop Med Int Health* <sup>111</sup> Schindell et al. (2022) Stigmatization of Ebola virus disease survivors in 2022: A cross-sectional study of survivors in Sierra Leone. *Journal of Infection and Public Health* 17 (2024)

## 3.14 Out-of-school Children

The CCA report outlines the high number of young adults in Sierra Leone who lack literacy and numeracy skills. Data show that 57 percent of those 15 years and above are illiterate, impacted by high rates of children who do not complete primary school and cannot read and write.<sup>112 113</sup>

The Education Act of 2004 gives every Sierra Leonean citizen the right to nine years of basic education (Primary and Junior Secondary), “free to the extent specified in statutory instruments”.<sup>114</sup> This is compulsory and a parent or caregiver who fails to send their child to school shall be subject to a fine or imprisonment and further states that, ‘A child who persistently fails to attend schools for basic education shall be treated as if he were a juvenile in need of care under paragraph (b) of subsection (1) of Section 27 of the Children and Young Persons Act.’<sup>115</sup> Despite the Act, which makes it compulsory for children to go to school, children are out of school for several reasons.

A study related to the country’s Radical Inclusion policy shows that girls leave school at a higher rate than boys due to reasons largely attributed to the intersection of poverty and gender norms, involving issues such as early marriage, the need to earn an income, the burden of household chores and being enlisted into child labor.<sup>116</sup>

In 2017, 18 percent of children aged 6-11 years old were out of school, 19 percent in junior secondary school (JSS) were out of school, more boys were out of school than girls in both age groups, and rates of children who are out of school were about two and half times higher in rural than in urban areas.<sup>117</sup> Since the introduction of the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) in 2018, enrolment rates have increased over the years. Gross Enrolment Rates vary across the country with rural districts like Falaba, Kailahun, and Pujehun have rates below 50 percent while Western Area Urban is about 98 percent and 114 percent (including older age children) for JSS and senior secondary school respectively.<sup>118</sup>

The most prevailing reason for children not completing school is poverty. Other reasons include living in a child-headed household, location, gender, religion, cost, teen pregnancy, and early marriage.<sup>119</sup> Barriers of exclusion are the factors that cause a child not complete school or prevent their participation.<sup>120</sup>

Studies have shown there are demand and supply-side barriers to children not completing school. The demand-side barriers include economic barriers like poverty which increases vulnerability to food insecurity, difficulty in paying for school fees and school materials, especially for unapproved and private schools, orphan status, being homeless, and being in an abusive situation.<sup>121</sup> Supply-side barriers include insufficient supply of schools, even basic education facilities, in some chiefdoms, which forces children to attend JSS in other towns/cities and thereby exposes children, especially girls, to unhealthy coping mechanisms.<sup>122</sup> Other supply-side barriers also include distance to schools especially secondary schools, lack of trained teachers, inadequate supply of special needs education schools for children with disabilities, and lack of sexuality education that empowers students for sexual and reproductive health rights.

Weak Child Protection is another reason children are out of school. According to the Bureau of International Labour Affairs, the child protection system in Sierra Leone is relatively weak, under-resourced, donor-dependent, and lacking coordination.<sup>123</sup> These factors combined lead thousands of children to drop out of school, thereby vulnerable to exploitation and harm. The lack of support centres for survivors of SGBV and domestic violence is a concern for girls dropping out from school.

Previously, Sierra Leone had policy on education that banned pregnant girls from attending school during pregnancy. However, this policy was reversed, and pregnant girls are permitted to continue attending school, but other enabling factors must be in place for this to be a reality for individual girls.

<sup>112</sup> UNDP (2020) Human Development Report: Sierra Leone. <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/SLE.pdf>

<sup>113</sup> WFP (2022) Sierra Leone Country Profile. <https://www.wfp.org/countries/sierra-leone>

<sup>114</sup> National Strategy for Out-of-School Children in Sierra Leone <sup>115</sup> Government of Sierra Leone. Education Act 2004

<sup>116</sup> MBSSE (2021) National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools. <https://mbsse.gov.sl/wpcontent/uploads/2021/04/Radical-Inclusion-Policy.pdf>

<sup>117</sup> Statistics SL (2018) Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey <sup>118</sup> Out-of-School Children Study (2021) <sup>119</sup> UNICEF (2008) The Out-of-school Children of Sierra Leone

([http://www.globalpartnership.org/media/library/Final\\_Out\\_of\\_School\\_Study\\_Sierra\\_Leone\\_012009.pdf](http://www.globalpartnership.org/media/library/Final_Out_of_School_Study_Sierra_Leone_012009.pdf) <sup>120</sup> GoSL, UNICEF, and CMDA (2016) A National Assessment of the Situation of Out of School Children, Freetown <sup>121</sup> Out-of-School Children Study (2021) <sup>122</sup> Ibid <sup>123</sup> Bureau of International Labour Affairs (2019) ‘A Baseline Research on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, Trafficking in Persons and Indecent Work in Sierra Leone,’ as quoted by GOAL (2020) GOAL’s work on child protection issues.

