

To obey or not to obey?

**IMF wage bill ceiling and the
Sierra Leonean's right to the
qualified quantity of
incentivized frontline workers.**

A case study of selected
communities in 5 Districts

JUNE 2023

POLICY BRIEF

Why we did it

Healthcare workers must be trained, experienced, and have a wide range of skills to implement Universal Health Care (UHC). To achieve this, healthcare staff must be aligned with the needs of the population and provided with a supportive working environment. Increased levels of specialised education and training are necessary to better meet the requirements of the healthcare system. The education system in Sierra Leone lacks the required number of qualified teachers in relation to the rapidly increased enrolment. President Bio instituted the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy in 2018 to widen participation and improve the quality of available educational opportunities. This expanded access drastically and more teachers were recruited even though not yet meet the internationally accepted teacher–pupils ratio.

All of the above difficulties demand hiring more teachers, and health workers, and paying them properly which increases the wage bill. The IMF's advice to decrease the wage cost to 6% of GDP surely will not help the government to solve these challenges. IMF loans always include macroeconomic conditions that government has to abide by. ActionAid commissioned this study to diagnose the problem and provide solutions that will contribute towards addressing the education and health workforce especially providing justification on why IMF conditions should not include education and health wage bills.

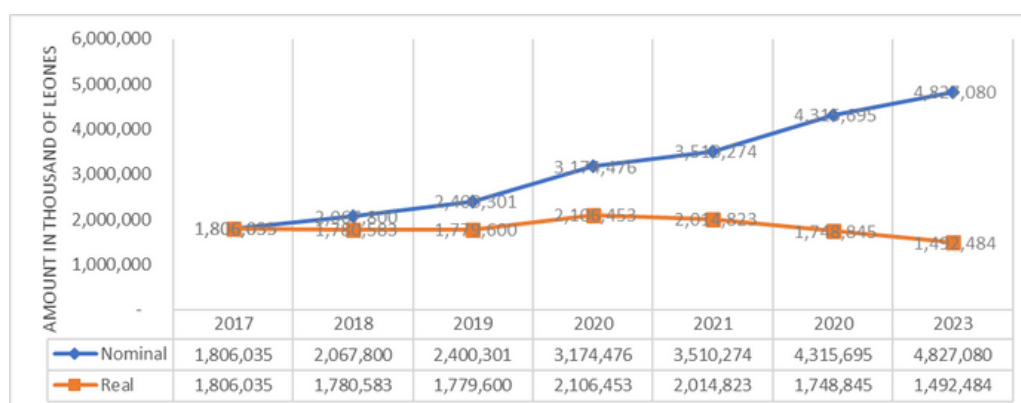
The purpose of the study is to assess the current gaps in qualified and approved teachers, nurses, and doctors/CHOs' recruitment and placement in the study communities. This was done by assessing progress made in access to the schools by pupils; patients to PHUs and the welfare of teachers, nurses/doctors/CHOs as frontline workers.

How we did it

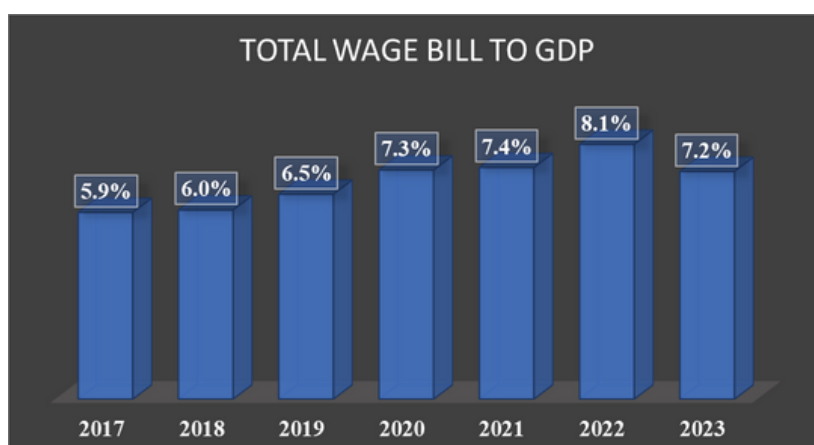
The study used a mixed methods research design to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from health centres, schools, hospitals, education and health stakeholders, and community stakeholders in 5 districts through key informant interviews (KIIs) and a mini-survey. Extensive desk research was also done. Qualitative data revealed practices and perspectives that would have been difficult to access using a traditional quantitative approach. Primary and secondary data were collected from 56 schools in the Western Area, Bombali, Bo, Kono, and Kambia districts.

