



Diaspora engagement mapping

SIERRA LEONE

Facts & figures

Terminology: The terms 'diaspora' and 'migrant workers abroad' are used in policy documents.

Political rights



Dual citizenship¹



Right to vote in national elections for citizens residing abroad²



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **8.44%**
Remittances inflow (USD million): **437.51**

Voting from abroad



Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from UNDESA (2024) and remittances from the World Bank (2023).

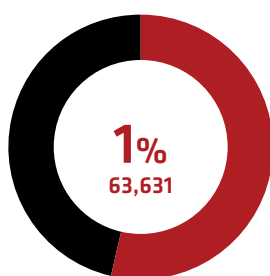
Emigration



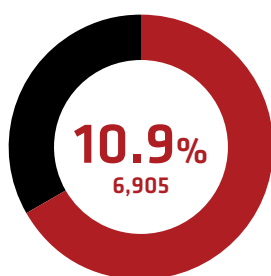
% of emigrants in total population



% of which in the EU



♂ 53.7%
♀ 46.3%



♂ 66.8%
♀ 33.2%

Top countries of destination



Senegal	15,843
Liberia	13,878
Guinea	8,065
Nigeria	4,679
Australia	4,218

¹ Sierra Leone Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2006 (section 10 for dual citizenship and section 19A for the reinstatement of citizenship)

² The Public Elections Act, 2012 (section 18 for registration of voters outside Sierra Leone). Sierra Leoneans abroad are able to register to vote where structures are in place. However, voters have to return to Sierra Leone to cast their vote.

Overview of the policy and legislative framework

2022 ● The **National Migration Policy (NMP)**³ establishes a nexus between migration and development and underlines the need to develop an institutional policy framework to organise diaspora engagement back home, in particular in the fields of trade, remittances and consular assistance abroad.

The NMP aims to strengthen the ties between the diaspora and Sierra Leone by organising periodic homecoming events and conferences for diaspora members to visit home and contribute to development, as well as short-term working visits for highly skilled diasporans.

2019
▼
2023 ● The **Mid Term National Development Plan (MTNDP)**⁴ is Sierra Leone's five-year strategy to propel Sierra Leone closer to middle-income status. The potential role of the diaspora is outlined within the plan; key areas include:

- To reduce the cost of remittances with the anticipation of increased spending in education and health;
- Specialist Knowledge: The diaspora is recognised for skills and knowledge-sharing potential, with potential identified for support in sectors such as health and finance.
- Private Sector and Investment: Diaspora participation in trade and investment is encouraged through various mechanisms including:
 - Diaspora bank accounts
 - Relaxation of capital controls for diaspora businesses
 - A diaspora bond that would raise \$500 million towards supporting development projects as outlined in the MTNDP.

2012
▼
2017 ● The National Labour Migration Policy was developed with the support of ICMPD's MIEUX team. The policy includes a diaspora focus to:

- Increase the flow of remittances and decrease barriers
- Support the portability of social security rights – this would enable the movement of pensions from country of residence to Sierra Leone
- Promote foreign direct investment options in Sierra Leone from diaspora (known as Diaspora Direct Investment, DDI) and migrant entrepreneurs.
- Address the security and support of migrant workers abroad and their families in their country of residence.

» Trends

The civil war and endemic poverty have contributed to massive emigration, especially in the 1990s. However, at government level, the recognition of the importance of diaspora engagement has been slow to follow. Following the civil war, the diaspora started to engage with their heritage country through health professional and financial support, advocacy activities and setting up organisations to support victims of the war and the rehabilitation process⁵. In 2007, the government began to structure its diaspora engagement approach by establishing the Office of Diaspora Affairs, a dedicated institution to engage Sierra Leone's diaspora.

As in other West African countries, labour migration is an important livelihood strategy. The civil war led to massive departures of educated nationals. In the post-conflict era, the poor state of infrastructure, lack of economic development opportunities, low wages and the working environment further pushed individuals to migrate. This has led to brain drain becoming an acute problem. In response, the government wishes to harness diaspora skills and knowledge to contribute to national development.

³ The National Migration Policy (NMP)

⁴ The Mid-Term National Development Plan is available via the Ministry of Planning and Economic Department's website https://www.slurc.org/uploads/1/0/9/7/109761391/sierra_leone_national_development_plan.pdf (If the website is not functioning, the Ministry can be contacted via its Facebook page)

⁵ DEMAC, (2016) Diaspora Humanitarianism: Transnational ways of working, Page 13

In order to promote skills transfer from Sierra Leonean professionals living abroad, the government has created a database on existing diaspora communities, including localisation and skills profiles. In addition, the government aims to turn brain drain into brain gain by developing programmes like short-term working visits to attract highly skilled Sierra-Leoneans back home. For example, a former Sierra Leonean Minister of Social Welfare was re-called from the US to assist in the response to the Ebola crisis. In addition, the National Ebola Response Committee⁶ (NERC) had several key management positions filled by Sierra Leonean diaspora, some of whom received the Presidential award in recognition of their services.⁷



Achievements

The Office for Diaspora Affairs works with other government departments to address capacity gaps in the public sector and find ways of encouraging Sierra Leonean professionals to return. In 2018, for example, the Office of the President invited David Sengeh,⁸ an engineer living in the diaspora, to be Chief Innovation Officer. Dr Sengeh's connections have created a relationship between the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Sierra Leone to the benefit of students and educational staff. Dr Sengeh became Minister for Basic and Senior Secondary Education in 2019.