<https://www.goalglobal.org/stories/goals-work-on-childprotection-issues-in-sierra-leone/>

### 3.15 Persons Trafficked, including Children

Another vulnerable group results from trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants within West Africa, as well as to North Africa, the Middle East, the Gulf countries and Western Europe.<sup>124</sup> In addition, Sierra Leone is a destination country for persons trafficked from other countries (West African and Asian countries) for the purpose of labour and sexual exploitation and for smuggling out of country's minerals and other goods.<sup>125</sup>

Sierra Leone is a Tier 2 country, meaning the government does not fully comply with all of the Trafficking of Victims and Violence Protection Act minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.<sup>126</sup> The key driver of human trafficking in Sierra Leone is poverty and the victims mostly come from rural areas and are trafficked into urban areas, where they can be subjected to sexual exploitation, forced labour in domestic service, exploitative work in the artisanal diamond, granite mining, fishing and agriculture sectors, and be forced into situations of begging or homelessness.<sup>127</sup>

To provide more insight into these circumstances, Box 1 provides a distinction between migrant smuggling and human trafficking:

#### **Box 1: The distinction between migrant smuggling and human trafficking**

Trafficking of human beings is defined as: 'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat, or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation'.

The smuggling of migrants is defined as: 'The procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a state Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident'

*Sources: UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (2000); UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (2000)*

<sup>124</sup> Africa Organized Crime Index (2023) Increasing Criminality, Growing Vulnerabilities

<sup>125</sup> National Migration Policy for Sierra Leone (2021)

<sup>126</sup> <https://traffickinginstitute.org/what-is-the-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

<sup>127</sup> The Borgen Project (2021) Human Trafficking in Sierra Leone. Retrieved from: <https://borgenproject.org/human-trafficking-sierra-leone/>.

In 2021, the government reported investigating 72 cases of human trafficking, 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.<sup>128</sup> Women and children, the most vulnerable victims, were referred to different organizations/individuals for support. NGOs provide shelter and other services and, in some cases, law enforcement officers temporarily shelter child victims in their homes or authorities temporarily host victims at law enforcement facilities.<sup>129</sup> NGO services can include medical, psychosocial, educational, legal, vocational, family tracing, and reintegration support.

Traffickers exploit victims for work in fishing or agriculture, and also for sex trafficking or forced labor through customary practices, such as forced marriages. U.S. State Department reporting on Trafficking in Persons have cited NGO reports of child sex trafficking situations around beach areas and nightclubs, mostly fueled by local demand, but also with foreign tourists as clients. There are also reports of workers on foreign-owned fishing vessels bringing girls to their boats at night for commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>130</sup>

Traffickers have also exploited Sierra Leonean women for domestic servitude, primarily in Middle Eastern and Gulf countries. Since 2017, an international organization repatriated at least 1,500 Sierra Leoneans from Libya and other Middle Eastern countries, some of whom were victims of slavery and sex trafficking.<sup>131</sup> Overall, since 2017, IOM has supported the voluntary return of 10,137 Sierra Leoneans back to Sierra Leone (8,076 male and 2,061 female), including 464 victims of human trafficking.

### 3.16 Vulnerable Persons Negatively affected by Climate Change

On many global rankings, Sierra Leone is considered as one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change impacts. Due to its geography and climate, the country is vulnerable to several natural hazards including floods, landslides, tropical storms, coastal erosion, and droughts which cause loss of lives and livelihoods and have severe economic impacts.<sup>132</sup> Up to 13 percent of its area and 35 percent of the population are at risk, with the majority in urban areas: alarmingly, the population at risk is on the rise.<sup>133</sup>

