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UN AGENCIES WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS



Monday–Friday,
7th - 11th July 2025

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Welcome to the **UN Agencies Weekly Highlights** – your trusted source for dynamic updates, impactful stories, and transformative work shaping Sierra Leone and beyond. Dive into powerful narratives of resilience, partnerships driving sustainable development, and the vibrant faces behind the initiatives. Stay informed, inspired, and ready to act. This is where stories meet solutions – because together, we can drive the change the world needs.

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EU- UN €15 million Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls launched

The Government of Sierra Leone has officially launched the Spotlight Initiative—a bold, multi-year global partnership between the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN)—to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

The launch held at the New Brookfields Hotel in Freetown on Tuesday July 8th united government ministries, including the Chief Minister, the Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs and the Minister of Health; the European Union; UN agencies, representatives from the global Spotlight Initiative; the Rainbo Initiative; civil society organisations; traditional leaders; parliamentarians; the justice sector; and key development partners to address this scourge in our society.



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This launch builds on a landmark €15 million financing agreement signed on 11 April 2024 by Minister of Finance Sheku Ahmed Fantamadi Bangura and the European Union. This pivotal partnership represents a shared commitment to intensify national efforts in combating sexual and gender-based violence through coordinated funding, technical support, and sustained political will.

Violence against women and girls remains deeply entrenched in Sierra Leone. An estimated 62 percent of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence, according to the Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey (SLDHS) 2019. Harmful traditional practices—such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage—along with intimate partner violence, continue to threaten the safety, dignity, and economic empowerment of women and girls across the country.

By adopting this proven framework, Sierra Leone aims to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 5—achieving gender equality—and to create lasting, transformative change for generations to come.

The Spotlight Initiative in Sierra Leone will implement a comprehensive, four-pillar approach:

1. **Laws, Policies, and Institutions** — Strengthen legislation, enhance institutional capacity, and improve data systems to support prevention and justice.
2. **Prevention** — Launch nationwide behavior-change campaigns and community education programs that challenge harmful social norms and practices.
3. **Response Services** — Expand access to quality, survivor-centered health, legal, psychosocial, and protection services.
4. **Women's Movements** — Empower and fund grassroots women-led and youth-led organisations to lead advocacy and accountability efforts.



With funding of a little over \$ 12,000 targeting Moyamba, Falaba, and Kailahun Districts, the 3.8 million Euros component of the project will target all the 16 districts, 48 chiefdoms and 48 wards (in the Western Area Rural and Urban). Key national partners include the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Sierra Leone Police, traditional leaders and the justice sector.

At the launch ceremony, political leaders, development partners, civil society, and community representatives recommitted to ending gender-based violence through policy reform, community mobilisation, and strong institutional responses.



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Gerald Hatler, Charge' d'Affaires of the EU in Sierra Leone, said that what makes this Initiative particularly significant is its focused approach: among the many nations globally, only a select few in Africa are benefiting from this comprehensive programme.

He was proud to highlight that Sierra Leone is one of the four pioneering African countries for this second phase of the programme, alongside Uganda, Zambia, and Liberia.

"This selection underscores the recognition of Sierra Leone's commitment and the urgent need for action here", he noted.

UN Resident Coordinator Seraphine Wakana, who is also Co-Chair of the Project Steering Committee, noted that violence against women and girls remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations of our time. She called on the Government to institutionalise gender-responsive budgeting, strengthen data systems, and ensure that national frameworks are inclusive and rights-based.

Delivering the keynote address and officially launching the programme, the Chief Minister Dr David Moinina Sengh who is also the Lead Co-Chair of the Project Steering Committee described the launch as a remarkable testament to the strength of national and international partnerships. He highlighted the government's efforts in the fight against GBV, including the strengthening of the Sexual Offences Act, the establishment of One-Stop Centres, the 116 GBV Hotline, safe homes, and a Sexual Offences Model Court.



UNDP, partners launch skills training programme with guaranteed jobs for 100 youth

In a bold effort to tackle youth unemployment and strengthen technical capacity in Sierra Leone, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with the National Youth Commission and Sierra Tropical Ltd (a subsidiary of Dole Asia Holdings), has launched a transformative skills training programme for 100 young people in Bo District.



Deputy Minister of Youth Affairs, Hon. Patrick Michaelson Gibrilla, noted, “This programme is a shining example of public-private collaboration for youth empowerment. It equips our young people with tools to succeed and contribute meaningfully to national development.”

