

Sierra Leone



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1961
Population:	5,696,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	0.9% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 158
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT
Currency:	leone (Le)

Geography

Area:	71,740 sq km
Coastline:	402km
Capital:	Freetown

The Republic of Sierra Leone (Portuguese for 'Lion Mountain') in West Africa is bordered by Guinea to the north, Liberia to the south-east, and the Atlantic to the south and west.

Main towns: Freetown (capital, Western Province; pop. 828,000 in 2009), Bo (Southern, 206,800), Kenema (Eastern, 164,100), Makeni (Northern, 99,500), Koidu (Eastern, 91,000), Lunsar (Northern, 23,600), Port Loko (Northern, 22,400), Pandebu-Tokpombu (Eastern, 19,400), Kabala (Northern, 18,600), Waterloo (Western, 17,500), Kailahun (Eastern, 17,200), Magburaka (Northern, 15,800), Segbwema (Eastern, 15,700), Koindu (Eastern, 15,700) and Bonthe (Southern, 10,100).

Topography: Sierra Leone has some 402km of coast along the Atlantic Ocean, with magnificent beaches. Apart from the hilly Freetown peninsula (officially known as the Western Area), the coastal belt is flat, with a width of up to 110km. The land rises to the Guinea highlands in the east, with mountain peaks up to 1,917m. There are eight main rivers; the estuaries of two of them can be navigated by ocean-going vessels.

Climate: Tropical and humid all year, but cooler on the coast. The dry season is November to May, when the dusty harmattan wind blows from the Sahara; the rainy season lasts the rest of the year.

Environment: The most significant environmental issues are depletion of natural resources during the civil war; deforestation and soil exhaustion due to over-harvesting of timber, expansion of cattle grazing, and slash-and-burn agriculture; and overfishing.

Vegetation: Mangrove swamps occur along the coast, with thickly wooded hills on the Freetown peninsula, and grasslands, woods and savannah on the interior plains. The central inland area,

did you know?

Sierra Leoneans have twice been regional winners in the Commonwealth Writers' Prize: Syl Cheney-Coker, born in Freetown in June 1945, with his novel, *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, in 1991; and Paul Conton, with *The Price of Liberty*, in 1993.

Sierra Leone hosts a national chapter of the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council.

The population of Sierra Leone grew faster than any other country in the Commonwealth during 1990–2009, at 3.7% p.a.

formerly forested, has been cleared for agriculture. Forest – including mahogany and teak – covers 38% of the land area, having declined at 0.7% p.a. 2000–07. Arable land comprises 13% and permanent cropland 1% of the total land area.

Wildlife: Large game animals are now rare, but the Kilimi National Park in the north of the country has the largest concentration of chimpanzees in West Africa. The park is also home to 12 other primate species, including the colobus monkey, as well as the rare large bongo antelope and, in the river margins, pygmy hippopotami. After the civil war a chimpanzee sanctuary was established at Leicester in the Western Area.

Transport: There are 11,300km of roads, 8% paved, but in poor repair; secondary roads may be impassable in the rainy season. The railway system (nearly 600km in length) closed in 1974.

Freetown is the main port with a deep-water quay. There are smaller ports at Pepel, Bonthe, Niti and Sulima. Several rivers are navigable by small craft.

The international airport is at Lungi, 13km north of Freetown, and is separated from the capital by a river estuary.

Society

KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 79
 Life expectancy: 48 years
 Net primary enrolment: 69%

Population: 5,696,000 (2009); 38% lives in urban areas; growth 3.7% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 40 per 1,000 people (46 in 1970); life expectancy 48 years (36 in 1970 and 40 in 1990); population figures are unreliable because during the civil war in the mid-1990s up to 50% of the population had to leave their homes – there was mass migration to towns and to neighbouring countries.