The negative impact of these hazards is projected to increase as a result of climate change and underlying socioeconomic factors such as increased urbanization, poverty, and low levels of economic development.<sup>134</sup> Climate change threatens food security and the livelihoods of the population through changes in precipitation and temperature, increase in risks of droughts, floods, a rise in sea levels eventually affect the country's agriculture, water, energy, infrastructure and coastal areas.<sup>135</sup> Children are most exposed to climate hazards in these three districts -Western Area Urban, Pujehun, and Tonkolili. The hazards include fire disasters, flood events, landslides, coastal erosion, and droughts.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> US State Department (2021) Trafficking in Person Report: Sierra Leone. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/sierra-leone/>

<sup>129</sup> Ibid

<sup>130</sup> Ibid

<sup>131</sup> Trafficking in Persons Report: Sierra Leone (2022) Available at:

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/sierraleone/#:~:text=Traffickers%20exploit%20victims%20in%20fishing,at%20beaches%20and%20in%20nightclubs>

<sup>132</sup> World Bank Group and GFDRR (2020) Disaster Risk Management Diagnostic Note Sierra Leone

<sup>133</sup> World Bank (2023) Sustainable Cities: Urban Areas and Climate Change in Sierra Leone. Washington D.C, World Bank Group

<sup>134</sup> Ibid

<sup>135</sup> <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/sierra-leone#:text=Climate%20change%20threatens%20food%20security,energy%20and%20livelihoods>

<sup>136</sup> UNICEF (2022) Climate Landscape Analysis for Children in Sierra Leone

The effects of climate change are generally felt most among the poor, those living vulnerable situations, persons with disability, women, and children. These include the compulsion of communities to fetch water and firewood from long distances due to impacted natural resources; frequent school lateness and absenteeism by children from disaster prone communities, the exposure of women are girls to increased risk of SBGV, especially at night, while fetching water or using open spaces for defecation in the aftermath of a disaster. Extreme heat increases the risks of heatstroke in children and pre-eclampsia in pregnant women and pregnant women are more likely to give birth prematurely and their babies are also prone to be underweight.<sup>137</sup>

The fight for economic livelihood opportunities and the need for shelter in Sierra Leone has led to massive degradation of the environment and increases the frequency and scale of certain disasters, namely, floods, landslides, erosion, water shortages, and diseases outbreaks.

Environmental degradation occurs at increasing rates because of the following: logging, mining, land grabbing, irregular construction including construction along water ways, and firewood collection. Unabated deforestation and construction prompt mass movements of people which can trigger landslides and mudslides.

## The impact of climate change in Sierra Leone will be in multiple sectors:

- 1. Agriculture: Increased crop loss/failure, more pests, weeds, pathogens, reduced food security;**
- 2. Water Resources: Increased sedimentation and runoff due to more intense rainfall, decline in water quality;**
- 3. Human Health: Increased range for vector-borne diseases, increased breeding sites for water pathogens and illnesses; and**
- 4. Disasters: Damage to coastal infrastructure and production zones, loss of life and productive assets.**<sup>138</sup>

Flooding has increased in the country and poses the greatest threat to overall health, as floods increase the number of people exposed to water-borne diseases such as cholera, diarrhea and dysenteries. Sanitation, storm-water drainage and sewage disposal are often disrupted by flood events.

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<sup>137</sup> UNICEF (2016) culled from [https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/Clear\\_the\\_Air\\_for\\_Children\\_Executive\\_summary\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/Clear_the_Air_for_Children_Executive_summary_ENG.pdf)

<sup>138</sup> USAID (2016) Climate Change Risk Profile of Sierra Leone. Culled from <https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2016%20CRM%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Sierra%20Leone.pdf>