What we found out at the national level

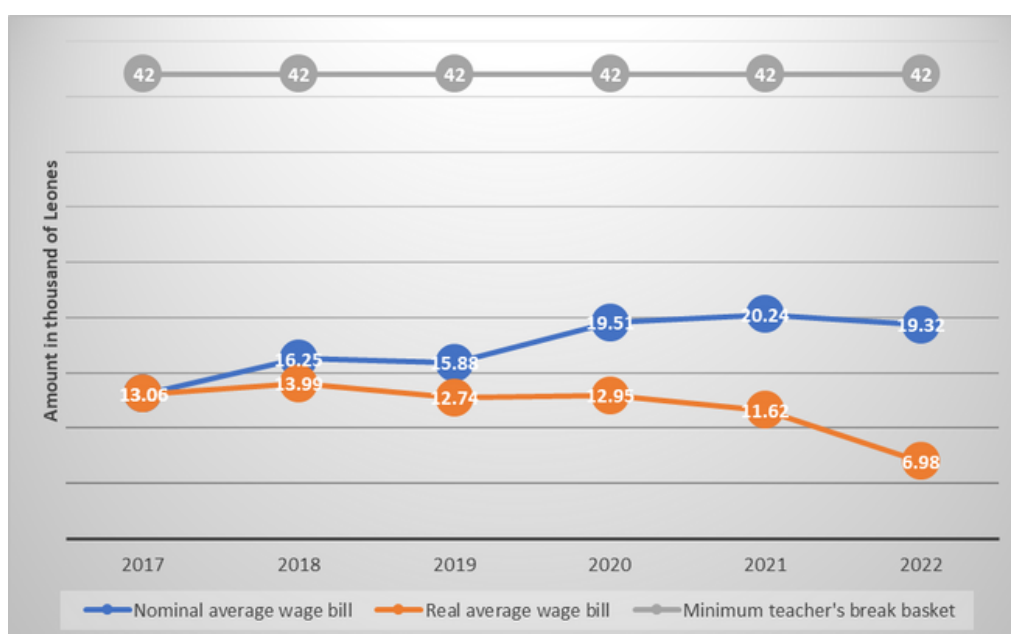
- The IMF has been providing consistent guidance through the budget on a medium-term basis from 2017 through 2023, with the objective being to reduce and freeze the PSWB and reach a target of 6% of GDP.
- The wage bill budget for the Sierra Leone government increased by 167% in nominal terms and 83% in real terms between 2017 and 2023. In the same period, the total number of government workers has grown by 34% (now at 95,761 compared to 71,325 before). One of the reasons is that the government has made it a priority to hire more teachers and medical professionals as part of its Human Capital Development (HCD) initiative.



- The average yearly wage of all workers increased by 19% between 2017 and 2023. This expansion was evaluated purely nominally (that is, from Le 25.32 thousand in 2017 to Le 50.41 thousand in 2023). In real terms, it falls by 38% using 2017 as a base (Le 25,52 thousand) to 2023 (Le 15,59 thousand). This demonstrates, as is the case in many other countries, that the rate of increase in the Public Sector Workers' Wage (PSW) in Sierra Leone is not proportional to the rate of increase in the pricing of commodities and services.
- The entire wage bill is projected to rise from 5.9% of GDP in 2017 to 7.2% in 2023. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has long recommended that governments keep their pay bills below 6% of GDP in order to maintain a sustainable wage bill



- In 2021, 61% of government employees were teachers and health workers. By 2023, 54% were. This reduction is due to more persons joining the police, military, and other areas, not a decrease in health and education professionals.
- The budget for Sierra Leone's education sector has increased dramatically, from 15% in 2017 to 22% of the total discretionary budget in 2022. This is still below the 20% of GDP that all GPE member countries are required to allocate to education as part of their national budget.
- Between 2017 and 2023, the total cost of teachers' wages climbed by 98 percent in real terms from Le 448,408 to Le 887,666. However, after adjusting for inflation over the same period, it plummeted by 61%. Between 2017 and 2022, average salary and wage bills ranged from 13,000 to 20,000 per year.
- Almost 4,000 teachers have been assessed and their salaries placed on the right scale according to the 2021 school census report.
- Currently, Sierra Leone has 37,700 teachers to teach 2,873,049 pupils in public schools. Using the Education for All standard of 1 teacher to 40 pupils, the teacher-pupils ratio is 1:76. Reducing the teacher-pupil ratio to 1:40 will require recruiting an additional 34,065 teachers.
- The proposed "food basket," with an annual cost of Le 42,000, is far more than teachers' current income and salary. The take-home pay is considerably less than 3,500 New Leone (NLE) a month, which means that not even a principal with 20 years of classroom experience could earn such a salary and income.