Special effort to reach out to Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora was also undertaken in the planning process of the Mid-Term National Development Plan through the embassies and consulates.

Furthermore, in response to the advocacy efforts of diaspora with an interest in greater political inclusion and participation, the President of Sierra Leone, Julius Maada Bio, announced in October 2021 that the Attorney General was to present an amendment to the Constitution that will allow dual citizens to be elected as Members of Parliament.⁹

Obstacles



- **Political:** Diaspora participation in government has been a cause of contention with the electorate evenly split as to whether diaspora should be able to participate at this level. The government faces concern from non-diaspora members of parliament who fear that during elections diaspora could have an advantage due to the resources they may access. Their apprehensions could become an impediment to the dual-citizen political participation amendment gaining acceptance by parliament. The government has committed to carrying out a review¹⁰ of the concerns raised.
- **High cost of remittances:** This is a general problem across the African continent with money transfer corridors¹¹ in the region carrying the highest fees globally. High transfer fees are restrictive to development and feature in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10c, which calls for a reduction of money transfer fees to under 3%. The Sierra Leone government is working with UNDP¹² to improve its banking and financial system to respond to this challenge. Currently, a high proportion of remittances to Sierra Leone (and other locations) are transferred through informal channels due to the high cost of transmitting remittances through formal financial institutions. Bureaucratic procedures also deter people from using the channels provided by formal financial institutions.

6 National Library of Medicine (2017) Command and control of Sierra Leone's Ebola outbreak response: evolution of the response architecture, Section 5 (a) Structure

7 For example, Yvonne Aki Sawyerr was the Director of Planning for NERC and received the Presidential Award for her services during the Ebola crisis.

8 New African Magazine (24 November 2020) Interview with Mr Sengeh

9 Africa News (29 October 2021) Sierra Leone pushes to allow MPs dual citizenship

10 Afrobarometer (20 February 2020) Sierra Leoneans Strong on Democracy, but Split on whether Dual Citizens should Participate

11 Making finance work for Africa (2021) Africa: Sub-Saharan Africa Most Expensive Globally to Send and Receive Money

12 UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) (2021) Sierra Leone's Journey Towards Digital and Financial Inclusion

- **Lack of effective mechanisms to leverage financial capital:** The government lacks the capacity to leverage foreign inflows from the diaspora as an asset for investment and national development.
- **Information on investment & business opportunities:** There is a need for trustworthy and skilled focal points to provide credible information on diaspora-specific investment and business opportunities, as well as contacts of reliable suppliers for new businesses.

SPOTLIGHT: effective practices

Explore 400+ practices by country, SDG or sector of engagement in the [interactive database!](#)



Heritage tourism in Freetown 2022

TOURISM

Stemming from Freetown City Council's (FCC) Transform Freetown development plan, FCC is working with diaspora organisation [AfricaOracle](#) (AO) to enhance Freetown's heritage tourism sector. The initiative is supported by EUDiF's Capacity Development Lab (CDL) and leverages heritage tourism as a sector of interest to diaspora as a means of investment and connection to their past. The FCC and AO will develop a strategy to enhance the customer experience at historical sites and associated service provision in Freetown. They will also develop concept packages for a bi-annual festival and walking tours. The long-term aim is to open up opportunities for diaspora investment and create local jobs as tourist demand for auxiliary services increases (hospitality, transport, merchandise etc.) and stimulates revenue in the municipality.

Invest Salone 2018

INVESTMENT

Invest Salone is a £27m British government-funded programme running between 2018-23. It aims to increase investment in Sierra Leone's export sectors, including agriculture, tourism, and fisheries to drive economic diversification, household income growth and job creation. The Ministry of Finance collaborated with Invest Salone to facilitate a Private Sector Platform, the main vehicle for public-private consultation and collaboration to improve the investment climate in Sierra Leone. London-based diaspora organisation AFFORD is a partner of the project, ensuring the diaspora element is incorporated across the project, including participation in the PSP.

Engaging the Diaspora to Strengthen the Health, flood prevention and Agriculture Sectors in Sierra Leone 2018-2019

HEALTH

The Office of Diaspora Affairs and the Ministry of Health collaborated with the International Organisation for Migration on a diaspora 'medical mission'. The mission comprised five diaspora medics who are members of the [Afro-European Medical and Research Network](#) (AEMRN). The medics came from Switzerland, the UK and the USA and provided free screenings and treatments to over one hundred people in the Kailahun district.

