



# Points of Entry, Cross-Border Mobility Patterns and Trends and Disease Surveillance

Participatory Mapping exercise in Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba Districts, Sierra Leone

12—22 October, 2021



Map 1: Main points of entry in Sierra Leone

## Introduction and Context

With the emergence and the spread of COVID-19 globally in 2019, prevention and mitigating strategies that limit the spread of COVID-19 became important for many countries. To that effect, and with the identification of hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 case in Sierra Leone, effective border management has been seen as crucial in the fight against reducing the impact of COVID-19, because of the porous nature of the country’s borders with Liberia and Guinea. Mapping out points of entry bordering Liberia and Guinea with high mobility flows, and understanding mobility patterns and trends, emerged as pivotal in this regard.

Indeed, with the emergence of the COVID-19, securitization of national points of entry of all countries became crucial within the mobility discourse, particularly given the plethora of unprecedented COVID-19 recorded cases in neighboring countries caused through traveling. With the huge characteristics of notable points of entry porosity at both land and blue crossing points in Sierra Leone, mapping and identification of official and unofficial points of entry plays an essential role to check the spread of COVID-19 cases in Sierra Leone.



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Thus, the present study was focused on participatory mapping of points of entry, by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) within the three districts in Sierra Leone:-Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba districts, within the project's broad aim of contributing "strengthening health care system, preparedness and resilience against COVID-19 at points of entry in Sierra Leone".

The three districts identified as the operational areas to be covered by the project are among the identified border districts of Sierra Leone, sharing borders with Guinea and Liberia. On the map of Sierra Leone, Guinea is located on the north and north-east of Sierra Leone sharing border with five of Sierra Leone's geographical districts- Kailahun, Falaba, Kono, Karene and Koinadugu, while Liberia is found on the South and South-east of Sierra Leone and its border districts with Liberia border are Kailahun and Pujehun.

Central to the participatory mapping carried out was the identification of major crossing points, comprising several blue (water) and land points of entry. The identification of these vital crossing points is to play key role in supporting the government, through the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, with credible data on points of entry essential for the institutionalization of a wide-ranging operational COVID-19 mitigation and preventive protocols. Sierra Leone remains challenged with effective health system provision, thus, the identification of these mobility points of entry play intrinsic input in enhancing the existing community event-based surveillance system, heavily reliant upon by the District Health Medical Team (DHMT) at district level. Thus, this DTM mapping exercise directly impact the project outcome, titled: "strengthening health system capacity preparedness and resilience in COVID-19 affected points of entry."

## Aims and Objectives

The aim of the participatory mapping exercise was to identify major crossing points in Kailahun, Pujehun, and Falaba districts that would assist government with data on points of entry and cross border mobility patterns for the institutionalization of COVID-19 mitigation and prevention measures. In particular, the aims and objectives of the project were to:

- Identify points of entry with high volumes of cross border travellers;
- Help provide key information on various cross border mobility patterns and trends within Kailahun, Falaba and Pujehun Districts bordering with Liberia and Guinea useful for disease detection, response and prevention such as COVID-19;
- Understand cross border activities at and around points of entry separating Sierra Leone from Guinea and Liberia.

## Methodology

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Focus group discussions were the main methodological approach employed for the points of entry mapping exercise. Fifteen participants were selected in each of the selected border chiefdoms in these three district (Prefecture)-Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba. Participants comprised local stakeholders at the community level within the border chiefdoms comprising various occupational and professional expertise. Selected participants includes local chiefs, chairladies of market women association, chairmen of motorcycle and drivers union association, heads of community health workers, district representatives of the office of national security, representative from the state security apparatus at the district level, local ward councilors, and community youth leaderships. The focus group discussion was led by one facilitator, a recognizable hard copy maps of each border community. With the help of the facilitator, participants identified locations in their communities that have been used as points of entry, both official and unofficial crossing points. The careful identification of points of entry were reached after group members unanimously agreed along with their local authorities the movement locations in those settlements.



*Picture 1: DTM Staff Member Leads a Focus Group Discussion © George Tucker/IOM 2021*

## **Location of border crossings and characteristics of cross-border mobility**



## Kailahun District

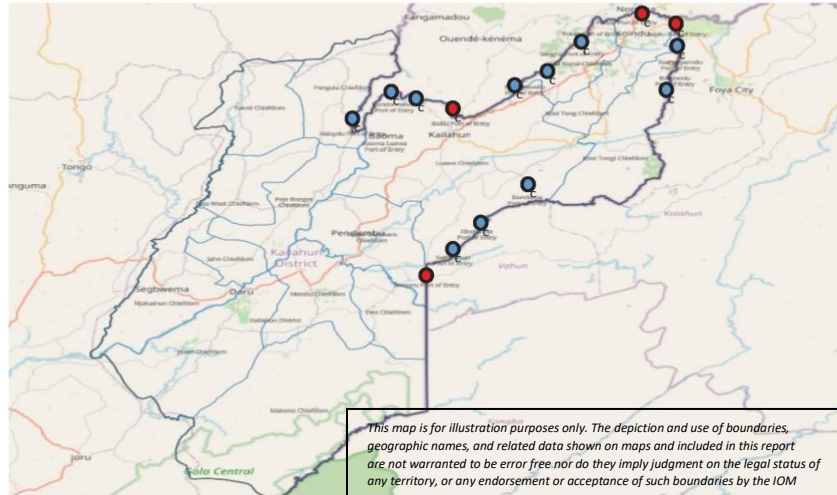


Strengthening Health System  
Capacity, Preparedness and  
Resilience in COVID-19  
Affected Point of Entry, With  
Sierra Leone Diaspora

