

UNFPA

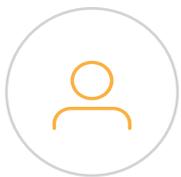
Sierra Leone

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At a glance

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Ensuring rights and choices for all



Who we are

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UNFPA, is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. Our mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is a safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

Guided by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UNFPA calls for the realisation of reproductive rights for all and supports access to a wide range of sexual and reproductive health services – including voluntary family planning, maternal health care and comprehensive sexuality education.



What we do

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UNFPA has been operating in Sierra Leone since 1971 and supports the Government's efforts to revitalise the health system and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights. We provide the Government and other partners with comprehensive technical support to implement programmes, improve knowledge around sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, population issues, adolescents and youth.

In 2018, UNFPA launched efforts to achieve three transformative results, ambitions that promise to change the world for every man, woman and young person:

- Ending unmet need for family planning
- Ending preventable maternal deaths
- Ending gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls

Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is a safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.



Country context ...

The population of Sierra Leone is estimated at 7.1 million, comprising 49.2 per cent males and 50.8 per cent females, with a growth rate of 3.2 per cent per annum (Census 2015). The population is generally young, with 77.2 per cent aged below 35 years.

Maternal mortality in Sierra Leone is among the highest in the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates of the maternal mortality ratio from 1990 to 2015, indicate a decline from 2,630 to 1,360 deaths per 100,000 live births – which is still unacceptably high. The main causes of death are postpartum haemorrhage and unsafe abortions.

Critical shortages in a skilled health workforce are prevalent, with staffing gaps for higher-skilled cadres such as doctors, specialist nurses, and midwives. The 2018 UNFPA Supplies report shows that 28.4 per cent of service delivery points reported stock outs of at least three modern contraceptive methods due to irregular distribution and a poor logistics management system.

The rates of adolescent pregnancy are high with 28 per cent of girls 15-19 years having begun child bearing while 38.9 per cent of women aged 20-24 marry before age 18 years (DHS 2013). Major consequences of child marriage and adolescent

pregnancy are high maternal mortality and morbidity including obstetric fistula. An estimated 46.8 per cent of deaths among adolescent girls are due to maternal causes (DHS 2013) and anecdotal evidence indicates the number of obstetric fistula cases are as high as 2,496 cases based on initial modelling projections.

Gender-based violence is prevalent with 57 per cent of women age 15-49 ever having experienced physical or sexual violence (DHS 2013). Female genital mutilation is also prevalent with 90 per cent of women aged 15-49 affected, which is among the highest rates in the sub-region.

Despite improvements in strengthening the national statistical system, high quality data collection, analysis and use is still a challenge, particularly at the decentralized district levels. There remains a compelling need to strengthen data collection and management. Sierra Leone has experienced several humanitarian crises including an Ebola virus disease outbreak, flash floods and landslides resulting in displacement of people and deaths. These placed huge burdens on an already overstretched and weak health system, which critically requires health systems strengthening.

Our key programme areas...



Sexual and reproductive health



Adolescents and youth



Gender equality and women's empowerment



Sexual and reproductive health

Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages is third of the Sustainable Development Goals. It declares that the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right of every person. Reaching this standard requires that health systems become more sensitive and responsive to women and girls' needs and wants, while offering higher quality and more comprehensive and accessible services.

To reduce the alarming rates of maternal mortality in Sierra Leone, UNFPA works closely with the Government to provide family planning services nationwide, taking special measures to reach those most marginalised. In addition to saving the lives of women and children, voluntary family planning helps to empower women and girls, reduce poverty, and ultimately build stronger nations.

UNFPA supports programmes that improve access to and affordability of family planning services; offer a broad selection of choices; reflect high standards of care; are sensitive to cultural conditions; and address other reproductive health needs.

UNFPA works to ensure safe births, effective maternity services and improve the quality of basic and emergency obstetric care services. UNFPA is also engaged the provision of essential equipment and standardised guidelines.



Adolescents and youth

UNFPA pays close attention to young people as a crucial cohort needed to support efforts to reach sustainable development. By advancing programmes and initiatives that help to expand their life choices, protect their rights, and contribute to their own development as well as that of their communities, UNFPA is investing in the next generation. Sierra Leone is in a prime position to reap the 'Demographic Dividend', which is proven to boost sustainable development. Young people are more likely to reach their full potential if investments made focus on four key areas including, health and well-being; employment and entrepreneurship; rights, governance and youth empowerment; and education and skills.

UNFPA in Sierra Leone's key interventions to empower adolescents and youth cover a range of services that include providing life skills to young people, comprehensive sexuality education, youth-friendly health services and safe spaces. These measures are designed to reduce teenage pregnancy and maternal deaths, as well as to support livelihoods, develop capacity, build personal knowledge, and encourage social environments that promote good health and



Gender equality and women's empowerment

Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential to sustainable development. Only when women and girls are able to fulfil their potential, can they fully contribute to the development of nations. Sustainable Development Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls is pivotal to the realization of every other SDG, as an empowered girl changes not only her life, but that of her family and society.

UNFPA works closely with the Government, as well as with local non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations and other development agencies, to strengthen legislation pertaining to gender equality and to remove discriminatory clauses from Sierra Leone's constitution. UNFPA also advocates for gender-sensitive data collection, and emphasises the integration of culturally sensitive approaches to end gender-based violence, including traditional practices that harm women and girls such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.

UNFPA also recognises the rights, perspectives and influence of men and boys, involving them in the promotion of gender equality and reproductive health, proving that women's empowerment is the responsibility of everyone, not just women and girls.



Population and development

In line with the SDGs', UNFPA Sierra Leone is committed to promoting data-driven change and developing capacity in data collection and analysis to support effective programmes. UNFPA provides the Government, other development partners and key stakeholders with relevant, reliable data and information, as a guide towards evidence-based development planning, policy formulation, service delivery, and monitoring and evaluation.

UNFPA also supports the government and partners to develop the National Population Policy, and in the collection of data for the production of the Demographic Health Surveys, as well as Population and Housing Census. Alongside other UN agencies and development partners, UNFPA has been instrumental in building the technical and institutional capacities of Statistics Sierra Leone in the production and dissemination of national statistical data.

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