

CALL FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Supporting Informal Enterprises Transition Towards Sustainable Growth and Formalization

1. Background

The informal sector plays a dominant role in Sierra Leone's economy, accounting for about 90% of total employment in the country. Although the informal sector dominates the employment share in Sierra Leone, they are generally associated with low productivity, minimum capital investments, limited access to financial services, poor working conditions, high vulnerability to external shocks, and low level of education and business skills, among other challenges. Addressing the issues in Sierra Leone can scale-up the importance of the sector in the government's development agenda. Transitioning towards formality is crucial for long-term economic growth and improved living standards in Sierra Leone.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has supported the Sierra Leone under the [Supporting Informal Enterprises Transition Towards Sustainable Growth and Formalization Project](#), financed by the European Union and UNDP and Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS). The project aims to identify and address structural barriers related to informality. Under the support of this project, a baseline study examining the challenges facing the informal economy in Sierra Leone was conducted. Subsequently, a National Action Plan for Formalization outlining a formalization approach tailored to the needs and characteristics of Sierra Leone is underway. Aligning with the baseline assessment and the National Action Plan, a research grant scheme has been initiated to expand the knowledge base on the informal sector in Sierra Leone. This research grant scheme also aims to promote research focusing on the specific issues within the informal sector, particularly to improve quality of data that is generally scarce in the Sierra Leone.

2. Research Grant Scheme

While contributing to the overarching goal of supporting the growth and formalization of informal firms, the objectives of this research grant scheme include:

- Expanding the knowledge base on the informal sector in Sierra Leone.
- Providing empirical data and insights to inform policies and promote formalization of informal firms.
- Strengthening research capacity in local academic and research institutions in Sierra Leone

Specifically, **five research grants, each valued at the local currency equivalent of USD 4,000** will be awarded to institutions in Sierra Leone. Preference will generally be given to proposals aimed at empirical research. The research implementation period is 3 months from the date of grant agreement signing. The grant will be transferred upon the completion and submission of the research reports to the satisfaction of the project team.

3. Eligible Criteria

The eligibility criteria for the recipients of the research grants are as follows:

- Academic, technical, research institutions in Sierra Leone specializing in research or market/ sector analysis related to informal sector issues or enterprise formalization efforts.

- Demonstrated experience and/or publication records in research in social sciences ¹
- Researcher(s) / expert(s) in these institutions hold minimum of a master's degree economics, social studies, political science, or related fields.

More than one proposal can be submitted by the institution/organization, provided that the proposals are distinct from one another. Any query related to the eligibility of institution or organization should be sent to Judith Van Doorn (doorn@ilo.org); Huong Ngo (ngot@iloguest.org); and Sia Lajaku-Williams (lajaku-williams@ilo.org) at least 7 days prior to the research proposal submission deadline.

4. Research Themes

Research proposals should focus on issues pertaining to informality in Sierra Leone, such as tackling bottlenecks in formalization at national policy level, or exploring challenges faced by informal enterprises in their journey towards sustainable growth and formalization. Proposals should fit within the following thematic areas, which are drawn from the findings of the baseline assessments ² and national action plan³ for formalization.