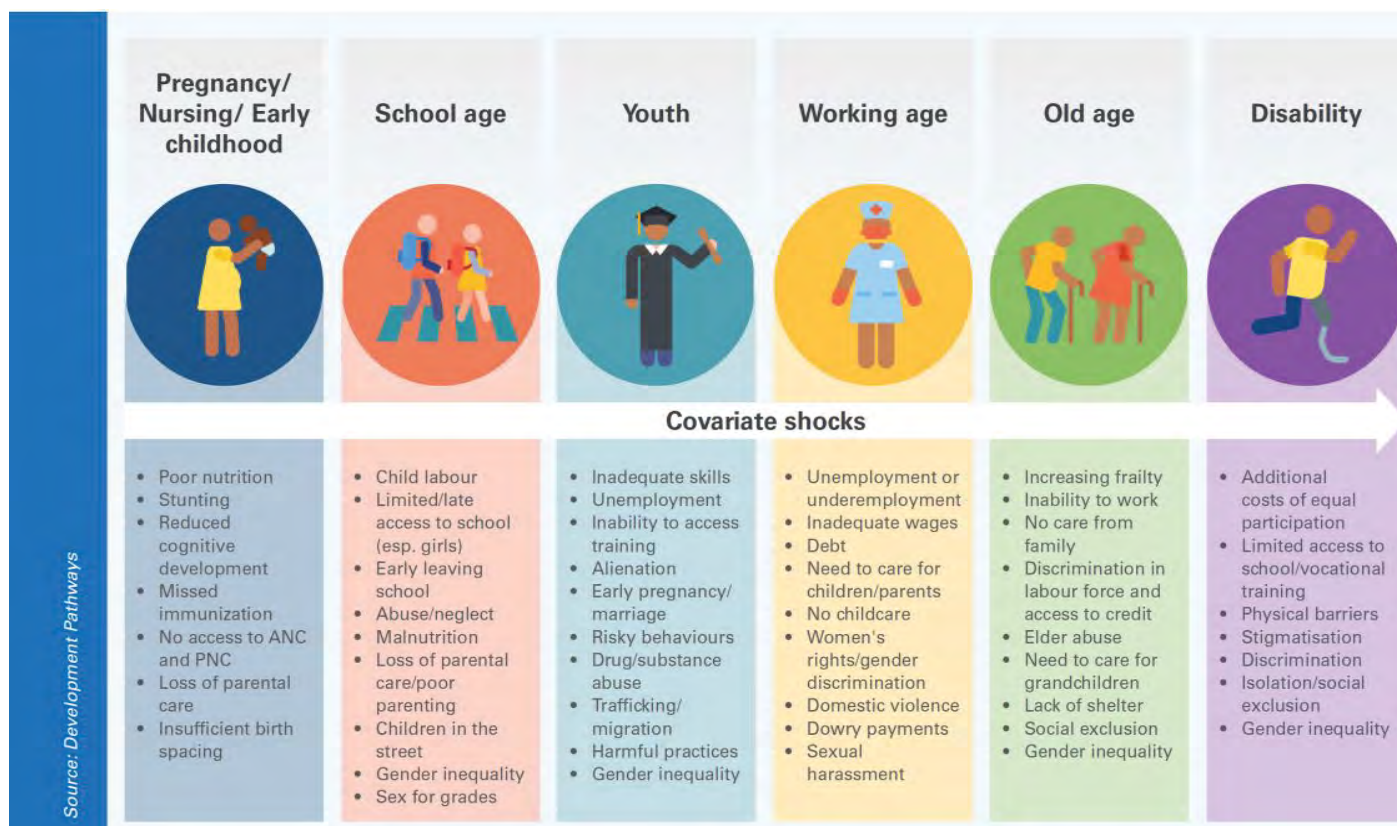
An aerial photograph of a village in Sierra Leone. The foreground shows several small, simple houses with brown roofs. The middle ground is a dense cluster of similar houses, interspersed with green trees and vegetation. In the background, a large, steep, rocky hill rises, its surface covered in patches of green and brown. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

## Chapter 4: General LNOB Considerations

This chapter provides some general considerations on the LNOB topic. It begins with an analysis of life-cycle vulnerabilities and social protection in Sierra Leone that highlights the specific challenges faced at different stages of life, and the extent to which the social protection scheme in Sierra Leone addresses these challenges. The second part of this chapter looks into the governance related challenges and obstacles in implementing LNOB in Sierra Leone.

## 4.1 Life-Cycle Vulnerabilities and Social Protection Programs in Sierra Leone

This section presents an overview of the vulnerabilities at each life stage (Figure 3). This is ensued by a narrative discussion of each and the extent to which social protection programs in Sierra Leone address these.



**Figure 3: Life Cycle Vulnerabilities**

Source: National Social Protection Strategy for Sierra Leone

**Pregnant Women and Infants (0 – 5 years):** Despite notable progress in improving maternal health with a 74 percent reduction in MMR from 1,682 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 443 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020, Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) of 79 per 1000, and Under-5 mortality rate of 104.7 per 1,000 live births, the country still has one of the highest mortality rates placing these people at the very high risk category.<sup>139 140</sup> Pregnant women who cannot access adequate and quality health care, face a high risk of maternal mortality. Those from poor and rural homes (72 percent) who cannot access healthcare, report at least one barrier to accessing care ranging from getting money for treatment (83 percent), distance to health facility (44 percent on average, 67 percent in lowest quintile and 22 percent in wealthiest quintile), as well as getting permission to go for treatment etc.<sup>141</sup> Poor nutrition, stunting, reduced cognitive development and more are additional risks to a child's development in Sierra Leone especially from a poor rural household.