The vast majority of the people are of Bantu origin: Temne (35% in the 2008 census) and Limba (8%) people mostly in the Northern province; Mende people (31%) live in the Southern province and Eastern province. Additionally, there are nine other Bantu ethnic groups, including Kono (5%), Mandingo (2%) and Loko (2%). Krios (2%) are descendants of formerly enslaved 19th-century immigrants who live mostly in and around Freetown. The small Lebanese community, mostly of traders, decreased during the 1990s.

Language: English is the official language. Krio (an English-based Creole) is spoken in and around Freetown. Other major languages are Temne, Mende and Limba.

Religion: Muslims 60%, Christians 10%, with most of the remaining population holding traditional beliefs, which often coexist with other religions.

Media: There are many newspapers including *Awareness Times*, *Awoko*, *Concord Times*, *The Democrat* and *Standard Times*.

The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service runs a national radio service and a terrestrial TV network. There are many private radio stations and ABC TV is a private TV channel.

There are 3 internet users per 1,000 people (2009).

Education: Public spending on education was 4.3% of GDP in 2009. There are seven years of primary education starting at age five, and seven of secondary comprising cycles of five and two years. The school year starts in September.

The principal tertiary institutions are Fourah Bay College in Freetown and Njala University, with campuses in Bo and Njala. These universities, together with Milton Margai College of Education and Technology (Freetown), Eastern Polytechnic (main campus in Kenema) and other independent tertiary institutions, are all affiliated to the University of Sierra Leone. The country also has a number of teacher-training and technical/vocational institutions providing certificate and diploma courses. Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 56% (2008).

The government's education plan for 2007–15 aims to complete rehabilitation of the country's education system, after the years of civil war, in order to give all citizens access to quality education. The plan emphasises primary education, skills-training and tertiary education to meet development needs.

Health: 49% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 13% have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2009). Climatic conditions are conducive to the spread of tropical diseases (notably malaria and guinea worm), and civil war made the country vulnerable to cholera. There was a high incidence of maiming during the civil war. Infant mortality was 123 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (220 in 1960). In 2009, 1.6% of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

Communications: Country code 232; internet domain '.sl'. Mobile phone coverage is limited to the Freetown area. The public telephone system does not extend beyond Western Area. The number of internet cafes is increasing, especially in Freetown. Post offices are found in the main towns.

There are 6 main telephone lines and 204 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, Independence Day (27 April), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

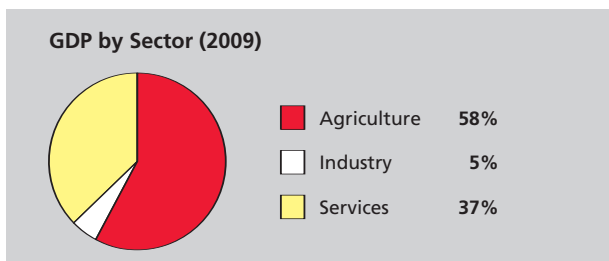
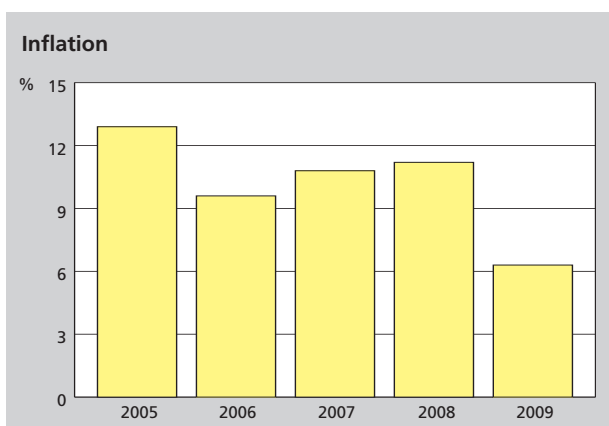
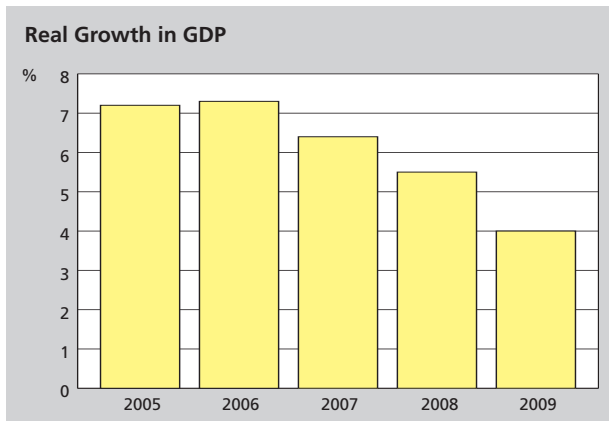
Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Mouloud (Prophet's Birthday), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan) and Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice).