- **Thematic Area 1. Data and Methodological Approaches**
 - Addressing data and measurement challenges specific to informality in country specific context
 - Regional disparities and localized characteristics of informality
 - Conducting surveys to better understand the dynamics in the informal economy in Sierra Leone.
- **Thematic Area 2. Sector-Specific Issues of Informality**
 - Economic and social costs of informality within specific (sub)sectors
 - Market research on informality in specific (sub)sectors
 - Representation of women and challenges encountered by young entrepreneurs in informal business of specific (sub)sectors
 - Contribution and impact of competition from informal enterprises on formal enterprise productivity in specific (sub)sectors
 - Initiatives by employers' and workers', organizations, informal sector associations and other member-based organizations to serve and represent their members and facilitate the formalization and business growth of informal enterprises
- **Thematic Area 3. Policy and Regulatory Impact Assessment on Informality**
 - Measuring the impact of national or local policies and regulations on enterprise formalization through case studies
 - Assessing the effects of regulatory incentives, such as one-stop-shop, business advisory, capacity building, other supporting services etc., on the formalization process of informal MSMEs
- **Thematic Area 4. Enablers of Firm-level Productivity for Informal Enterprises**
 - Productivity tools, techniques, methods to enhance efficiency of informal enterprises
 - E-commerce platforms for market access for informal enterprises
 - Digital tools and digital literacy for informal enterprises
- **Thematic Area 5. Financial Inclusion and pathways to formality for Informal Businesses**
 - Financial inclusion and pathways to formality for rural informal enterprises, informal MSMEs.
 - Addressing geographical barriers, collateral issues, social norms, etc., affecting financial inclusion and formalization.
 - Access to financial services such as Fintech or financial mechanisms adapted to the needs of informal operators, such as women and young entrepreneurs, with volatile and small incomes and the creation of pathways to formality.

¹ Social science, any branch of academic study or science that deals with human behaviour in its social and cultural aspects. Usually included within the social sciences are cultural (or social) anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, and economics

² ILO, EU, and UNDP (2022). Baseline Studies of Informal Economy in the African Caribbean, and Pacific Regions – The case of Sierra Leone.

³ ILO, EU, and UNDP (2024) Supporting Informal Enterprises Transition towards Sustainable Growth and Formalization in Sierra Leone – National Action Plan for Formalization.

5. Research Proposal Submission Guide

Research proposals should be sent to Judith Van Doorn (doorn@ilo.org); Huong Ngo (ngot@iloguest.org); and Sia Lajaku-Williams (lajaku-williams@ilo.org) by the deadline of **17:00** (Sierra Leone time), **30 November 2024**. A proposal should include the following content:

- Research title
- Contact details: Institution name and contact details of a representative/ lead researcher (full name, affiliation, address, phone, and email address)
- Summary: A brief summary of the research proposal (max. 200 words)
- Background, topic, and expected contribution:
 - Explain the research background for the topic selection, its relevance and the expected contribution of the research in the context of Sierra Leone
 - Indicate the relevant thematic areas, specify research question to be addressed, the significance and originality of the research topic in the context Sierra Leone
- Methodology: Description and justification of the research methodology, including identification of data sources, method to collect data, analysis techniques, and estimation methodology (for empirical study).
 - Notes: For empirical study, econometrics techniques or regression analysis methodology to be applied, statistical software to be used, construction of variables
- Outline: indicate tentative structure of major sections in the research content
- Duration: include the research implementation period, which should not exceed 3 months
- References: up to 10 references
- Budget breakdown: Indicate how the research grant will be utilized.
- Publication plan: describe plan to share final output/ findings (e.g., local or international journals, seminars, workshops, conferences, or public presentations). This section is optional.

Other requirements:

- Language: Proposals should be submitted in English
- Length: Research proposals should not exceed 2,000 words, excluding references
- Figures, tables, and images included in proposals should be limited to a total of three, with full citations for any reproduced content from other sources.

Attached documents:

- An introduction of the institution and a record of documented projects on enterprise formalization and informality studies
- List of researchers, and recent CV of lead researcher following the template provided in Annex 2.

Note: Any question related to the call for proposal schemes could be sent to Judith Van Doorn (doorn@ilo.org); Huong Ngo (ngot@iloguest.org); and Sia Lajaku-Williams (lajaku-williams@ilo.org) at least 7 days prior to the research proposal submission deadline. Answers to the questions will be made available to all interested applicants if applicable.