*Although there are no social protection programs targeted at pregnant women and children under 5 years, there are several programs focused at improving their social wellbeing, particularly the country's Free Health Care Initiative program.*

<sup>139</sup> <https://sierraleone.unfpa.org/en/topics/maternal-health-10>

<sup>140</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/country/sle/>

<sup>141</sup> Government of Sierra Leone: National Social Protection Strategy 2022- 2026

**School Age Children (6 – 14 years):** The key areas of vulnerability include child labour and the inability to access school, malnutrition, domestic and other GBV and harmful practices, loss of parental care, girls living in poor rural and insecure households are prone to drop out of school. Education is a vital prerequisite for combating poverty, empowering women, economic growth, protecting children from hazardous and exploitative labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment, and influencing population growth.<sup>142</sup>

A Ministry of Basic and Secondary School Education (MBSSE) study found that amongst the barriers to accessing education in Sierra Leone, lack of money emerged as the highest with about 50 percent stating it as being behind the process of exclusion followed by lack of school materials, food, teacher and family in that order.<sup>143</sup> Girls living in poor rural and insecure households were seen to be more prone to drop out of school. This is evidence in the 2017 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 38.8 percent of children in the lowest quintile drops out of school as against 7.1 percent of their counterparts in the highest quintile.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, about 1,071 million children aged 5 – 17 years were classified as working while 45.9 percent (895,428) as child labor and 22 percent engaged in hazardous environment work.<sup>145</sup>

*The social protection programs for this age group includes school feeding which has quadrupled since the launch of the Free Quality School Education (FQSE); Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) and faith-based organization run bursary program for poor children to cover associated cost of books, stationery, uniform, transport etc.; safe spaces for girls funded by United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), sexuality education etc.*<sup>146</sup>




<sup>142</sup> Ibid

<sup>143</sup> Ibid

<sup>144</sup> Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) (2017)

<sup>145</sup> Sierra Leone National Child Labour Survey (2011)

<sup>146</sup> Government of Sierra Leone: National Social Protection Strategy 2022 - 2026



Youth (15 – 24 years): Some of the challenges faced by this life course group, especially girls from poor rural homes are that they are: exposed to drugs, harmful practices and GBV, forced child marriage and teenage pregnancy issues, as well as lack of skills to enter the labour market.<sup>147</sup> The proportion of out of secondary school going children amounts to 38.8 percent from poor households compared to 7.1 percent from rich households.<sup>148</sup> Possible explanations for this are the 2018 SLIHS identified this group to make up 10 percent of the economically active population, implying those who should be going to school are classed as working; the girls in this group have high risk of child marriage and teenage pregnancy which impedes them from completing school. The 2019 Demographic Health Survey (DHS) reports 21 percent of girls aged 15 - 19 had at least a child or been pregnant.

*The social protection programs include the establishment of a one stop shop for GBV issues, car wash program for youths, the pro-poor Growth for Peace Consolidation (GPC) program and more.*

<sup>147</sup> The issue of GBV, Child marriage and Teenage pregnancy are discussed extensively in another unsegmented group.

<sup>148</sup> Sierra Leone MICS (2017)

**The Working Age (25 – 64 Years):** The key challenges facing this group include increasing unemployment (or underemployment) and the inability to find new work, domestic or partner violence, the risk of accumulating indebtedness and high levels of care responsibilities (of elderly parents and children) which fall disproportionately on women in the household, the absence of a contributory social insurance scheme for the informal sector where majority (over 90 percent) of the working population works, the more children there are in a family the likelihood for poverty to exist (for instance, a family with 8 or more members is more than 4 times likely to be poor as a family of 3). Most women do not enter the labour market because of the care and domestic responsibilities, which they are burdened with due to general social and cultural norms and gender roles.

