



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	SIERRA LEONE
Title	Major security, political and humanitarian developments in Sierra Leone
Reference period	1 July 2021 to 17 July 2023
Topic(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Major security and political developments<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1. Electoral violence1.2. Anti-government protests2. Humanitarian situation<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1. Food insecurity2.2. Access to healthcare
Date of completion	26 July 2023
Query Code	Q21-2023
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	N/A

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – SIERRA LEONE

Major security, political and humanitarian developments in Sierra Leone

1. Major security and political developments

1.1. Electoral violence

On 24 June 2023, presidential elections took place in Sierra Leone, where the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) had been in power since the 2018 elections.¹ Out of the 13 candidates, Mr Julius Maada Bio, running for his re-election with the SLPP, and Mr Samura Kamara, the leader of the All People's Congress (APC), were leading the polls.² The period surrounding the elections was described by Reuters as 'tense, with violence breaking out before, during and after the vote'.³

The week preceding the elections, supporters of the APC demonstrated in Freetown and asked for the resignation of the chief electoral Commissioner over 'allegations of electoral fraud'.⁴ Referring to the same incident when protesters were demanding the resignation of the chief electoral Commissioner, sources report clashes between the protesters and police officers who 'fired rubber bullets and teargas at supporters of the opposition party'.⁵ Reuters reported the statements of the APC spokesperson who said that police killed one of the participants to the protests.⁶ On the same incident, the police 'accused former combatants of firing at them with AK-47s and pistols'.⁷

In the week before the elections, the APC office located in the city of Bo, Bo District, the second most populous city in Sierra Leone, was set on fire.⁸ The APC party denounced that the action had been carried out by 'unknown perpetrators'.⁹ APC blamed SLPP supporters of several instances of attacks against its supporters and party offices in the Southern and Eastern provinces of Sierra Leone during the electoral period on a press release published on 20 June 2023.¹⁰

¹ AlJazeera, Sierra Leone opposition leader wins presidential election runoff, 5 April 2018, [url](#)

² AlJazeera, Sierra Leone votes in national elections amid economic crisis 24, 24 June 2023, [url](#)

³ Reuters, Sierra Leone president wins re-election, says electoral commission, 28 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴ CNN, Tensions mount as Sierra Leone prepares for high-stakes elections, 23 June 2023, [url](#); France 24, Violence flares in Sierra Leone ahead of presidential vote, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵ CNN, Tensions mount as Sierra Leone prepares for high-stakes elections, 23 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶ Reuters, Violence flares in Sierra Leone ahead of presidential vote, 21 June 2023, [url](#); VOA News, Tension Grows Ahead of Presidential Polls in Sierra Leone, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

⁷ VOA News, Tension Grows Ahead of Presidential Polls in Sierra Leone, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

⁸ Sierraloadead, APC Office Reportedly Set on Fire in Bo, 19 June 2023, [url](#); Jurist, Sierra Leone opposition party protests Electoral Commission, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹ Sierraloadead, APC Office Reportedly Set on Fire in Bo, 19 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰ Sierraloadead, APC Reacts to Alleged Attacks on Supporters, Party Offices in the South-East, 20 June 2023, [url](#)



During the campaign, the ruling party, SLPP, ‘complained about attacks on their supporters’.¹¹ Further information on attacks against SLPP supporters could not be found within the time constraints to complete the COI query.

