

Sierra Leone: Birth Registration and Child Marriage

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26 May 2025



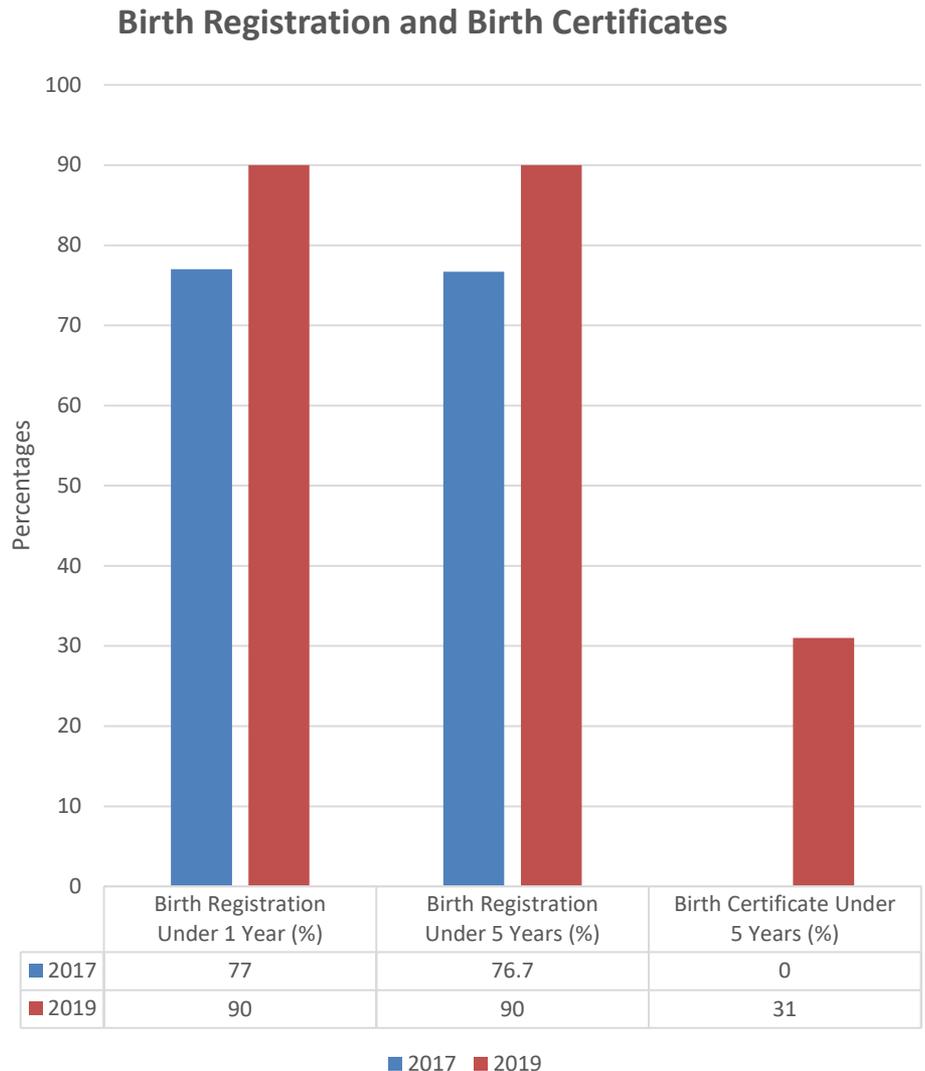
Sierra Leone

- **Population:** 8.7million
- **Child (under 15) population:** 3.5 million (estimate).
- **Minimum legal Age for Marriage:** 18 years
- **Early Birth Registration:** 90 days (no fee).
- **Birth Registration Completeness:** 90 percent in 2019.
- **Crude Birth Rate:**30.6 births per 1,000 population in 2023.



Birth Registration and Birth Certificates

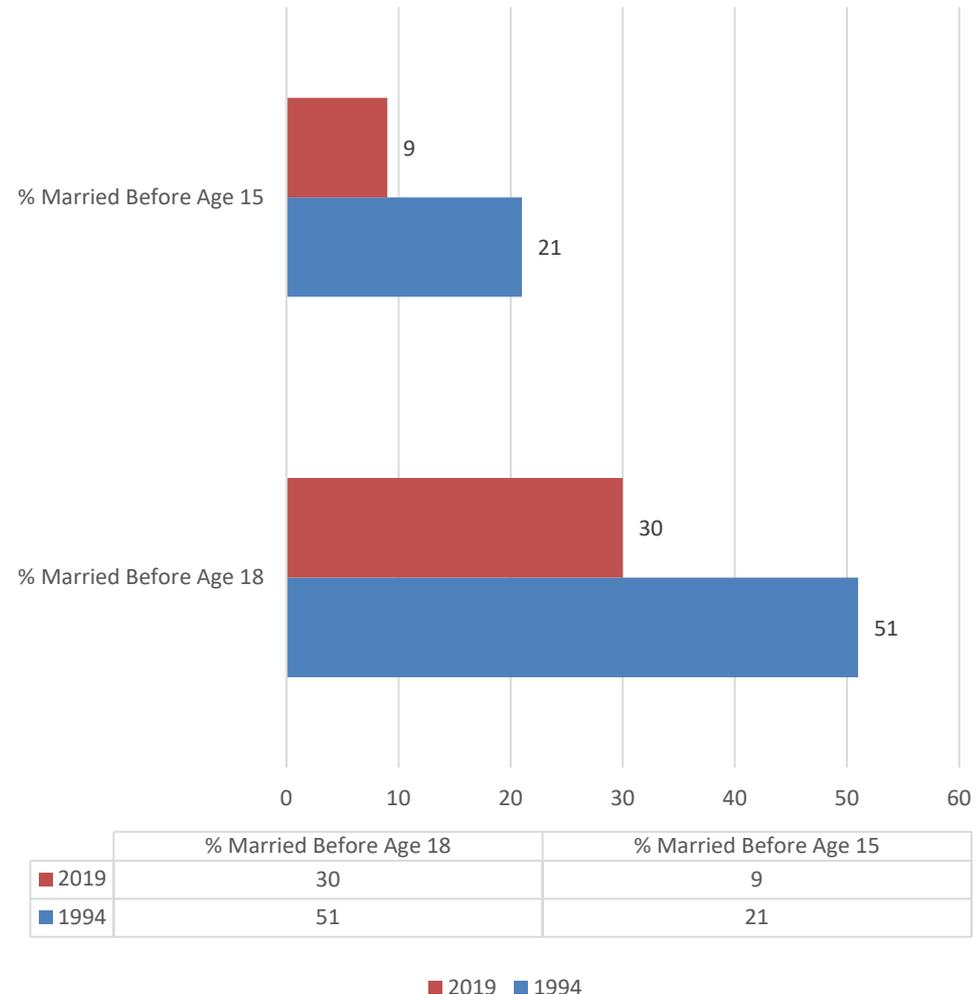
- Birth registration for children under 1 year increased from 77% in 2013 to 90% in 2017 (MICS)
- For children under 5 years, birth registration rose from 76.7% in 2013 to 90% in 2019. (MICS)
- Despite high registration rates, only 31% of children under 5 years had a birth certificate in 2019 (DHS 2019).
- Birth Registration coverage 10-17 years in 2024 was 2,028 (1,480 F: 548 m)