6. Timeline

Milestone/ steps	Date
Research proposal submission deadline	17:00 (Sierra Leone time), 30 November 2024
Announcement of selected research proposals (tentative)	15 December 2024
Research implementation	16 December 2024 – 15 March 2025
Deadline of final research report submission	16 March 2025

7. Evaluation and Selection of Proposals

- A panel of experts comprising prominent specialists and researchers will assess the completed proposals based on their relevance, innovativeness and quality of research design, capacity to execute the research.
- Details and deliberations regarding the evaluation process are at the discretion of the evaluation panel.
- The research grantees might receive feedback on their research from the expert panel.
- Feedback will not be provided for non-selected research proposals.
- Incomplete submission will not be considered for evaluation.

Annex 1. SUGGESTED TEMPLATE FOR RESEARCH PROPOSAL

1. Research title

2. Summary

- A brief summary of the research proposal (max. 200 words)

3. Contact details

- Institution name
- Contact details of a representative/ lead author: full name, affiliation, address, phone, and email address

4. Research background and expected contribution

- Explain the research background for the topic selection and its relevance to Sierra Leone
- Briefly outline the expected contribution in the context of Sierra Leone (max. 200 words)

5. Research topic

- Indicate the relevant thematic areas (refer to section 4 of this call for proposal), specify research question to be addressed, the significance and originality of the research topic in the context Sierra Leone (max. 300 words)

6. Methodology

- Tentative data sources and method to collect data
- Analysis techniques
- Estimation methodology (for empirical study): explain econometrics techniques or regression analysis methodology to be applied, Statistical software to be used, construction of variables

7. Tentative Research Content

Briefly indicate tentative major sections in the research (max 500 words)

- Content section 1: brief description
- Content section 2: brief description
- Content section 3: brief description
- ...

8. References

- Up to 10 references should be used

9. Implementation plan

- Duration: include the research implementation period, which should not exceed 3 months
- Budget breakdown: Indicate how the research grant will be utilized
- Publication plan (optional): describe plan to share final output/ findings (e.g., local or international journals, seminars, workshops, conferences, or public presentations)

10. Annexes

- Introduction and a record of documented projects on enterprise formalization and informality studies
- List of researchers, and recent CV of lead researcher following the template provided in the Annex 2

Annex 2. List of researchers and CV Template for lead researcher

Name of researchers	Proposed position	Years of experience	Age	Educational background	Specialist areas of knowledge	Experience in partner country	Languages and degree of fluency from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient)*

* Levels are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>. The linguistic competencies are to be demonstrated by certificate or by past relevant experience.

Curriculum vitae of lead researcher

Family name	
First names	
Date of birth	
Nationality	
Civil status	
Education	

Institution	Date from dd/mm/yyyy	Date to dd/mm/yyyy	Degree(s) or diploma(s) obtained

Language skills: Indicate competence from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient). The competence level is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>. The linguistic competencies are to be demonstrated by certificate or by past relevant experience.

Language	Reading	Speaking	Writing

Membership of professional bodies	
Other skills (e.g. computer literacy, etc.)	
Present position	
Years within the firm	
Key qualifications (relevant to the project)	
Specific experience in the region	

Country	Date from dd/mm/yyyy	Date to dd/mm/yyyy

Professional experience of lead researcher

Date from dd/mm/yyyy	Date to dd/mm/yyyy	Actual working days [1] in FTEs [2]	Location	Company & reference person[3] (name & contact details)	Position	Description
Total		0				

Other relevant information (e.g. publications)

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[1] Only the work experience mentioned in the CV will be considered by the evaluation committee.

[2] 220 full time equivalents (FTE) constitute one year of professional experience. Part-time must be converted into FTE.

[3] The contracting authority reserves the right to contact the reference persons. You undertake to inform the reference persons mentioned in the present form that their data will/may be transferred to the Commission and communicate the privacy statement to them. The privacy statement is available at [https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/Annexes#Annexes-AnnexesA\(Ch.2\):General](https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/Annexes#Annexes-AnnexesA(Ch.2):General). If you cannot provide a reference, please provide a justification.