On Tuesday, 27 June 2023, the country’s electoral commission announced that Mr Julius Maada Bio won the election, obtaining 56.17 % of the votes, passing the 55 % required to win in the first round.¹² According to the electoral commission as reported by Reuters ‘the SLPP won 81 seats while the opposition All People’s Congress won 54’.¹³ Sources reported on 26 June 2023 that while waiting for the results, during a press conference held at the headquarters of the APC in Freetown, police used teargas and fired shots to disperse opposition supporters.¹⁴ According to media sources during the operation, one woman died¹⁵ and the APC party called for an investigation into her death the following day.¹⁶

The leader of APC, Mr Samura Kamara, published on 27 June 2023 on his Twitter account that he rejected the results announced by the electoral commission.¹⁷ APC national publicity secretary, Sidie Yahya Tunis, speaking at the radio show, Daybreak Africa, declared that the reasons for the APC to reject the election results were that they were not verified by ‘APC field representatives’ and that they were ‘faked’ and ‘cooked up’.¹⁸ France24 reported on 2 July 2023 that the APC ‘said it will not take part in any level of governance in the country, from parliament to local councils’ and issued several demands.¹⁹ Among these were included resignation of the Chief Electoral Officer, Chief Justice, Inspector General or Police, and reconducting elections in six months time.²⁰ APC Parliamentarians boycotted the opening of Parliament on 14 July over the accusation of election tampering, though one APC Parliamentarian was sworn in.²¹

National and international observation missions expressed their concerns ‘about the lack of transparency in the tabulation process’, which were shared by the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), Ireland, Germany, France and EU Delegation, published in 28 June 2023 on a joint statement.²² The European Union Electoral Observation Mission (EU EOM) noted that there were ‘statistical inconsistencies between the first and second batch of presidential results published by the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) on 26 and 27 June,

¹¹ Reuters, Violence flares in Sierra Leone ahead of presidential vote, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

¹² BBC, Sierra Leone election results: Julius Maada Bio leading Samura Kamara, 27 June 2023, [url](#); AlJazeera, Sierra Leone’s Bio re-elected as president, avoids run-off, 27 June 2023, [url](#)

¹³ Reuters, Sierra Leone ruling party wins 60% of parliamentary seats in contested vote, 1 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴ Africa News, Police fire tear gas at opposition HQ as Sierra Leone vote tally continues, 26 June 2023, [url](#); AlJazeera, Police fire tear gas at Sierra Leone opposition after vote, 26 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵ Guardian (The), Woman killed at opposition party HQ during Sierra Leone elections, 28 June 2023, [url](#); Africa News, Police fire tear gas at opposition HQ as Sierra Leone vote tally continues, 26 June 2023, [url](#); Reuters, Woman unresponsive after gunshots heard at Sierra Leone opposition HQ, 25 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶ VOA News, Sierra Leone’s Opposition Demands Electoral Violence Investigation, 26 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷ SamuraKamara2023, [Twitter], posted on 27 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸ VOA News, Sierra Leone’s Opposition APC Rejects Partial Election Result, 27 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁹ France 24, Sierra Leone’s main opposition vows not to take part in governance, 2 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁰ SwitSalone, Elected APC MPs and local council officials set to boycott all governance activities, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

²¹ VOA News, Sierra Leone Minister Slams Opposition Boycott of Parliament, 14 July 2023, [url](#); Barron’s, Sierra Leone Parliament Opens To Opposition Boycott, 13 July 2023, [url](#)

²² US Embassy Freetown, Joint Statement by U.S., UK, Ireland, Germany, France and EU Delegation, 28 June 2023, [url](#)



respectively'.²³ The African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) reported that 'elections were conducted in a generally peaceful, transparent, and credible manner, up to the counting on polling day, despite reported incidents of violence particularly during the pre-election period.'²⁴

1.2. Anti-government protests

On 10 August 2022, a series of protests erupted over the cost of living²⁵ in the country, particularly in East Freetown, and 'soon devolved into violence, including acts of vandalism and attacks on security personnel'.²⁶ Sources estimated that anti-government protests between protesters and security forces resulted in the killing of more than 21 persons.²⁷ Six police officers were also killed during the protests.²⁸ The preliminary report released on 11 August 2022 by the Sierra Leone Police tallied 113 people arrested in the North-West and North-East regions in connection to their participation in the protest.²⁹ Citing the Inspector General of Police, Amnesty International (AI) noted on 20 March 2023 that '515 people were arrested following the protests on 10 August including about 200 for violating the curfew'.³⁰ According to AI 'people arrested were prosecuted for offences ranging from malicious damage, arson, unlawful procession, riotous conduct, seditious behaviour to murder'.³¹ At the time of publication, 20 March 2023, AI noted that 'the exact number of people remaining in detention is uncertain'.³² Further information concerning the exact figure of people who had been detained could not be found within the time constraints to complete the COI Query. During the protests, authorities restricted access to internet, including social media and messaging apps.³³