Economy

KEY FACTS 2009

GNI: US\$1.9bn
 GNI p.c.: US\$340
 GDP growth: 6.1% p.a. 2005–09
 Inflation: 10.1% p.a. 2005–09

Overview: With real GDP falling almost continuously from the 1980s to the start of the 2000s, the economy of Sierra Leone became very depressed, despite the country's rich resource base, notably diamonds, gold, bauxite and rutile. Civil war in neighbouring Liberia and its spread within Sierra Leone, particularly from 1995, caused total collapse of the economy. The country was burdened by an economically counter-productive parallel economy, which increased in the lawless conditions of civil war. Around 90% of diamonds produced in Sierra Leone were estimated to leave the country illegally, and cash crops in the fertile south and east were



being smuggled out. The cost of maintaining a large army and bringing in foreign troops put a further strain on the economy, and there were mass migrations of people to avoid the fighting.

Restoration of democracy in February 1998 and the peace agreement with the Revolutionary United Front of July 1999 opened the way for a very substantial commitment of aid by the international community, led by the UN, IMF and World Bank, to reintegrate the military into civilian life, to restore institutions, to rebuild the economy and alleviate poverty.

Delivery of this aid was impeded and delayed by the collapse of the peace agreement in May 2000 and during 2001 by the slow pace of demobilisation of rebel troops and of returning all areas of the country to peace and security, but during 2001 the rutile mines were rehabilitated and agricultural production was resumed in large areas of the country. In 2001, too, reserves of offshore oil and gas were discovered and the UN ban on the trade in uncut diamonds did begin to reduce smuggling.

The economy began to expand again in 2000, with a surge of growth in 2001 (18.2%) and 2002 (27.4%), moderating to 9.5%

in 2003 and averaged 6.1% p.a. over 2005–09, while unemployment persisted at a high level, and inflation rose from practically nil in 2000–02 to more than 10% p.a. 2005–09. Then as the world economic downturn depressed demand for Sierra Leone's exports, GDP growth again moderated to 5.5% in 2008 and 4.0% in 2009, rising to about 4.5% in 2010.

In December 2006, Sierra Leone qualified for debt relief amounting to US\$994 million under the IMF/World Bank Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.

Trade: Exports of goods and services account for 16% of GDP (2008). The main exports are diamonds, rutile (an oxide of titanium), cocoa, bauxite and coffee.

Constitution

Status:	Republic with executive president
Legislature:	Parliament
Independence:	27 April 1961

The independence constitution was abrogated during the series of military coups which followed. The 1971 constitution allowed for a ceremonial president; an amendment later that year created an executive presidency. A new constitution in 1978 established a one-party state, with the All People's Congress as the recognised party, and there was further constitutional amendment in 1985.

The 1991 constitution marked a return to a multiparty system, with many of the parliamentary features of the independence constitution, though the country was to remain a republic with an executive presidency. Implementation of this constitution was interrupted by an army coup. The National Provisional Ruling Council became the governing body, and rule was by decree.

These developments were in turn reversed by the implementation of the 1995 constitution, which (with amendments) restored the 1991 constitution, returning the country to a multiparty system with an executive presidency and a unicameral legislature. For the elections of May 2002, the legislature had a total of 124 members, comprising 112 directly elected – eight in each of 14 constituencies – and 12 paramount chiefs. Presidential and parliamentary elections are held at least every five years, under universal adult suffrage and proportional representation. The president forms a government and appoints a cabinet.