- Despite the fact that urban areas house only 38% of the population, they house 70% of the healthcare personnel. This clearly demonstrates that there is a significant issue of equity in the allocation of healthcare workers in Sierra Leone.
- The health employees' wage bill budget as a percentage of the government's total budget decreased from 4.13% in 2022 to 3.48% in 2023. As a percentage of the total wage bill, it also decreased from 13.1% in 2022 to 12% in 2023.
- Sierra Leone's current population stands at 7,548,702 individuals. According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended doctor-to-patient ratio of 1:1,000, the country would require 7,548 doctors to meet its healthcare needs. At present, the nation's physician count stands at fewer than 650, necessitating a 14-fold increase in the number of medical practitioners by the government.
- Sierra Leone lacks the qualified nurses and midwives needed to provide universal health coverage for the basic package of treatment. To meet population needs, 3,000 midwives are needed, but only 750 are practicing. To meet the required number of midwives, the government needs to increase the number of midwives by 4-fold.
- The wage bill has accounted for between 45% to 58% of the domestic revenue for the period 2017 to 2023.
- Since 2017, the percentage of interest payments that are made out of domestic revenue has been steadily climbing to its current level. The percentage increased to 26% in 2023, up from 15% in 2017.

What we found out in the selected districts

- The headcount for five days showed a pupil-teacher ratio of 38-1 at 56 institutions. The ratio was 54 for certified teachers. If unresolved, this will affect the quality of children's education and the country's educational ecosystem.
- According to the collected data from the field, the majority of teachers are men (87% compared to 13%). The data also demonstrates that the percentage of competent male teachers in schools is significantly higher (86%) than the percentage of qualified female teachers (14%).
- In the three-year period from 2020-2022 and for the 56 schools, a total of 80 new teachers were hired, while 57 existing teachers were replaced. In the 56 schools, an average of 26 new teachers were hired each year. This equates to one new teacher being hired for every two schools every year.
- 52% of teachers at 56 government and government-assisted schools do not receive government pay. This supports the 2021 school census' that indicates 28% volunteer rate for public school teachers.

- The survey finds out that it will take an average of 1.13 years to recruit or replace a teacher.
- Of the 7 PHUs, each has a staff (all staff) of 2 or more, which almost meets the WHO requirement of 2.5 staff per PHU. In relation to qualified health workers, 85% have at least a nursing certificate.
- 38% of the staff (qualified staff) at the PHUs receive salaries from the government, while 62% are either on-the-job as trainees or volunteers. This has a huge implication in the delivery of health services.

Key policy ask and Recommendations

- **IMF condition should not affect the recruitment of health workers and teachers:** Government should ensure that IMF condition on wage bill to GDP should not affect the provision of more teachers and health workers that are well enumerated.
- **Enactment and operationalization of the Wages and Compensation Commission Bill-** When wage disputes arise, the Commission acts as an impartial arbiter. By putting the Commission into action, pay will be standardized according to competence and experience across all sectors. This can block revenue wastages and increase resources for an improved workforce of frontline workers.
- **Develop a plan to implement the minimum breadbasket salary for teachers –** This plan is an absolute game-changer. It's designed to inspire and motivate our incredible teachers to continue serving and giving their best in the classroom.
- **Develop a plan to reduce the high teacher-pupil ratio –** Due to population growth, more students are accepted to schools each term or school year, putting pressure on teachers to manage students every day. The internationally acceptable teacher-pupil ratios are 1:40. The 1:76 teacher-pupil ratio is abhorrent because some teachers are community volunteers and have little teaching methodology and classroom management skills, which makes it harder to improve learning outcomes and quality education. There is a need to develop a progressive long-term plan to hit the 1:40 teacher-pupils ratio.
- **Develop a plan to reduce the high doctor-patient and nurse/midwives-population density**
- **Push for Debt Cancellation –** Sierra Leone has to restructure its existing debt obligation and cooperate with the international community to guarantee complete debt relief so that the government can see some relief with the domestic resources mobilised each fiscal year. Debt cancellation frees up government resources formerly spent on interest payments, allowing them to raise spending on vital sectors like education and healthcare.

- **Reduce the gap between male and female teachers:** develop a plan to get more females trained as teachers to reduce the huge gap between men and women in the teaching field.
- **Merge some MDAs**– Over the years, some MDAs has been established and we believe their function can be merged hence reducing the amount of resources that will be spent on salaries and other cost.
- **Provide remote allowance for teachers and health workers** – Sierra Leone has many remote areas. Some communities lack access to good roads, electricity and phone service. Because of this, teachers and health staff fear going there, education and health are worst here. Therefore, an incentive in the form of a remote allowance should be provided for them.
- **Community monitoring of schools and health centers** – Regular community visits to schools and health centers should be made in order to determine whether or not there is a shortage of teaching staff or medical personnel, and the findings should then be used to engage key stakeholders such as the Deputy Director of Education (DDE) and the head of the District Health Management Team.
- **Stakeholders engagement** – Community stakeholders should engage policymakers like the council Mayors/Chairman, Members of Parliament, DDE. Head of DHMT, CSOs, Media and chieftom authorities to rise the need for more qualified teachers and health workers in their communities.

END

Done in collaboration with Alliance for Public Sector Wage Bill