



Sierra Leone



Background Continuously populated for at least 2,500 years, the area now known as Sierra Leone is covered with dense jungle that allowed the region to remain relatively protected from invading West African empires. Traders introduced Sierra Leone to Islam, which occupies a central role in Sierra Leonean culture and history. In the 17th century, the British set up a trading post near present-day Freetown. The trade originally involved timber and ivory but later expanded to enslaved people. In 1787, after the American Revolution, Sierra Leone became a destination for Black British loyalists from the new United States. When Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807, British ships delivered thousands of liberated Africans to Sierra Leone. During the 19th century, the colony gradually expanded inland. In 1961, Sierra Leone became independent of the UK. Sierra Leone held free and fair elections in 1962 and 1967, but Siaka STEVENS -- Sierra Leone's second prime minister -- quickly reverted to authoritarian tendencies, outlawing most political parties and ruling from 1967 to 1985. In 1991, Sierra Leonean soldiers launched a civil war against STEVENS' ruling party. The war caused tens of thousands of deaths and displaced more than 2 million people (about one third of the population). In 1998, a Nigerian-led West African coalition military force intervened, installing Tejan KABBAH -- who was originally elected in 1996 -- as prime minister. In 2002, KABBAH officially announced the end of the war. Since 1998, Sierra Leone has conducted democratic elections dominated by the two main political parties, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All People's Congress (APC) party. In 2018, Julius Maada BIO of the Sierra Leone People's Party won the presidential election that saw a high voter turnout despite some allegations of voter intimidation. BIO won again in June 2023, although irregularities were noted that called into question the integrity of the results. In October 2023, the Government of Sierra Leone and the main opposition party, the All People's Congress, signed the Agreement for National Unity to boost cooperation between political parties and begin the process of reforming the country's electoral system.

Capital name: Freetown

Government type presidential republic

Area
total: 71,740 sq km
land: 71,620 sq km
water: 120 sq km

Climate tropical; hot, humid; summer rainy season (May to December); winter dry season (December to April)

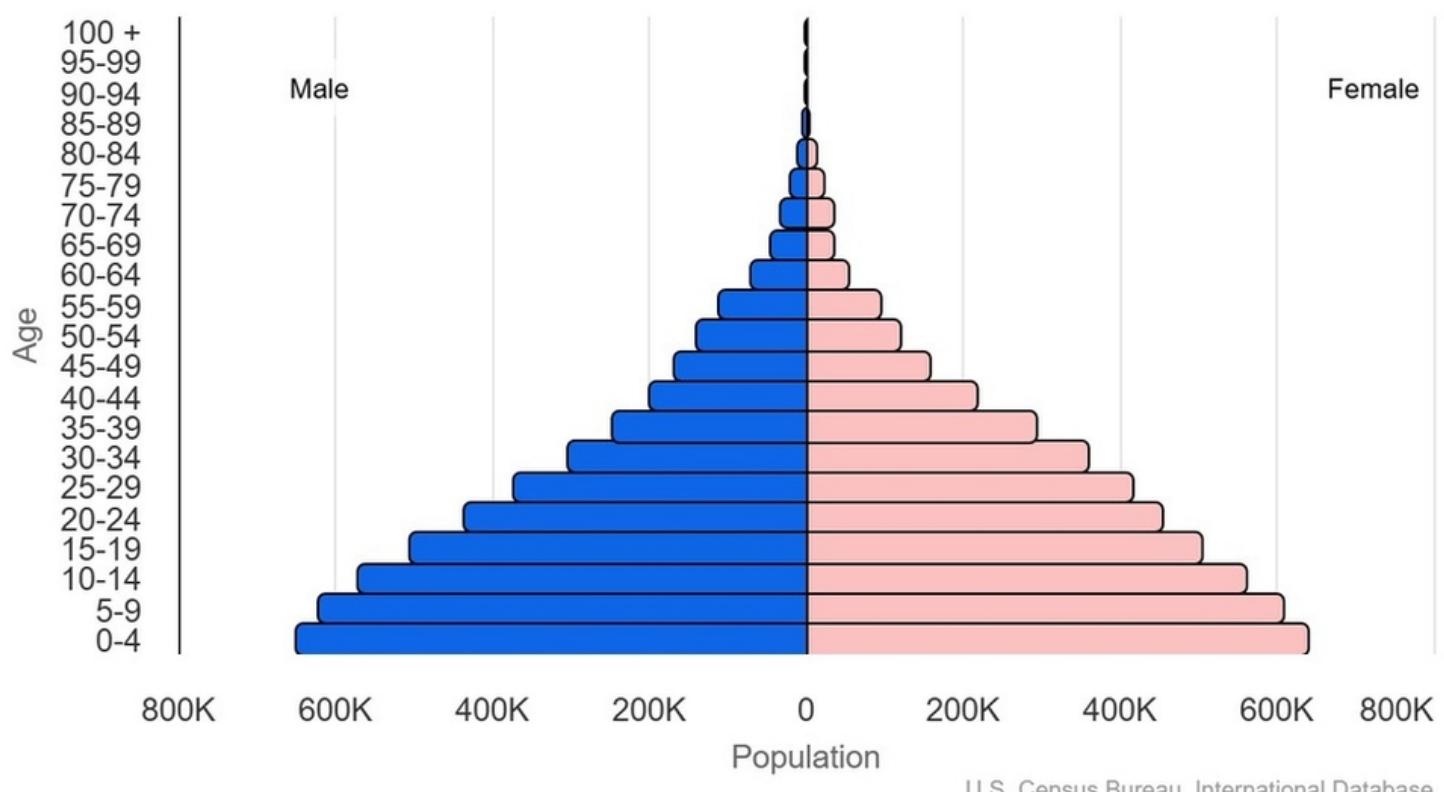
Natural resources diamonds, titanium ore, bauxite, iron ore, gold, chromite