2. Humanitarian situation

Information on displacement due to conflict during the reference period was not found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this response.

²³ EU EOM, The EU EOM calls on Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone to promptly publish disaggregated results data at polling station level, to ensure transparency and public scrutiny, 28 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁴ AUEOM, African Union Election Observation Mission to the 24 June 2023 General Elections in The Republic Of Sierra Leone – Preliminary Statement, 26 June 2023, [url](#), p. 7

²⁵ Guardian (The), 'Explosion of violence': Sierra Leone picks up the pieces after protests, 21 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁶ Crisis 24, Sierra Leone: Anti-government protests possible nationwide during Independence Day April 27, 26 April 2023, [url](#)

²⁷ Reuters, Freetown in shock after dozens killed in Sierra Leone protests, 11 August 2022, [url](#); CNN, At least 21 protesters killed during anti-government protests in Sierra Leone, sources say, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁸ Reuters, Freetown in shock after dozens killed in Sierra Leone protests, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁹ Sierra Leone Telegraph (The), Sierra Leone police interim report on the deadly protest is out and makes for grim reading, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁰ AI, Sierra Leone: Seven months after August's protests which turned violent in some locations, no justice yet for those injured or the families of those killed, 20 March 2023, [url](#)

³¹ AI, Sierra Leone: Seven months after August's protests which turned violent in some locations, no justice yet for those injured or the families of those killed, 20 March 2023, [url](#)

³² AI, Sierra Leone: Seven months after August's protests which turned violent in some locations, no justice yet for those injured or the families of those killed, 20 March 2023, [url](#)

³³ AI, Sierra Leone: Authorities must ensure robust, impartial investigation into deadly protests, 12 August 2022, [url](#)



2.1. Food security

The World Food Programme (WFP) describes Sierra Leone as a ‘a food-deficit country’.³⁴ According to the Human Development Index (HDI) published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in 2021 Sierra Leone was placed in the ‘low human development category’ and ranked 181 out of 191 countries.³⁵ The economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic,³⁶ as well as the economic effects of the war in Ukraine, and ‘macroeconomic decline’, impacted the food security and deficit in the country.³⁷ According to the information last updated on 30 March 2023 by The World Bank ‘inflation and exchange rate depreciation reached record levels’,³⁸ placing Sierra Leone among the ten countries in the world with the highest food inflation.³⁹ For instance, according to RPCA (Réseau de Prévention des Crises Alimentaires-The Food Crisis Prevention Network), in 2023, staple cereal prices are 113 % higher compared to the average of the last five years.⁴⁰

Key findings from the Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS)⁴¹ analysis presented in February 2023 show that most households spent over 75 % of their income on food and ‘cannot afford a healthy diet’, affecting their health and nutrition in the long run. Falaba, Koinadugu, Moyamba and Pujehun were the districts presenting the highest levels of vulnerability.⁴²

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)⁴³ published ‘a visual display of the total number of people experiencing or facing high levels of acute food insecurity classified in Crisis’ and included Sierra Leone among the countries affected by major crises. The platform estimates that between June 2023 and August 2023, in Sierra Leone, more than 1 million people are experiencing ‘high levels of acute food insecurity’, 34 384 are in a situation of emergency and 2.9 million are estimated to be in stressed condition during the same period.⁴⁴ According to the WFP, ‘stunting remained Sierra Leone’s most significant malnutrition burden’.⁴⁵ Despite some improvements and the national stunting rate in children under 5 years old dropped from 31 % in 2019 to 26.3 % in 2021,⁴⁶ there were about 176 000 children