Child Marriage: Sierra Leone

- **Child marriage before age 18 declined** from 51 percent in 1994 to 30 percent in DHS, 2019
- **Child marriage before age 15 declined** from 21 percent in 1994 to 9 percent in DHS, 2019
- **Women aged 15-24 reported having sex with a non-marital, non-cohabiting partner is 37 % (MICS 2017)**
- No published, available figures on the proportion of marriages taking place under customary vs. civil/religious systems or underage marriage cases (formal or informal)

Child Marriage: Sierra Leone



Advancing the law for CRVS and the Prohibition of Child Marriage

- **The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2024** sets the minimum legal age for marriage at 18. This overrides all other legislation, including Customary Law, which previously allowed marriage at age 16 with parental consent.
- **The National Civil Registration Act, 2016** (currently under review) provides for the issuance of a birth certificate.
- **Age Verification is Key:** Marriage Registrars **MUST** verify the age of **BOTH** parties **BEFORE** registration. This is mandatory but not a birth certificate. Under the Child Rights Bill, a birth certificate is required.
- **Birth Certificate:** Currently, the primary proof of age for marriage registration; accepted alternatives must be rigorously verified. Other proof can be clinic cards, passport, school records, baptismal certificates, medical records, or affidavits from community leaders or witnesses.
- **Challenge:** Age verification can be inconsistently applied, especially in rural and customary settings. (Data: 31% of children under five have a birth certificate (2019)).



Marriage Registration Process: Age Verification and Child Marriage

Who is involved: Child Marriage Officers, Social Workers and Police

- Presentation of Birth Certificate or other documents, including school records if no birth certificate.
- Payment of Fees

Intention to Marry

Age Verification

- Registrar or Religious leader provides feedback based on documents (birth certificate, ID, baptism certificate) before consent is given- the process also includes the publishing of names and banns

- If all documents in place, and verification made, the marriage ceremony is completed- along with registration and granting of a marriage certificate.
- Oath to be taken before
- Birth Certificate/age verification indispensable if claim is made of child under 18 years of age.

Marriage

Mechanisms still to be put in place: Community based monitoring, Training, Awareness, procedures to support age verification

Strategic Opportunities for Strengthening CRVS and Prevention of Child Marriage

- **Secure/Maintain High-Level Political Commitment:** Leverage government leadership and regional African platforms to prioritize child marriage and birth registration in national and continental agendas, ensuring sustained advocacy and accountability.
- **Mobilise and Sustain Financing:** Increase domestic budget allocations and leverage partnerships to fund comprehensive, costed national strategies like Sierra Leone's 2025–2030 plan for adolescent pregnancy and child marriage reduction. Promote innovative financing models and microfinance to address poverty drivers.
- **Enforce and Harmonise Legal Frameworks:** Strengthen implementation of the 2024 Child Marriage Prohibition Act and birth registration laws, ensuring alignment across customary, religious, and statutory systems with clear penalties and protections.
- **Enhance Multisectoral Coordination:** Foster collaboration among Government, civil society, and communities to deliver integrated interventions.
- **Transform Social Norms through Community Engagement:** Engage traditional, religious, and youth leaders in sustained dialogue and behavior change campaigns to shift norms supporting child marriage and improve birth registration uptake.
- **Expand Access to Education and Adolescent Services:** Implement inclusive education policies (e.g., Radical Inclusion) and adolescent-friendly services to empower girls and reduce early pregnancy.
- **Improve Birth Registration Systems:** Decentralise and integrate birth registration with health and community services, increase awareness, and remove barriers to timely registration, especially in rural and marginalised areas.
- **Strengthen Data and Monitoring:** Invest in robust data systems to track progress, inform policy, and target high-risk populations effectively.

YOUR CHILD'S FIRST TICKET IN LIFE

A birth certificate is their gateway to

- Schooling 
- Healthcare 
- Identity 
- Voting Rights 
- Social Protection 

Thank you