*The known social protection support here is NASSIT, a Program that caters for the formal sector employees. There is also the social assistance program which is poverty-targeted, household-based, and unconditional, with households receiving quarterly payments.<sup>149</sup>*

**Old Age (65+ Years):** The well-being of the elderly population is affected by disability and sickness and other challenges decreasing their ability to work, increased isolation, and a high incidence of poverty (62 percent) for households headed by old people etc. About 44 percent of Sierra Leone's population is aged 65+ of which 47 percent and 53 percent are males and females respectively and 73 percent and 27 percent live in rural and urban areas respectively.<sup>150</sup> Also, about 82 percent did not go to school of which 60 percent are females and 40 percent males, while of the 18 percent who attended school, 71 percent are males and 29 percent are females.<sup>151</sup>

*The current available social protection program for the elderly is the NASSIT Pension Scheme for formal sector workers and the Social Safety Net program administered by the Ministry of Labour.*

Biological aging is accompanied by a process of loss of physical and also mental abilities, culminating in disability, which about 88 percent of the elderly population are suffering from, the most common being partial and complete blindness (about 50 percent)<sup>152</sup> About 48 percent of the elderly population are poor of which 46 percent are in the bottom 40 percent and 73 percent of them are involved in agriculture.<sup>153</sup>

**Disability and Chronic Illnesses:** One of the most vulnerable, marginalized, and discriminated sectors of society is people living with various forms and extents of disabilities, and particularly children. Their situation further increases the incidence of poverty in their careers because of their reduced ability to engage in many economically rewarding sources of livelihood while tending their children.

*Apart from the invalidity pension provided by NASSIT for formal sector workers, there is no established social protection program for these set of people.*

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<sup>149</sup> Government of Sierra Leone: National Social Protection Strategy 2022- 2026

<sup>150</sup> Sierra Leone Population & Housing Census 2015: Thematic Report on the Elderly Population

<sup>151</sup> Ibid <sup>152</sup> Ibid

<sup>153</sup> World Bank (2020) Poverty & Equity Brief (Africa, Western and Central) Sierra Leone. <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty>

<sup>153</sup> Government of Sierra Leone: National Social Protection Strategy 2022 - 2026



Sierra Leone’s approach to social protection takes note of the lifecycle considerations discussed above. These prove beneficial in providing clarity on the different risks, vulnerabilities, objectives, coordination, partnerships, and linkages relating to various life-course stages. The Social Protection framework in Sierra Leone is intended to go beyond poverty alleviation, and to establish a gender-sensitive and age-appropriate framework for protection of the most poor and vulnerable. This, through a minimum social protection floor for all Sierra Leonean citizens, also aids in minimizing the risks of others sliding into poverty thereby ensuring a life of dignity.

As noted above, some of the groups are eligible for direct income support programs by the government, while other groups are reached through related programs. Yet, with the many vulnerabilities outlined here, overall coverage by social protection programs is meagre in Sierra Leone, as shown in Table 3. For instance, only 4.4 percent of the population is covered by at least one social protection benefit in 2020, which also includes other key coverage percentages.

Indicator	Percentage
Persons covered by at least one social protection benefit	4.4
Persons above retirement age receiving a pension	7.0
Unemployed receiving unemployment benefits	0.0
Employed persons covered in the event of work injury (2019)	6.1
Children and households receiving child and family cash benefits	0.8
Vulnerable persons covered by social assistance	1.4

**Table 3: Proportion of population covered by social protection in Sierra Leone, 2020**

Source: Labour Market Profile Sierra Leone – 2023/2024

## 4.2 The Importance of Governance in LNOB

The issue of governance revolves around poor systems, policies, or enforcement of existing laws and the effectiveness of government systems. Sierra Leone is plagued with governance challenges stemming from limitations in accountability and transparency, participatory governance, commitment to uphold the rule of law, administrative bottlenecks, bureaucracy, and corruption,<sup>155</sup> all topics explored more in the CCA report. Weakness of governance institutions often results in the non-realization of people's basic rights and perpetuates inequalities among groups in the country.

Many Sierra Leoneans are not included in political decisions affecting them – most times the government does not use people-centered approaches in such decision-making processes. Despite this existing general discrimination, vulnerable and marginalised people suffer more discrimination and social inequalities, having less chance than others to ensure their voice is heard in decisions affecting them. In some rural settings, because of the cultural practices, women and persons with disability are not allowed to sit with elders to make a decision concerning their general welfare in the community.

Marginalized people are less likely to be included in the data and evidence that the government uses to allocate resources and define policies. For instance, people living in hard-to-reach communities are normally not included in governance dialogues because of difficult geographic access linked to poor road networks and other factors. A lack of data can negatively impact vulnerable groups, and we have found a clear gap in the production of statistical data to be used as national and international references in design of policies and programs.

The last National Population and Housing Census was conducted in 2015 and has been built upon for national and international data reference point. In 2021, there was a mid-term census that was boycotted by the opposition, making the results inaccurate, therefore could not be used as reference for development purposes. The national civil and vital registration system presents clear weaknesses, in the production and circulation of information between institutions at different levels of administration (local and national).