Politics

Last elections:	August/September 2007 (presidential and legislative)
Next elections:	2012 (presidential and legislative)
Head of state:	President Ernest Bai Koroma
Head of government:	the president
Ruling party:	All People's Congress

Presidential and parliamentary elections under the 1991 multiparty constitution were held in February 1996 (see the section entitled 'Civil war' under 'History'). Of the 68 parliamentary seats, Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) held 27, United National People's Party (UNPP) 17, People's Democratic Party 12, the All People's Congress (APC) five, the National Unity Party four, the Democratic Centre Party three. In a two-round presidential election SLPP candidate

Ahmad Tejan Kabbah defeated UNPP's Dr John Karefa-Smart and Kabbah was sworn in as president at the end of March.

In May 1997 the Kabbah government was overthrown in a military coup but in October 1997, in a deal brokered by ECOWAS in Conakry, Guinea, the rebel regime agreed to a six-month transition to the restoration of the legitimate civilian government. After nine months in exile in Conakry, President Kabbah returned to Freetown in March 1998. The National Assembly reconvened and about 50% of its members attended.

In July 1998 the UN agreed to establish an observer mission to monitor the military and security situation in the country and to advise the government on the rebuilding of the police and security forces. After a period when rebel activity intensified a wider peace agreement was signed in July 1999.

UN peacekeepers proceeded with disarming rebel troops and took control over a growing area of the country, so that in May 2002 the legislative and presidential elections originally scheduled for February/March 2001 were finally held with Commonwealth

observers present. Kabbah and the SLPP won a landslide victory, receiving about 70% of the votes in the presidential election, defeating Ernest Bai Koroma, and in the parliamentary elections taking 83 of the 112 seats; Koroma's APC gained 22 and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) none. Commonwealth observers said that the conditions were such as to enable the will of the people to be expressed.

In June 2004 special courts with Sierra Leonean and UN-appointed judges began trying those both on government and rebel sides of the civil war accused of war crimes.

In the parliamentary elections in August 2007, the APC was the largest party with 59 seats, the SLPP 43 and People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) ten. The simultaneous first round of the presidential election was won by APC leader Ernest Bai Koroma with 44% of votes; the ruling SLPP candidate, Solomon Berewa, came second with 38% and Charles Margai of PMDC third with 14%. Since no candidate received the 55% needed to secure the presidency, the leading two candidates, Koroma and Berewa, went into a second round. Koroma received 54.6% of second-round

History

The Bulom are the earliest known inhabitants of the territory, with the Krim and Gola people arriving by AD 1400. The Mende and Temne settled in the 15th century, and the Fulani moved into the northern region.

Around that time the Portuguese were exploring the coast – Pedro de Cintra gave the country its present name in about 1462 – and built a fort on the site of Freetown. Europeans traded along the coast without formally establishing themselves. In 1787 Granville Sharp and other British abolitionists settled 400 people, formerly slaves, on a strip of land bought from Naimbana, a local chief. Over the following years more settlers arrived, many of them freed slaves from Jamaica and Nova Scotia. The British parliament declared the slave trade illegal in 1807, and a British naval station was established at Freetown to intercept slavers continuing to operate; people rescued from the slave-ships were also settled in Sierra Leone. Freetown became a British colony in 1808 and the coastal and inland area a protectorate in 1896. During the 19th century the colonial rulers forged administrative links with The Gambia, the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Lagos in Nigeria.

In 1863 a legislative council was created. It was progressively enlarged and made more representative in 1924 and 1951, evolving in 1956 into the House of Representatives. By 1957 most men were eligible to vote; women who were taxpayers or owned property were also enfranchised. A new constitution came into force in 1961, establishing formally a unicameral parliament and Queen Elizabeth II as sovereign. On that basis Sierra Leone became independent on 27 April 1961.