On completion of the project in March 2019 the members of AEMRN continued their voluntary services and created a [Mobile Health Clinics \(MHC\) campaign](#). This campaign was rolled out between 4th and 17th May 2019 in partnership with the Sierra Leonean Ministry of Health. The original five medics were joined by a further four colleagues enabling the campaign to benefit from the expertise of nine health professionals from AEMRN.

TOURISM + LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Local heritage tourism as a connection to diaspora in Sierra Leone

The Freetown City Council (FCC) launched its Transform Freetown (TF) Agenda in January 2019. The agenda is a development strategy comprising 11 sectors within four pillars: resilience, human development, health, and urban mobility. This action responds to the need identified by the FCC to strengthen its local heritage tourism in order to attract the global Sierra Leonean diaspora.

Annex:

List of Actors

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 430+ institutions](#)

Diaspora related institutions

- **At regional level**

African Union Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (AU CIDO)

Sierra Leone is a member of the African Union and nominates a diaspora focal point to represent Sierra Leone as part of the AU CIDO Continental Meetings.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

Sierra Leone is a member of ECOWAS a regional group of fifteen countries in West Africa with the aim of promoting economic integration. While diaspora related measures are generally located within migration policies and strategies they are increasingly being regarded with greater levels of attention and importance.¹³

The Mano River Union (MRU) (1973)

The MRU is an intergovernmental organisation with a Secretariat based in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The MRU was formed as a customs union, to promote economic growth, social progress, and cultural advancement through trade promotion.

- **National institutions**

- At ministerial level

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MOFAIC) 1961

MOFAIC aims to create an effective and efficient diplomatic apparatus for implementing the government's programmes and activities. The Office of Diaspora Affairs is a division within the ministry.

Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) 2007

The MoFED ensures that issues related to labour migration are mainstreamed into the national development agenda.

Ministry of Labour and Social Security 1939

In collaboration with the Office of Diaspora Affairs, the Ministry reaches out to diaspora and creates awareness on employment opportunities within the country. It also establishes structures and programmes to ensure effective utilisation of diaspora skills for the socio-economic development of the country.

Ministry of Public and Political Affairs (MPPA) 1996

The MPPA oversees the activities of the Office of the Diaspora and meets migrant workers to deliberate and receive feedback from them on labour issues. It is also responsible for organising the Annual Diaspora Home-Coming events and other diaspora activities within and outside the country.

¹³ IOM (2020) [Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean](#)

- At sub-ministerial level

Office of Diaspora Affairs (ODA) 2007

The ODA was established in 2007 to strengthen diaspora engagement. The ODA was under the Ministry of Public Affairs, however, from March 2020 it became a division under MOFAIC. ODA focuses on skills transfer between the diaspora and Sierra Leone, enhancing the development impact of remittances and encouraging diaspora investment for development. ODA acts as a link between diaspora organisations and the government and keeps them informed about employment and business opportunities.

Diaspora organisations in Europe

African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) 1994 Belgium/United Kingdom

Read more about diaspora organisations
in "[Starting guide: What is a diaspora
organisation](#)"



Development activities

AFFORD has an office in Sierra Leone and has run a number of diaspora focused projects that cover social entrepreneurship, diaspora investment and humanitarian response.

Afro-European Medical and Research Network (AEMRN) Switzerland

Development activities

AEMRN is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation with a strong vision of improving the quality of life for people from and living in resource-limited settings. Their projects span health, food security and more. See Spotlight section for their work in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone Central Union (SLCU) Netherlands

Development activities **Integration activities**

SLCU's vision is to unite and promote peace, unity and cooperation among all registered Sierra Leonean organisations in the Netherlands.

Sierra Leone Youth Initiative (SLYI) 2018 Netherlands

Development activities

SLYI is a foundation with the goal of stimulating the self-reliance of Sierra Leonean children and young people by giving them the opportunity to learn a trade and to stimulate entrepreneurship.

The Organsiation of Sierra Leone Healthcare Professionals Abroad (TOSHPA) 2009 United Kingdom

Development activities

TOSHPA is a professional and non-political thinktank healthcare organisation of Sierra Leonean healthcare professionals abroad. It is committed to providing health care relief services and creating ideas and policy debate which will shape the future of healthcare policy, practices and regulations for a healthier Sierra Leone.

Youth Partnership for Peace and Development (YPPD) 2005 United Kingdom

- ☑ **Development activities**
- ☑ **Integration activities**

The YPPD is a youth empowerment thinktank established in 2005 to enhance the capacity of young people and their communities to promote peace, human rights, health, and inclusion of marginalised groups, as well as the creation of open societies that promote sustainable development.

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