Due to the centralisation of the administrative services, the registration offices are based in urban centres rather than in rural areas. This makes it cumbersome for residents living in these locations to get access to these vital citizenry documents. Additionally, the production of births and death data can be misleading as many Sierra Leoneans are born/give birth outside a formal system (health facility) where there is no record. In rural areas when death occurs the death is often not registered due to lack of awareness of the registry system.

The desire for most government workers to live and work in Freetown hinders equality of government services throughout the country. Majority of the government workers – Medical Doctors, Nurses, Judges/Magistrates, Teachers, Engineers – believe that working in Freetown provides greater career opportunities. This leads to huge capacity, data collection and sharing, institutional and sectoral gaps between service provision in the urban and rural areas.

<sup>155</sup><https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/sierra-leone/democracy-governance-and-human-rights#:~:text=Despite%20increasing%20its%20stature%20as,uphold%20the%20rule%20of%20law>

The negative impact of corruption, limited and delayed funding to the local councils, and unclear roles and responsibilities at local level is affecting the country's development trajectory in meeting the SDGs. Governance challenges, therefore, remain a major impediment to development and a risk to peace and stability, as highlighted in Sierra Leone's 2004 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report: Endemic corruption was a central factor that produced the dire conditions that made civil war inevitable. Sierra Leone remains in the grip of pervasive corruption, which, if not arrested, will sap the country of its life force and lay the grounds for further conflict.<sup>157</sup>

A weak public financial management system, coupled with high corruption in the public sector leads to inefficient management of economic and fiscal policies may worsen the conditions of people who were already falling behind, increasing inequalities and discrimination (such as increasing domestic violence, early marriage, pregnancy, illegal migration, trafficking in human beings, children not completing school and child labour). Furthermore, the failure of government to intervene economically can increase in the number of people who enter a vulnerable condition (such as dependents receiving government social protection assistance, such as employees in a company that has stopped working, and people who have lost their own business).

Consequently, the absence of adequate political and economic interventions to address the situations faced by groups of people left behind perpetuates the disadvantages faced. This further erodes the social contract between the State and the people and makes it more difficult to encourage participation, identify challenges, enact solutions, and build trust. The loss of trust in state institutions and the absence of state authority encourages people who are left behind to migrate or to be involved in, or forced to participate in, illegal activities such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, illegal fishing, and illegal logging.



<sup>157</sup> N Broadbridge, N (2013) Strengthening Governance in Sierra Leone. Commonwealth Governance Handbook



## Chapter 5: Why Groups are Left Behind

In this chapter, we bring together the LNOB conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 with LNOB groups profiled in Chapter 3. Table 4 is an overview of which of the five causal factors from the LNOB framework are dominant in impacting the LNOB groups discussed in this report, to better provide insight into the types of initiatives that might be needed to address main casual factors. Two of the five factors were found to be dominant for all groups profiled. These are Discrimination and Socio-Economic Status.

LNOB Group	Primary Causal Factors for being Left Behind				
	Discrimination	Socioeconomic Status	Vulnerability to Shocks	Geography	Governance
Children Living in Poverty	X	X	X	X	X
Informal Workers	X	X	X		X
Homeless persons	X	X	X		
Persons with Disability	X	X			
Persons Living with HIV/AIDS	X	X			
Survivors of Sexual & Gender-Based Violence	X	X			
Adolescent Girls impacted by Child Marriage and Harmful Practices	X	X			
Returnee Migrants	X	X			
Those living in Hard-to-Reach Communities	X	X	X	X	X
Inmates of Correctional Institutions	X	X			X
Youths in Conflict with the law / Youth gang members	X	X			X
Persons with Substance Abuse Issues	X	X			X
Ebola Virus Disease Survivors with Latent Health Issues	X	X	X		
Children who left Primary or Secondary School	X	X	X		
Persons Trafficked, including Children	X	X	X		
Vulnerable Persons Negatively affected by Climate Change		X	X	X	

**Table 4: Why groups are being left behind**

Source: UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) 2019, Leaving No One Behind, A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Team. <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Interim-Draft-Operational-Guide-on-LNOB-for-UNCTs.pdf> and Author's Analysis.