³⁴ WFP, Sierra Leone; Annual Country Report 2022; Country Strategic Plan 2020 - 2024, 8 April 2023, [url](#), p. 7

³⁵ UNDP, Human Development Index – Sierra Leone, last updated 8 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report – Sierra Leone, 23 February 2022, [url](#) p. 4

³⁷ WFP, WFP Sierra Leone Country Brief, May 2023, [url](#), p. 1

³⁸ World Bank, Sierra Leone - Overview, last updated 30 March 2023, [url](#)

³⁹ WFP, WFP RAM Sierra Leone Market Prices Bulletin - Quarter 1, 2023, 8 May 2023, available at: [url](#), p. 8

⁴⁰ RPCA, Press release on food and nutrition situation in the Sahel and West Africa, 16 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁴¹ The FSMS analysis developed by WFP in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security is based on a bi-annual survey. The results presented in February 2023 were based on the collection of data from 5 120 residents living in 16 districts and in both urbanised and rural areas to monitor the food insecurity situation across the country. WFP, WFP Sierra Leone Country Office: Food Security Monitoring System Report - February 2023, 19 April 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁴² WFP, WFP Sierra Leone Country Office: Food Security Monitoring System Report - February 2023, 19 April 2023, [url](#), p. 3

⁴³ IPC is an innovative multi-partner initiative for improving food security and nutrition analysis and decision-making. IPC, IPC overview and classification system, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁴ IPC, About the IPC-CH Dashboard – Sierra Leone, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁵ WFP, Sierra Leone; Annual Country Report 2022; Country Strategic Plan 2020 - 2024, 8 April 2023, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁶ World Bank, Prevalence of stunting, height for age (% of children under 5) – Sierra Leone, 2021, [url](#)



under 5 years old with wasting disease in Sierra Leone in 2022.⁴⁷ According to the World Bank, as of 2021 infant mortality stood at 78 children per 1 000 births.⁴⁸

2.2. Access to healthcare

World Health Organisation (WHO) informed that ‘the population of Sierra Leone has limited access to quality essential medicines and health technologies’.⁴⁹ WHO notes that in 2023 health service delivery is limited due to ‘socioeconomic barriers, weak referral systems, limited availability of basic medical commodities (drugs and equipment) and amenities needed for quality health service delivery, frequent stockouts of essential medicines and medical supplies in public health facilities, weak supply chain management system for medical commodities and inability to implement the basic packages of essential health services’.⁵⁰ Funding the health system in Sierra Leone ‘faces numerous challenges, including inadequate health expenditure per capita, high out-of-pocket spending, limited fiscal space, with heavy dependency on donors’.⁵¹ The WHO mentioned that noncommunicable diseases and injuries (NCDIs), including mental health problems, ‘remain major public health challenges in Sierra Leone’.⁵²

⁴⁷ FSIN, Global Report on Food Crises 2023 – Country Profile Sierra Leone, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁸ World Bank, Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births) - Sierra Leone, 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁹ WHO, Country Cooperation Strategy 2022–2025 Sierra Leone, 2023, [url](#), p. 27

⁵⁰ WHO, Country Cooperation Strategy 2022–2025 Sierra Leone, 2023, [url](#), p. 11

⁵¹ WHO, Country Cooperation Strategy 2022–2025 Sierra Leone, 2023, [url](#), pp. 11-12

⁵² WHO, Country Cooperation Strategy 2022–2025 Sierra Leone, 2023, [url](#), pp. XV, 8

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Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); AlJazeera; Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS); Associated Press (AP); Council on Foreign Relations (CFR); European Union – EUAA COI Portal; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch (HRW); International Crisis Group; New Humanitarian (The); Refworld; United States –Department of State (USDOS)