

Jelf International Insights



In this edition, Jelf International assesses the areas that employers should be aware of when considering operating in Sierra Leone.

This includes healthcare access, delivery and insurance provisions. The report draws on various sources to highlight specific considerations for this emerging jewel in West Africa.

The environment

Sierra Leone has historically relied on diamond mining for the majority of its exportable economic activity, accounting for 29% of its export, but simultaneously only contributing to 4.5% of its Gross Domestic Product¹.

Today, mineral extraction, specifically Bauxite and Iron Ore, is a key economic activity and a significant employer of both Sierra Leone Nationals and Expatriates alike. Sierra Leone's Tonkolili region has the world's 3rd largest proven Iron Ore deposits². As such, it represents a significant investment opportunity for established mining organisations that are able to obtain licenses to explore the region.

Sierra Leone is ranked at 142/189 in the World Bank's 'Ease of Doing Business Index' and notably, 5 places above their West African counterpart Nigeria, which has benefited significantly from foreign investment and expertise to realise its natural energy assets. Key challenges when commencing operations in Sierra Leone are much more rudimentary than appropriate international medical insurance and sanitary healthcare provision. They start at getting electricity and obtaining construction permits, according to the Ease of Doing Business Index. This in itself has not stopped many western, AIM listed organisations expanding into the region, for 'High Risk, High Reward' activity - where there is less competition than Nigeria, or South Africa, which in turn makes it an attractive prospect.

Access to Healthcare

Access to sanitary healthcare facilities in Sierra Leone is a significant challenge. Due to its

lack of public healthcare investments it lags somewhat behind other East and West African nations both in terms of number of facilities, doctors and specialists and the quality of facilities available for your employees.

In 2013 Bupa International, a leading private medical insurer, had just 20 contracted facilities in Sierra Leone, with only 6 of these outside Freetown³. This, despite having one of the most well developed provider networks in the world.

Those facilities that are available, may not practice Western style medicine and may be sparsely equipped, with limited diagnostic equipment. This means that in an emergency, your employee is likely to be stabilised in Sierra Leone before being medically evacuated to a neighbouring country; Nigeria, South Africa or Europe depending on availability and their condition. With Air Medical Evacuations routinely costing in excess of \$100,000 USD, having appropriate healthcare insurance to protect your balance sheet against such costs is critical.

Alternative Facilities

For those organisations who have a significant employee population (e.g. 100+ on one site), it may be worth considering hiring an approved physician, who can be paid on a 'retainer', to provide basic medical care and coordinate with insurers and assistance companies in the event of an emergency. Renowned 'Western Style' facilities are available outside Sierra Leone, in Ghana (Accra & Takoradi) and can provide:

- ◆ 24/7 Emergency Stabilisation
- ◆ Minor Surgery
- ◆ Vaccination Management & Disease Control Programmes
- ◆ In-House Pharmacy

These facilities are owned and/or managed by International SOS and their competitors, and will often require a plan sponsor/ employer to arrange for all employees to have membership, in addition to their international medical insurance. It should be used as a safeguard, rather than a complete solution, as most serious medical conditions will require a medical evacuation.

Managing the risks prior to deployment

Many of the more significant disease related risks can be managed and pre-empted prior to country deployment. Pre-screening is the cornerstone in better managing your employees' health and wellbeing abroad. For those working within the energy sector, Oil and Gas UK (OGUK) pre-deployment medicals are highly recommended. They can be carried out at a number of facilities in the UK. A vaccination program is a critical component to consider and according to the US Centre for Disease Control (CDC), employees should get vaccinated or receive a pre/post drug treatment for:

- ◆ Hepatitis A & B
- ◆ Malaria
- ◆ Typhoid
- ◆ Yellow Fever (The Sierra Leone government may require proof of this on entry)

For those who are working outside, or those who may have contact with animals, Rabies is a considerable threat. Meningitis is also particularly prevalent during the dry season (December-June).

Employees should avoid blood transfusions at all costs whilst in Sierra Leone, as there is a lack of adequately screened blood available; instead consider joining a screen blood programme such as Blood Care Foundation which maintains two blood banks in neighbouring Nigeria.



Dental Check-Ups

Encouraging employees to have a dental check-up may seem more vanity than necessity, but it is widely accepted across the expatriate community operating within Energy, Mining and Offshore services that dental pain is a common complaint. With limited or no facilities available in remote Sierra Leone, it will require at best a failed assignment with an employee returning to the UK for treatment, or at worst a medical evacuation, depending on the severity.

Including a routine dental benefit within your International Medical Insurance, for a scale & polish in addition to a check up, and encouraging employees to seek this prior to deployment is highly recommended, and can reduce the likelihood of a medical evacuation being necessary for dental related issues.

Medical Evacuation

Medical Evacuation is commonplace in Sierra Leone, due to the healthcare availability and infrastructure, so even some of the less 'life threatening' illnesses will require treatment outside of the country. Sierra Leone is classified as 'Extreme Risk' by Medical Assistance experts International SOS, who define such countries as those 'where healthcare is non-existent or severely over-taxed⁴.'

Evacuations to neighbouring countries will be executed by air or road ambulance and often a combination of both. However, as the cost for such an evacuation is high (e.g. up to and beyond \$100,000), ensuring that your international medical policy covers this, is financially prudent (so as not to be 'balance billed' for the cost of the evacuation and handling).

More specifically, selecting an insurer with a specific stop loss or large claim cost management method is important in protecting your renewal premium (especially for larger clients with more than 50-100+ expatriates) as an insurer may wish to reflect the cost of a medical evacuation in your following year's premium. Network mapping, evacuation response exercises and health risk analysis, in addition to selecting an appropriate insurer for your employees, can be managed by Jelf International and we will support your business objectives in the country.

Fast Facts⁵

- ◆ Population 6.1 million
- ◆ Life Expectancy of males: 46
- ◆ 77 out of 1,000 children do not survive their 1st birthday
- ◆ Total expenditure of health per capita \$165
- ◆ Total expenditure on health as a % of GDP 18.8%
- ◆ 2012 GDP Growth 15.2%
- ◆ Low HIV/AIDS prevalence at 4.9% (2012)

Jelf International assesses:

- ◆ **Legal framework**
To confirm your coverage is compliant, and allowing you a flexible approach to recruitment.
- ◆ **Recognition**
To ensure that your insurer is widely recognised and accepted in the region.
- ◆ **Plan design**
To reflect local costs of healthcare and associated risks.
- ◆ **Service delivery**
To help ensure peace of mind and business continuity.

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Contact Us

For a no obligation consultation.

Email
jelfinternational@jelfgroup.com

Phone
0333 920 7474

Visit
jelfgroup.com/international

Sources:

1. OECD 2009 - African Development Bank.
2. Mining Weekly 2010 www.miningweekly.com/topic/sierra-leone-natural-feature
3. Bupa International Sub-Saharan Africa Network List November 2013
4. International SOS Health Map 2014
5. World Health Organisation www.who.int

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