Kwame Wiafe, Managing Director of Sierra Tropical Ltd, reaffirmed the company’s commitment to youth development through skills training. “We are not just creating jobs, we are building a skilled, empowered local workforce,” he said.

The initiative signals a strong step forward in youth empowerment, inclusive growth, and private sector partnership for national development.

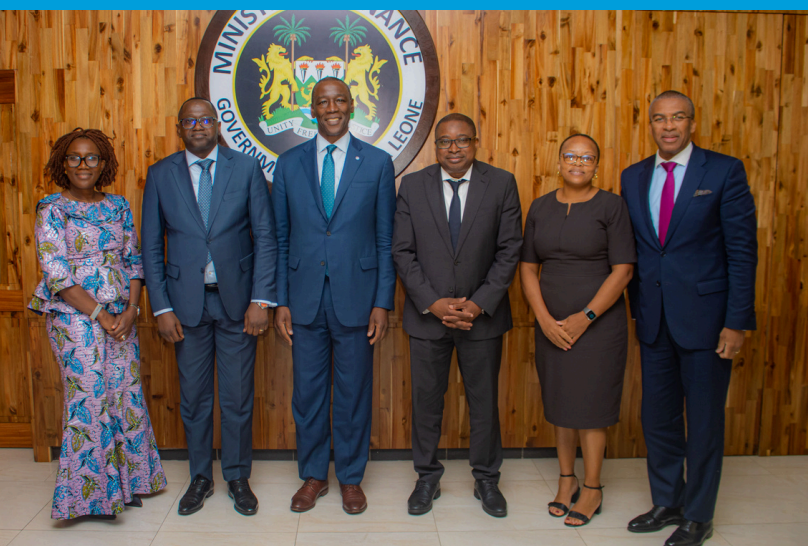
The initiative provides hands-on, market-relevant training in machine operations, automobile repairs, welding, and fabrication, sectors critical to Sierra Leone’s industrial growth. A unique feature of the programme is its direct link to employment: all trainees who successfully complete the training will be offered jobs by Sierra Tropical Ltd.

Speaking at the launch, UNDP Resident Representative, Frederick Ampiah, stated, “This initiative supports our commitment to youth employment and private sector development. By investing in employable skills, we help create an enabling environment where businesses thrive and young people secure sustainable livelihoods.”



UNDP supports Sierra Leone's sovereign credit rating journey

UNDP has launched technical support to assist Sierra Leone in securing its first-ever sovereign credit rating, a key step toward improving access to international capital markets and attracting private investment.



Sierra Leone is currently unrated by global agencies such as Moody's, S&P, and Fitch. This limits the country's ability to secure favourable lending terms. UNDP's support includes a readiness assessment, capacity building, data and policy reviews, and a roadmap to guide the rating process.

"Credit ratings play a critical role in shaping how global markets perceive a country's economic and financial health. UNDP is committed to supporting Sierra Leone in building the systems, skills, and institutional readiness necessary to secure and sustain a favourable credit rating" said Dr. Gilpin

This mission marks a critical step in Sierra Leone's journey toward financial resilience, economic transformation, and sustainable development.

This follows a request from the Ministry of Finance for assistance in enhancing capacity and mobilizing sustainable financing. Led by Dr. Raymond Gilpin, UNDP Africa's Chief Economist, and international credit rating expert Kelvin Dalrymple, the mission is part of UNDP Africa's broader initiative to help countries navigate credit rating processes, data requirements, and methodologies.

The UNDP team held high-level meetings with the Minister of Finance, Sheku A.F. Bangura, the Bank of Sierra Leone, development partners, and the private sector. Minister Bangura called the initiative "timely and strategic," noting that a sovereign rating would help unlock innovative financing, reduce borrowing costs, and attract credible investment.



UNICEF convenes national seminar to promote inclusive education

UNICEF convened a National Seminar on Inclusive Education on Friday, 4 July 2025 to assess existing gaps, identify practices and define strategic actions that ensure all children, including the most marginalized, have access to quality learning.



In collaboration with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), the seminar brought together government actors, civil society, development partners, and education stakeholders to accelerate progress toward a more inclusive, equitable education system in Sierra Leone.

"Inclusive education is not a separate or parallel system; it is the foundation of an equitable, resilient education system that leaves no child behind," said Liv Elin Indreiten, UNICEF Deputy Representative in Sierra Leone.

The seminar provided space for stakeholders to examine current challenges and systemic barriers to inclusive education; share successful models and innovations and map out priority actions to build a more inclusive education system that engages families, communities, and policy influencers.