Population total: 9,121,049 (2024 est.)

Population growth rate 2.32% (2024 est.)

Ethnic groups	Temne 35.4%, Mende 30.8%, Limba 8.8%, Kono 4.3%, Korankoh 4%, Fullah 3.8%, Mandingo 2.8%, Loko 2%, Sherbro 1.9%, Creole 1.2% (descendants of freed Jamaican slaves who were settled in the Freetown area in the late-18th century; also known as Krio), other 5% (2019 est.)
Religions	Muslim 77.1%, Christian 22.9% (2019 est.)
Languages	English (official, regular use limited to literate minority), Mende (principal vernacular in the south), Temne (principal vernacular in the north), Krio (English-based Creole, spoken by the descendants of freed Jamaican slaves; a first language for 10% of the population but understood by 95%)
Executive branch	chief of state: President Julius Maada BIO (since 27 June 2023) head of government: President Julius Maada BIO (since 27 June 2023)
Legislative branch	legislature name: Parliament
Diplomatic representation in the US	chief of mission: Ambassador Amara Sheikh Mohammed SOWA (since 24 July 2025)
Diplomatic representation from the US	chief of mission: Ambassador Bryan David HUNT (since 8 September 2023)
Economic overview	low-income West African economy; primarily subsistent agriculture; key iron and diamond mining activities suspended; slow recovery from 1990s civil war; systemic corruption; high-risk debt; high youth unemployment; natural resource rich
Real GDP (purchasing power parity)	\$26.728 billion (2024 est.) \$25.7 billion (2023 est.) \$24.312 billion (2022 est.)
Real GDP per capita	\$3,100 (2024 est.) \$3,000 (2023 est.) \$2,900 (2022 est.)
Exports	\$1.382 billion (2023 est.) \$1.202 billion (2022 est.) \$928.689 million (2021 est.)
Exports - partners	China 67%, India 6%, Belgium 5%, Netherlands 4%, Ireland 3% (2023)
Exports - commodities	iron ore, titanium ore, diamonds, aluminum ore, cocoa beans (2023)
Imports	\$2.264 billion (2023 est.) \$2.074 billion (2022 est.) \$1.91 billion (2021 est.)
Imports - partners	China 32%, India 15%, UAE 5%, USA 5%, Turkey 5% (2023)
Imports - commodities	rice, plastic products, packaged medicine, cement, cars (2023)

Population Pyramid

Sierra Leone (2024)

U.S. Census Bureau, International Database