

Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone

Monitoring Report on the National Civil Registration/ Verification Exercise

14th May, 2021

Introduction

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) was established by an Act of Parliament No. 9 of 2004. One of the ways the Commission fulfils its mandate is to monitor and document violations of human rights in Sierra Leone as provided for in section 7 (2)(f) of the HRCSL Act 2004. The Commission considers civil registration as a major human right issue as it goes to the identity of citizens and non-citizens and is connected to several other rights including labour and health rights, freedom of movement, etc.

From 9th to 14th May 2021, HRCSL monitored eighteen (18) centres where the National Civil Registration and Verification exercise is going on in the Western Area Urban and Western Area Rural. The eighteen (18) Registration and Verification centres monitored were:

1. UMC Ginger Hall, Fattah Rahman Street, , Centre 1 Ward 425
2. Open space Hill side Primary School, 7 Grant Lane, Centre 2 Ward 425,
3. Bishop Johnson Memorial Secondary School, 105 Fourah Bay Road, Centre 1 Ward 423,
4. SLMB Primary School, Canteen Lane, Centre 2, Ward 423
5. Laura Dove Vocational Secondary School, 32 Dan Street, Centres 2 Ward 422,
6. Eastern Municipal/ Henry Fergusson Junior Secondary School, Kennedy Street, Centre 1 Ward 422,
7. Saint Theresa Primary School, New Freetown/ Waterloo -Centre 2 Ward 420,
8. Bishop Crowder Primary School, Cline Street, Kanikay, Centre 1 Ward 420,
9. Wellington Muslim Association, Wellington Industrial Estate – Centre 1 Ward 382
10. Community Centre at Wellington City Road – Centre 2 Ward 406
11. Wellington Primary School at Melon Street – Centre 3 Ward 406
12. Conforti Primary and Secondary School (Calaba Town) – Centre1 Ward 404
13. St. Paul's Pre-Primary School Regent - Centre 81 Ward 396
14. Regent Community Centre – Centre 79 Ward 396
15. Sengbeh Pieh Memorial Secondary School – Centre 59 Ward 389
16. Community Centre Goderich – Centre 60 Ward 390
17. Great Hall MMCET Goderich– Centre 61 Ward 390
18. Lady Patricia Kabba Secondary School – Centre 62 Ward 390

The objective of the monitoring was to ascertain whether all related rights pertaining to the process were adhered to.

Findings

Opening and closing time

- On the first day, centres did not open on time due to challenge in logistics. HRCSL observed that on the 11th May, the UMC Ginger Hall centre did not start registration on time. HRCSL was informed by the registrants that the staff responsible for the registration was not around. On 12th May the Sengbeh Pieh Centre did not start registration on time due to the late arrival of the Centre Coordinator.
- Closing time is 5pm but those who are in the queue at 5pm are either registered or verified.

Turnout

HRCSL observed that the turnout during the first week was low. People started engaging with the process three days afterwards and consequently long queues were observed in the latter period. Centres were observed to be overcrowded close to the end of the duration of the exercise. As a result, registration officers at the centers continued working beyond closing time to ensure that those who were in the queue before closing were registered or verified.

Accessibility

With the exception of the Goderich Community Centre, the St. Paul's Pre Primary School (Regent) and the Regent Community Centre, all the other centres visited are accessible to persons with disability and the aged. The Goderich Community has rocks that could prove difficult for wheelchair bound registrants. The St. Paul's Pre-Primary Centre was located some distance away from the main road and vehicular access was restricted. The Centre at the Regent Community had a gutter at the entrance and a flight of stairs. HRCSL observed that the centre at the open space Hill Side Primary School was not conducive for the registration and verification exercise as it is located in an open field and registrants stood out in the hot burning sun.

Preference was given to persons with disability, the aged, lactating mothers, pregnant women and children to go through the process without joining the queue.

Visibility

Centres could not be easily identified due to non-display of posters advertising the location of the Centres. Public education was also very low.

Documentation required

Registrants had to produce one of the following documents for and new registration

- I. Birth certificate
- II. Passport
- III. NASSIT ID Card
- IV. Driver's License
- V. BECE/WAEC

- VI. Clinic cards
- VII. Work and Resident permit
- VIII. NCRA's attestation Form (to be endorsed by local authorities)

HRCSL observed that unaccompanied children (below 18) were denied registration. At the Sengbeh Pieh Centre, a group of children who went with their guardian without any form of identification were also prevented from registering (at the time of monitoring).

For new registration, the age limit was from birth upwards. Children below age six were only registered but no photographs were taken. Children six years above were photographed. Children ten years and above were photographed and finger prints scanned.

At St. Paul's Pre-Primary School in Regent, HRCSL was informed that children under eight years should not register.

In some of the schools used as centres, teachers in those schools were complaining that preference were not given to them to register.

For verification, the following documents are required”:

- Voter ID
- Birth certificate
- Telephone Number
- National ID Card
- Passport
- NASSIT ID Card
- Driver's License

HRCSL observed that three out of the eighteen centres visited, persons who had lost their voters ID cards and cannot recall their phone numbers they registered with in 2017 were advised to re-register.

Staffing and equipment

NCRA assigned not less than five (5) staff to each of the centres. However, at the UMC Ginger Hall and Bishop Crowther Primary School, only four staff were on duty at the time of monitoring on 11th May. The remaining sixteen centres had five staff each.

Each centre had only one verification machine and one registration machine. At the Henry Fergusson Municipal School the machine used for photographing and capturing other details was faulty and had to be changed.

Stand-by generators to charge the batteries of the computers were seen at some of the centres.

HRCSL's observation is that on average the verification process lasted between three and five minutes whilst the Registration lasted for between twelve to fifteen minutes.

However, registrants complained about the slow pace of the process. This could be partly attributed to the occasional malfunctioning of the laptop computers.

Security

Police personnel were seen in two centres – the Regent Community Centre and the Bishop Crowther Primary School. At the Bishop Crowther Primary School, HRCSL learnt that there were some disruptions at the centre which warranted the deployment of police personnel.

Poor crowd control measures were observed at all the centres. This sometimes led to tension among impatient registrants standing in long queues for hours.

Adherence with Covid-19 Prevention measures

HRCSL observed that Covid-19 preventive measures such as wearing of face masks, washing of hands and social distancing were not complied with.

Recommendations

- NCRA should consider extending the verification and registration period in order to capture the demographics of the regions. HRCSL is of the view that a minimum of two-days extension will be reasonable within which public/media outreach be made robust.
- NCRA should relocate all centres that are not disable –friendly or located in open spaces to more secured places to provide greater access to everyone and also shade for both registrants and registration officers.
- NCRA should collaborate with the SLP to deploy police personnel in all the centres and the police should manage the crowd well.
- NCRA should make sure that machines sent to centres are in good order and there should be stand-by machines in all the centres.

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