While Sierra Leone has made progress in ensuring equitable access to education through the Free Quality School Education programme and relevant policies such as the Radical Inclusion Policy and the Comprehensive School Safety Policy, many children—especially girls and children with disabilities—still face major barriers to learning.

Ms Indreiten further used that opportunity to launch the Inclusive Education Strategy for Sierra Leone, along with a policy brief developed in partnership with the MBSSE and other stakeholders. These resources offer evidence-based guidance to strengthen inclusive planning, classroom practice, and community engagement.



UNICEF Pilots Cash Plus Programme for Prevention of Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Kambia District

UNICEF, in partnership with the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) and Action Aid Sierra Leone, piloted a Cash Plus Programme for Prevention of Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy for almost 3,000 adolescent girls and their caregivers in seven communities in Kambia District.

unicef 
for every child



Sierra Leone has high rates of teenage pregnancy and child marriage with 2 in 10 girls aged 15 and 19 already with babies while 3 in 10 girls under 18 already married.

Kambia District was selected to pilot this Cash Plus programme due to its higher-than-average rates of teenage pregnancy to enable vulnerable adolescent girls with immediate cash support while also providing an opportunity to integrate it to other programmes aimed at addressing child marriage and teenage pregnancy.

The first round of cash support to adolescent girls took place a few weeks ago as the other programme components – safe spaces; Positive Parenting; inter-generational dialogue and community social action and engagement of boys and men – are being implemented with support from the Global Programme to End Child Marriage (GPECM). It builds on the solid foundations already laid by the GPECM, which has been implemented in Sierra Leone since 2016.



WHO boosts health emergency response

The World Health Organization (WHO) has officially handed over eight vehicles to Sierra Leone's Ministry of Health to strengthen the country's emergency preparedness and response systems. The donation, funded through the Pandemic Fund Agreement, was presented by WHO Country Representative Dr George Ameh to Minister of Health Dr Austin Demby during a ceremony at the Youyi Building in Freetown.



Minister Demby emphasized the critical role of Primary Health Care (PHC) in improving health outcomes and reducing disease outbreaks, highlighting its impact on Mpox control. "At one point, we had up to 2,000 active Mpox cases; today, we report around 200. This is the power of PHC and timely response," he said. He praised WHO for its continuous support, calling the organization "a companion in the journey."

Dr Ameh reaffirmed WHO's leadership in implementing the Pandemic Fund initiative and expressed appreciation for the government's trust. He noted that six vehicles were donated last year to support rapid response, and this latest batch further strengthens response efforts at the community level.

TNPHA Executive Director Prof Foday Sahr praised this joint effort: "With good leadership, everything is possible. The vehicles provided last year through WHO helped respond to five emergencies; Within 48 hours, teams were on the ground responding."

With this latest delivery, Sierra Leone's district-level readiness and health security are significantly enhanced, supporting the country's broader goal of building resilient, community-based health systems for long-term impact.



Private health practitioners engaged to strengthen mpox response

The National Public Health Agency (NPHA), with support from the World Health Organization (WHO), has engaged private medical practitioners to enhance collaboration in Sierra Leone's ongoing mpox response.



The meeting, held at Brookfields Hotel in Freetown, brought together key private healthcare providers to align on national strategies for disease surveillance, laboratory systems, vaccination, infection prevention and control (IPC), and case management.

This strategic engagement is part of broader efforts to ensure an inclusive and coordinated response to mpox by further integrating private sector contributions into national health security frameworks. By leveraging the reach and capacity of private practitioners, the initiative aims to close existing gaps in the response and improve case detection, reporting, and timely intervention.

Both the NPHA and WHO reaffirmed their commitment to building a stronger, more resilient health system through public-private collaboration, recognizing that collective action is essential for preventing outbreaks and protecting communities.



WHO supports Mpox response efforts in Koinadugu District

As part of the ongoing response to the mpox outbreak in Sierra Leone, the World Health Organization (WHO) has intensified support to Koinadugu District through the handover of critical medical supplies aimed at boosting case management and strengthening local response capacity.



World Health
Organization

COMPLEX KOIDADUGU DISTRICT



The handover, which took place at the district hospital, included essential commodities to support effective patient care and infection prevention. WHO also joined district health authorities in presenting discharge cards to mpox survivors, a powerful moment that recognized the strength of survivors and the unwavering dedication of the health workers who cared for them.

