

Evidence brief | Strengthening disability-inclusive child protection in Sierra Leone



UNICEF-supported child protection programming helps strengthen family and community support systems for children in Sierra Leone. ©UNICEFSierraLeone/2024

23%

Children aged 5–17 with at least one functional difficulty

16

Districts covered through nationwide CPIMS+ expansion

2027

Planned roll-out of disability-inclusive social work education

At a glance: Approximately 23 per cent of children aged 5-17 in Sierra Leone experience at least one functional difficulty.

To help ensure these children are not overlooked by the child protection system, Government and UNICEF have integrated the Child Functioning Module into Primero CPIMS+, UNICEF's digital Child Protection Information Management System. The module helps social workers better understand children's functioning, identify barriers and support needs, and strengthen assessment, case planning, referrals and follow-up.

The issue

Children with functional difficulties can face barriers that make them less visible to child protection systems. These barriers may affect whether children are identified, whether their needs are understood, and whether they are referred to appropriate services. Without consistent information on functioning and support needs, caseworkers may have limited evidence to guide assessment, case planning, referrals and follow-up.

What changed

Government and UNICEF have integrated the Child Functioning Module into Primero CPIMS+, UNICEF's digital Child Protection Information Management System. Based on the UNICEF/Washington Group Child Functioning Module, it provides a structured way for social workers to record information on children's functioning, barriers and support needs, helping translate evidence into practical case management decisions and more inclusive child protection responses.

Evidence-to-action pathway

Better identification of functional difficulties can support stronger assessment, more informed case planning, appropriate referrals, more consistent follow-up and improved use of data for child protection system strengthening.

Why it matters

- **For children:** Children with disabilities or functional difficulties are less likely to be overlooked, and their needs and barriers can be identified and addressed earlier.
- **For caseworkers:** Structured, child-centred information supports stronger assessment, case planning, referrals and follow-up.

- **For systems:** Better data helps strengthen service planning, workforce development and investment in disability-inclusive child protection services.

Sierra Leone's implementation snapshot

Implementation began with a review of existing systems, orientation for administrators and practical training for caseworkers. Supporting materials were adapted to the Sierra Leone context to help social workers use the module in day-to-day case management. The integration builds on the expansion of CPIMS+ from 8 to 16 districts between 2015 and 2026, making the system nationwide. Sierra Leone is the second UNICEF office globally to implement the Child Functioning Module in Primero CPIMS+, demonstrating national leadership in disability-inclusive child protection.

**Inclusive child protection
for every child.**

Sierra Leone is the second UNICEF office globally to implement the Child Functioning Module in Primero CPIMS+, strengthening disability-inclusive child protection case management.

Better evidence. | Stronger referrals. | More inclusive support for children.

unicef | for every child

Training highlights

In July 2026, UNICEF Sierra Leone hosted a two-day training workshop for 16 caseworkers from relevant government and national agencies. Participants explored disability-inclusive child protection, use of the Child Functioning subform, and how information collected through case management can guide assessment, case planning, referrals and follow-up. Discussions also highlighted barriers that children with functional difficulties may face, including limited access to sign language interpretation, harmful attitudes and inaccessible environments.

What this means for children and families

For children with disabilities or functional difficulties, this investment can help make needs and barriers more visible within the child protection system. With better information, social workers can develop stronger case plans, refer children to appropriate services and follow up more consistently. Over time, this contributes to a protection system that is better equipped to recognize and respond to children's diverse needs.

Why this matters

Inclusive child protection depends on systems that can recognize every child's needs, understand the barriers they face and respond with timely, appropriate support. By integrating the Child Functioning Module into Primero CPIMS+, Sierra Leone is strengthening evidence-based, disability-inclusive case management while investing in a more responsive and inclusive national child protection system.

Implications for programming

Action point: Use data from the Child Functioning Module to strengthen case planning, improve referrals, inform workforce development and guide investment in disability-inclusive child protection services. Sustained use of the module can help ensure that children with disabilities and functional difficulties are seen, supported and included in national protection responses.