## Chapter 6: Human Rights-Based Approach to LNOB

To ensure that no one is left behind, government and other development partners should apply a human rights-based approach to address the issue of LNOB in Sierra Leone:

1. **Human rights:** The principles of human rights should be paramount as they protect against actions that interfere with fundamental freedoms and human dignity that do support the agency of individuals and population. The Government of Sierra Leone and partners should ensure that the rights of the groups left behind be protected and their dignity upheld.
2. **Meaningful and inclusive participation and access to decision-making:** The inclusion and meaningful participation of all stakeholders with particular attention to the greater involvement of those individuals and communities left behind in development. Simply put, those left behind in development trajectory should be empowered, involved and actively participate in prioritization and development decisions that affect them.
3. **Non-discrimination and equality:** development priorities should not be discriminatory but affirmatively address existing developmental challenges. In summary, the LNOB programs should respect, protect, and fulfill the rights to equality and non-discrimination for those individuals and community's left behind.
4. **Accountability and rule of law for all:** government and partners should be accountable to the implementation of development priorities.
5. **Transparency and access to information supported by disaggregated data:** LNOB information should be available to all and that individuals and communities left behind should have access to development and social services.

By applying these principles, Government of Sierra Leone institutions, as the duty-bearers, are accountable for respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights. The above approach addresses individuals as rights-holders and empowers them to know, to claim and to enjoy human rights.

## Chapter 7: Addressing the Root Causes of LNOB

This study profiles groups who are being left behind and the reasons for their exclusion from sharing equally in the country's social and economic development. Addressing the deprivations these groups require a shift to targeted approaches, a people-centred approach, an improved governance environment, and ensuring that LNOB groups participate in discussions around solutions. LNOB should be a consideration in all phases of a project cycle – design, implementation, and monitoring/evaluation. It would be advanced by developed of indicators geared towards these groups and collection of more disaggregated data for LNOB groups, including by age, sex, and location.

## The following actions are proposed to address the root causes of why groups are left behind:

- Strengthen Socioeconomic Empowerment of the Key Population Groups through targeted approaches to eliminate discrimination and promote empowerment of groups.
- Address gender and social norms that perpetuate the vulnerability of some of those groups left behind.
- Develop Awareness Raising Campaigns and increase Knowledge about Human Rights, Gender Equality and Economic Rights, including strengthening the consideration and voice of girls and women in society.
- Create a more conducive environment for job creation and doing business, ultimately for promotion of decent work for all, irrespective of their status in society, which would help solve many related social problems.
- Enact, and bring into force, laws, policies, practices, and institutions based on human rights, with greater attention to enforcing these laws and avenues for justice for those who are deprived of their rights.
- Improve governance to address weak law enforcement, institutional incapacity, ill-resourced institutions, and lack of policy coherence on key issues.
- Create supportive environments that foster community cohesion and political inclusiveness, to overcome discriminative practices and promote accountable institutions.
- Give greater voice to LNOB groups to express their views, including strengthening civil society organizations representing these vulnerable groups, to allow for greater participation community and sectoral decision-making.
- Improve data collection for LNOB groups to improve understanding of the needs of those left behind and to develop context specific LNOB approaches and instruments. Strengthened national data collection systems can be a tool for monitoring and measuring multidimensional poverty and inequality.
- Promote agreements among government institutions to facilitate marginalized individual's access to programs that enhance their rights (for example, civil registration), and to basic services (for example, health and education).
- Encourage bottom-up dialogue and inclusive discussions when developing programmes, including social protection approaches, and employ LNOB principles in the design.
- Promote wide-ranging sensitivity to the needs of LNOB groups in trainings of those providing social services and social protection at different levels of government, to raise awareness of the issues of people who are left behind.
- Stimulate a national dialogue on developing a Unique Social Register (USR) starting with people who are left behind and marginalized, to create an efficient data collection system using technology.
- Strengthen the National Social Protection Strategy and approaches to better meet the needs of vulnerable groups.
- Disseminate information and ramp-up communication campaigns in communities related to understanding and claiming of rights, including information on legal forms of protest and legal access if rights are violated.

This report has looked at the topic of LNOB in Sierra Leone in relation to the country's quest towards SDG Realization by 2030, by taking into consideration the characteristics of different vulnerable groups and the root causes of their vulnerabilities. It has shown that LNOB is predominantly rooted in poverty and discrimination in the country, although geography, governance failure, and vulnerability to shocks are also factors.

Ultimately, to address LNOB in Sierra Leone, it will be important to consider the findings of this report in implementation of the MTNDP and in the new UNSDCF and to design concrete programs to strengthen the rights and living conditions of LNOB groups. Successful development progress depends not only on the government, the UN, and other development partners, but also on meaningful inclusion and engagement of groups left behind in support of social and economic advancement for all.

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