Beyond facility-based support, WHO supervisor teams are actively working with national and district response teams to enhance community outreach. As part of this effort, door-to-door sensitization is ongoing in affected communities, focusing especially on households with confirmed mpox cases across the country.

These community engagements are crucial in educating families on how mpox spreads, what symptoms to look out for, and the steps to take for early care and prevention. They also aim to dispel misinformation and reduce stigma around the disease.

WHO's continued support reflects its commitment to strengthening community health systems, improving outbreak response, and closing critical gaps in surveillance and case management.



RSLAF & UN Women-SL sign partnership to empower Armed Forces women

The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) and UN Women Sierra Leone have on Tuesday the 7th July, 2025 signed a new partnership to empower uniformed women in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

The initiative is to significantly enhance the participation and capacity of Uniformed Women in Peace Operations. Supported by the Elsie Initiative Fund (EIF), the partnership will implement a two-year project aimed at breaking long-standing barriers to gender equality within the country's military structure.



RSLAF Chief of Defence Staff, Lieutenant General Amara Idara Bangura, described the initiative as a major step forward for women in the armed forces.

"This project is cardinal to empowering women in uniform. It will enable Sierra Leone to maintain double-digit gender figures and empower female personnel to reach the highest cloud of their desire, exposing them to the dynamics of peacekeeping," he said.



The new project will include a comprehensive review of RSLAF's gender mainstreaming policies, substantial improvements to the Peace Mission Training Centre, targeted capacity building and career development for female personnel, and strengthened healthcare systems particularly in addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and ensuring effective reporting mechanisms.

The overarching goal is to increase the number of Sierra Leonean women eligible for deployment in UN peace operations. At present, women constitute 13 per cent of RSLAF's total uniformed personnel, although they make up 46 per cent of those deployed in current peacekeeping missions.

"UN Women's Head of Office in Sierra Leone, welcomed the collaboration as a turning point for gender equality in peace operations.

This project marks a critical step in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, strengthening leadership, and ensuring that women in uniform have the tools, voice, and support they need to thrive and lead," -

Setcheme Jeronime Mongbo,

UN Women, Government of Ireland and Marwopnet launch new report to better protect women in cross border trade

UN Women Sierra Leone, in partnership with the Mano River Women's Peacebuilding Network through the Enhancing Women's Protection, Empowerment and Rights in Sierra Leone-ENPOWER Salone Project funded by the Government of Ireland has on Tuesday, 8th July Launched a new Research Report to better protect women in cross-border trade across Mano River Union countries of Guinea and Liberia.



The Research which was conducted across five districts-Kailahun, Kambia Karene, Kono and Pujehun District encompassing 20 chiefdoms and 25 border communities. It aims to address critical gaps by exploring mechanisms in key border posts that can better protect women from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in the Mano River Basin.

Some of the findings revealed that the majority of respondents reported experiencing forced bribery or extortion {44.6%}, followed by verbal abuse {41.9%}. Additionally, a small group of women mentioned physical abuse, such as hitting and slapping [38.8%] and sexual abuse or harassment [17.3%] as part of their experiences in cross-border trade.

For perpetrators of abuse, the results revealed that the majority of the perpetrators were border security personnel, including police and customs officers.

The event which took place in Gendema, Pujehun District attracted key stakeholders including the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, Irish Aid Representatives, chiefs, partners and community stakeholders.

While launching the Report, Marian Goodie Sowonie, Director of Gender at the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs thanked and praised UN Women, Marwopnet and the Government Ireland for such a laudable initiative and call on all to read and implement the recommendations of this report.



IOM and NaCSA roll out youth empowerment efforts to curb trafficking and migration

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), in partnership with the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Taskforce Secretariat, has launched a monthlong training program focused on income-generating activities.



This initiative targets youth in the Western Area Rural and Kambia Districts, aiming to strengthen economic opportunities and raise community awareness on the dangers of irregular migration and human trafficking.

Key Objectives of the Initiative include Equipping young people with hands-on, marketable skills; Boosting youth-led entrepreneurship and local businesses; Encourage safe migration practices and reintegration support; and Educate communities to prevent irregular migration and trafficking

This impactful program is made possible through the support of the IOM Development Fund and the Swedish Ministry of Justice.



READY Salone unlocks digital confidence and inclusive leadership for young women

Through back-to-back workshops in Freetown, the ITC READY Salone project is strengthening how young women speak, pitch, and participate in shaping the support systems around them.



