

Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
For the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report

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SIERRA LEONE

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sierra Leone acceded to the *1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, as well as its *1967 Protocol*, in 1981 (hereinafter referred to jointly as the '*1951 Convention*'). The country also acceded to the *1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* and the *1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness* in 2016.

Notably, although Sierra Leone is a party to the *2009 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa* (the Kampala Convention), it has not yet incorporated the Convention into national law.

The main national legal instrument concerning refugees and asylum seekers is the Refugee Protection Act of 2007 (Sierra Leone Gazette, Vol. CXXXVIII, No. 42, 30 August). An eligibility committee and an appeals committee oversee the determination of refugee status.

The National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) is responsible for implementing the Refugee Protection Act of 2007, as well as for providing protection and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers.

As of 31 July 2025, Sierra Leone hosts 200 former Liberian refugees and 10 from Côte d'Ivoire, who remain under the responsibility of NaCSA and UNHCR while awaiting the issuance of local residence permits. Around 48% of the refugees are women and 52% are men. The majority of refugees in Sierra Leone are located in the rural districts of Kenema, Bo and Moyamba.

Regarding the prevention of statelessness, despite progress in civil registration and identity management, the lack of an effective birth registration system poses a particularly high risk of statelessness for certain groups, such as refugees and migrants, internally displaced persons, nomadic and border populations, and, in some circumstances, ethnic minorities and people living in remote areas. The birth registration rate stands at 78% (National Civil Registration Authority – NCRA, UN LIA Country Assessment, 2020), and record management is in poor condition, with no established standards to systematically guide the archiving of vital events. According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS, 2017), 81.1% of children under five are registered, among whom 52.9% have a birth certificate and 28.2% do not.

In November 2023, an attempted coup d'état was carried out by armed men who tried to access an armoury located at a military base near the president's residence. They launched an attack on two of the city's main prisons, resulting in the release of some detainees. The violence left at least 19 people dead, including 13 soldiers. This incident reflects political discontent in a context where Sierra Leone faces a high unemployment rate, pushing many to seek stable jobs in the public sector. During elections, affiliations with specific political parties become crucial for accessing state jobs and benefits. Losing for a party can mean losing influence, opportunities, and access for its supporters.

II. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT⁷

Issue 1: Establishing an effective asylum system

In 2022, UNHCR MCO Senegal and NaCSA reached an agreement to terminate the Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) with NaCSA and to transfer full responsibility for the asylum system to NaCSA, in accordance with Sierra Leone's national legislation. However, the Sierra Leonean government is facing significant challenges in fulfilling its obligations towards asylum seekers. The asylum system is currently non-operational due to the absence of an Eligibility Commission and qualified personnel to receive and process applications. Furthermore, the Kissy reception center, located near Freetown, has been out of service since it was destroyed during the anti-government protests in August 2022.

To address the dysfunction of the asylum system, it is recommended to strengthen institutions by establishing an Eligibility Commission and training specialized personnel to process asylum applications, rehabilitate infrastructure by reconstructing the Kissy reception center in accordance with appropriate standards, mobilize technical and financial support from international partners to enhance the capacity of NaCSA, and finally, implement a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure the effective implementation of the asylum system.

Recommendations:

- Establish an effective asylum system to ensure the protection of forcibly displaced persons, including their registration and the provision of basic legal and social needs.

Issue 2: Establishing a statelessness determination procedure

Although Sierra Leone is a party to the two main international legal instruments on statelessness — the *1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* and the *1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness* – these instruments have not yet been incorporated into national law.

Since the launch of UNHCR's #IBelong campaign in November 2014, Sierra Leone, like other West African states, has demonstrated strong political commitment and made notable progress. Nevertheless, despite these commitments, no national statelessness determination procedure (SDP) has yet been established.

In line with Objective 3.1 of the Banjul Action Plan "Determine / Recognize / Grant status to stateless persons" the establishment of an SDP is among the measures included in several national action plans. It is also a formal commitment made by Sierra Leone during the High-Level Segment on Statelessness. Accordingly, the government reaffirmed its willingness to act at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, committing to implement the National Action Plan on Statelessness, with the goal of regularizing 80% of identified individuals by 2026.

To effectively combat statelessness, it is recommended to harmonize national legislation with the 1954 and 1961 Conventions, establish a statelessness determination procedure (SDP) aligned with the Banjul Action Plan, and strengthen awareness among communities and training for relevant stakeholders. Additionally, implementing a national action plan with clear indicators—such as regularizing 80% of identified stateless persons by 2026 is crucial, alongside reinforcing strategic partnerships with UNHCR, NGOs, and regional institutions to support these efforts.

Recommendation:

- Consider amending the national legislative framework to establish a statelessness determination procedure (SDP) aimed at identifying and assisting stateless individuals, including foreign nationals and those with uncertain nationality, in acquiring or confirming their nationality, supported by effective, efficient and sustainable national policy programs.

UNHCR
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