At independence, two main parties shared the votes in a multiparty political system. First in office was the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) during 1962–67 under Sir Milton Margai. The 1967 elections were won by the All People's Congress (APC) under Dr Siaka Stevens. Almost immediately, Stevens was arrested

in a coup, followed days later by another army coup which imposed military rule until the next year. Then, after a further coup, Stevens was reinstated as prime minister.

In 1971, the country became a republic with Stevens as executive president. The general election of 1973 was boycotted by the SLPP and easily won by the APC, which also won the following elections in 1977 after a campaign which sparked violence. In 1978 the country became a one-party state, led by the ruling APC. Single-party elections in 1982 were once again violent.

In 1985 Major-General Joseph Momoh succeeded Stevens as president.

By the end of the 1980s, economic conditions were continuing to deteriorate and there was a growing demand for constitutional reform. The government responded by setting up a constitutional review commission. The commission's recommendation of a return to a multiparty democratic system was overwhelmingly endorsed in a referendum in August 1991. A new constitution was adopted, allowing for a transition towards multiparty elections. Political parties started to register in preparation for elections.

Civil war: The 1991 multiparty constitution was not, however, implemented. Fighting with a rebel movement, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which had started in March 1991, escalated, and there were incursions from neighbouring Liberia, the RUF in the south of the country being loosely in alliance with Liberian rebels.

In April 1992, Captain Valentine Strasser took control after a coup by junior army officers, and the constitution was suspended. The war escalated and, despite air and ground support from Nigeria, and troops provided by Guinea, by 1995 at one point the government was in secure control only of the capital. In January 1996, Strasser was overthrown by his deputy Brigadier Julius Maada Bio. Presidential and parliamentary elections were held in February 1996.



votes and was sworn in as president. Commonwealth observers reported that both parliamentary and presidential elections had been conducted in a democratic, credible and professional way in accordance with internationally accepted standards.

International relations

Sierra Leone is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, African Union, Economic Community of West African States, Non-Aligned Movement, Organisation of the Islamic Conference, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Traveller information

Local laws and conventions: Visitors should ensure they respect local customs at all times – and particularly during Ramadan and when visiting religious sites.

All drug-related offences carry severe penalties, including steep fines and prison sentences. All precious stones need an export licence and the smuggling of stones is a grave offence.

It is advisable to carry some form of identification at all times. Visitors should always ask permission before taking pictures of local people or their property.

Generally, there are few social restrictions, though sensitivity is suggested in the rural areas, where the more traditional societies, with ruling chiefs, are still preserved.

Handshaking is the normal form of greeting. Casual wear is suitable everywhere and men are rarely expected to wear suits and ties.

Business meetings can be formal, and usually begin with an exchange of cards and introductory speeches. In Freetown, English is the most common language for business, though Krio and tribal languages are more prevalent in the countryside, where translators are available. Appointments and punctuality are expected, and September to June are the best months to visit on business. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0800–1200 and 1400–1630.

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for six months and visas are required by all except those from the member

► In the presidential election SLPP's candidate Ahmad Tejan Kabbah defeated the United National People's Party's Dr John Karefa-Smart and Kabbah was sworn in as president at the end of March. In talks between the government and RUF leader Corporal Foday Sankoh, agreement was reached in November 1996 to end the war that had caused the displacement of 2 million people and over 10,000 deaths. The agreement allowed the RUF to register as a political party and permitted it access to the media.

In 1997 RUF leader Sankoh was arrested while on a visit to Nigeria and, at the end of May, Kabbah's government was overthrown in a military coup led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma who appointed four RUF members including Sankoh to his ruling Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC).

In October 1997, in a deal brokered by ECOWAS in Conakry, Guinea, the rebel regime agreed to a six-month transition to the restoration of the legitimate civilian Kabbah government. J P Koroma and other leading rebels were to have immunity from prosecution, and RUF leader Sankoh was to have a future role in government. Within a few days thousands of people had returned to their homes in Freetown.

Apart from a few skirmishes in the area of the diamond mines, the transitional period was reasonably peaceful until early February 1998 when renewed fighting broke out between Nigerian peacekeeping troops and J P Koroma's forces in Freetown and a few days later, on 12 February, the Nigerians captured Freetown and detained many members of the military regime, though not including J P Koroma himself.