International
Trade
Centre



From 30 June to 3 July, 26 young women entrepreneurs took part in a four-day workshop focused on building communication and business confidence. From storytelling and negotiation to using voice notes in Krio to engage with ChatGPT, the training blended soft skills with practical digital tools.

On 4 July, 22 representatives from women's business associations, business support organisations, and development actors came together to co-create more inclusive ecosystems for women in business. From peer-to-peer exchanges to action-oriented group work, participants explored what works and what needs to change.

"Sometimes the support is there but women don't trust it's for them," Hawa Yokie

READY Salone is implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC) in partnership with the Ministry of Youth Affairs, the Ministry of Communications, Technology and Innovation, and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The project is funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).



ITC READY Salone equips youth to innovate with purpose

Through hands-on training and high-level exposure, the Republic of Korea-funded project is preparing young Sierra Leoneans to design solutions that work for their community and their economy.

What makes a business succeed? At a recent Human-Centred Design (HCD) workshop in Freetown, young Sierra Leoneans learned that it starts with understanding people, not just products.



International
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Delivered by the International Trade Centre's READY Salone project, the four-day workshop trained youth and aspiring facilitators in practical, people-first design methods. Hosted in partnership with the IPAM Centre for Excellence in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, the training combined interactive exercises with real-world problem-solving.

The programme was delivered in two parts: first, a training-of-trainers to prepare participants to lead future HCD sessions; second, a hands-on practicum where participants worked with youth-led startups to apply key HCD principles—empathy, ideation, prototyping, and testing.

"I finally grasped the full design thinking framework and feel equipped to guide others through it," said Mabel Ironn Sky Turay, a business consultant

The READY Salone project also featured prominently at the Sierra Leone Innovates: Digital Government Summit, held from 4-6 June in Freetown. The event, hosted by the Ministry of Communication, Technology and Innovation (MOCTI), gathered over 4,000 participants and marked the official launch of 5G technology in the country.

As a sponsor, ITC READY Salone supported an interactive exhibition booth, connecting youth with training, mentorship, and digital skills opportunities; a tailored training session for early-stage tech entrepreneurs; and an Innovation Challenge recognizing five standout startups; the winners will take part in a sponsored learning exchange in South Korea.





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Media Contacts



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Organization



Moses **KALOKOH**, Communications Officer
Email: mokalokoh@iom.int | Phone: +232 77 774294



Janet Alamisi **DABIRE**, Communications Specialist
Email: janet.dabire@undp.org | Phone: +232 309 68950



Mohamed Lamarana **JALLOH**, Communications Specialist
Email: Jalloh.Mohamed@fao.org | Phone: +232 79244233



Suzanne Wooster –
PREMATILAKE, Chief Communication and Advocacy
Phone: +232 759 86567



Mohamed **KANU**, Communication and Knowledge Management Specialist, UNCDF
Email: mohamed.kanu@undp.org | Phone: +232 77 245031



Islander **KABIA**,
Communication Officer -
OIC
Email: ikabia@unfpa.org



John Duguba **KAMARA**,
UNESCO National Project Officer
Email: jd.kamara@unesco.org |
Phone: +232 772 27137



Mohamed **KARGBO**,
Communications Officer
Email:
mohamed.kargbo@unwomen.org
| Phone: +232 76 493 310



Osman **SANKOH**, Programme
Communication
and Advocacy Officer
Email: sankoh0@un.org
| Phone: +232 309 68909



Paul **JATALIAN**, Project
Coordinator
Email:
p.jatalian@unido.org



Anthony Musyoka **MAKAU**, Country
Focal Point
Email: anthony.makau@un.org



Selamawit Mussie **MEKONNEN**,
Economic Adviser Officer
Email:
selamawit.mekonnen@un.org



Shiaka **KAWA**, National
Coordinator
Email: skawa@intracen.org
| Phone: +232 76 60 3665



Semion Saffa-**TURAY**,
Strategic Information
Adviser
Email:
SaffaturayS@unaids.org
| Phone: +232 78 882 900



Francis **BOIMA**,
Communication Associate
Email: Francis.boima@wfp.org
| Phone: +232 76 750 587



Victoria **CHENDEKA**, Communications Senior
Analyst Officer Email: victoriak@unops.org |
Phone: +232 30 882151 | 030 30 7839



Madlyn **SHARCAH**,
National Communication
Officer
Email: sharkahm@who.int |
Phone: +232 73 62 3665



Tanya **HONNAH**, Communication
Officer (Graphic Design and Social
Media)
Email: tanya.honnah@un.org
| Phone: +232 78 751 325



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