After nine months in exile in Conakry, President Kabbah returned to Freetown in March 1998. He declared a state of emergency, allowing detention without trial of suspected members and associates of the J P Koroma regime and banning possession of weapons and hoarding of food and fuel. The National Assembly

reconvened and about 50% of its members attended. The UN oil, but not arms, embargo was lifted.

In July 1998 the UN agreed to establish an observer mission to monitor the military and security situation in the country and to advise the government on the rebuilding of the police and security forces. Sankoh was returned to Freetown from detention in Lagos to face charges of treason and was sentenced to death in October.

On news of Sankoh's death sentence RUF and AFRC rebels launched a campaign of severe brutality in the towns and villages they took over as they advanced rapidly on Freetown and in January 1999 Nigerian troops halted their advance very close to the capital. Sankoh was allowed to attend peace talks in Togo in May 1999 which produced a ceasefire agreement to be monitored by the UN and a promise by the rebels to release their prisoners. A wider peace agreement was signed in July 1999. It included a power-sharing arrangement between Kabbah and the RUF (with four RUF leaders appointed to ministerial portfolios in November 1999), annulment of Sankoh's death sentence and the release of those sentenced for their role in the 1997 coup. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recommended the deployment of 6,000 troops to Sierra Leone to guarantee the peace agreement and this was increased to 11,000 on the departure of the Nigerians in 2000.

In May 2000, as the UN peacekeepers moved into the diamond-producing region and began to demobilise the rebels, the peace agreement collapsed when the rebels took 500 UN troops hostage and fighting resumed between the Sierra Leone Army and the rebels. Power-sharing ceased and Sankoh was arrested, though the hostages were released unharmed in due course. In July 2000 the UN resolved to ban trade in uncut diamonds from Sierra Leone until the government had established an authentication system but the illicit trade continued into 2001, when there were signs that the ban was beginning to be effective.

countries of the Economic Community of West African States. Business visitors should ensure they have an introductory letter and invitation from the local business outlining the purpose of the visit and providing contact details. There is an airport departure tax for all foreign visitors.

A vaccination certificate for yellow fever is required by those arriving from an infected area.

Narcotics and firearms without a licence from the Commissioner of Police in Freetown are prohibited.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the right and visitors will need an international driving permit. Cars can be hired through local companies and hotels. Visitors should carry their licence with them at all times. The main highways have tarred surfaces.

It is recommended that onward and return flights are confirmed 72 hours in advance.

The national airline, Sierra National Airline LJ, does not operate internal flights; instead, private airlines can be chartered to fly to other towns and cities and even to neighbouring countries. The Sierra Leone Road Transport Corporation operates local and long distance bus services that are fast, cheap and connect all the major centres. Ferries connect all coastal ports.

There is a limited bus service in Freetown. Many people use minibuses (*poda-poda*), which operate within the city and surrounding towns, and charge a fixed rate. Taxis are available, but should only be used if they display a valid Tourist Board sticker on the windscreen.

Travel health: It is essential that visitors have comprehensive health insurance that includes medical repatriation.

Visitors will need protection against malaria as well as insect repellent and suitable clothing to discourage mosquito bites. There are infrequent outbreaks of cholera, which can be exacerbated during water shortages, and Lassa fever can be contracted in Kenema and in the east of the country. Vaccination against rabies and yellow fever is recommended, but all current vaccination requirements should be checked well in advance of travel.

Water should be boiled or bought in sealed bottles. Only powdered or tinned milk should be used.

Money: Credit cards are not accepted in Sierra Leone and all foreign exchange (preferably in US dollars or pounds sterling) must be through the banks and official exchange offices. However, visitors should be aware that exchange opportunities are limited. Banking hours are Mon–Thur 0800–1330 and Fri 0800–1400.

There were 40,000 tourist arrivals in 2005.

Further information

Office of the President, Republic of Sierra Leone:
www.statehouse.gov.sl

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

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