Map shows the major crossing points of  
Kailahun with Liberia and Guinea



- Informal Point of Entry
- Formal Point of Entry
- Main Roads
- Main Rivers
- 



**Map 2: Points of Entry in Kailahun District**

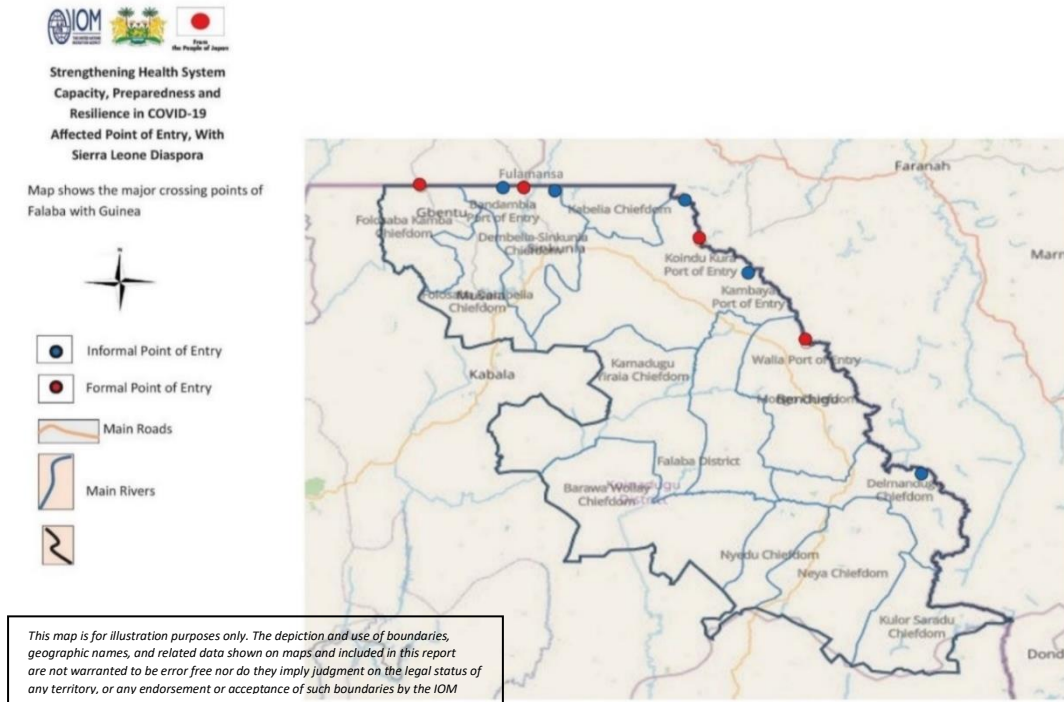
Kailahun district shares border with Guinea and Liberia, and is situated along the south-eastern part of Sierra Leone. Eight of the fifteen chiefdoms of the district are border chiefdoms, sharing border mainly with either Guinea and or Liberia. The first case of Ebola outbreaks in Sierra Leone, which resulted in the deaths of approximately 4,000 Sierra Leoneans (Lu, 2014) was recorded in Kailahun district from Guinea. The district, according to the 2015 Population and Housing Census has a population of 526,379 inhabitants.

Four major points of entry were mapped during the focus group discussion, namely- Bomaru, Bailu, Baidu and Yenga, which are all major official crossing points. Moreover, eleven unofficial points of entry were identified. Each of the official crossing point has an estimate volume of flow ranging between 150-200 travellers, daily. Cross-border mobility in these cross border communities, using both official and unofficial means, is a common practice within the Kailahun district bordering with Guinea and Liberia. The main reason for travel from the two neighboring countries through Kailahun is to reach the capital Freetown and other districts, meaning that Kailahun district is primarily a transit district through which travellers move on to and from Freetown and other districts. According to the data, it is noted that, communities situated within the border region in Liberia normally travel to Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, through Sierra Leone because the road network within the border communities of Liberia to Monrovia are in deplorable conditions. Thus, POEs located within the district play a strategic role in providing



timely and useful information on the daily movement patterns of travellers and on issues relating to travellers’ health. This has remained a key impetus in the fight against the spread of communicable disease such as COVID-19 from the neighboring countries.

### Falaba District



**Map 3: Points of Entry in Falaba District**

Falaba is a new district in Sierra Leone, created as late as 2016, and is situated in the northern part of Sierra Leone, with a population around 205,353. The district is divided into thirteen chiefdoms. The participatory mapping was carried out in four of the border chiefdoms- Delemandugu, Dembelia, Kebelia and Sulima, among others. Falaba district shares borders only with Guinea to the north. Characterized by porous crossing points, four official crossing points were identified in these four chiefdoms- Gentu, Fulamasa, Koindu-kura and Wala and five unofficial points of entry. Approximately 250 travellers move across these four official crossing points every day to different destinations in Sierra Leone and in Guinea. During the focus group discussion it was revealed that movements across these border points in Falaba district is hinged on trade and family visitations, largely because of the proximity of these locations and the demographic homogeneity of cross border communities on both sides of the frontier, which often form a single community on both sides of the border.

Transhumance is a commonplace practice within the Falaba cross border communities, conducted in common with communities in Faranah, Guinea. Large constituents of the district’s inhabitants are cattle herders from both countries and accompany their animals in search of grazing sites, and as such are often led to move across border and between



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countries using PoEs in Falaba to reach Guinea. Particularly notable with these transhumance practices along these border communities is that there have been low-scale conflicts with crop farmers, linked to the destructions of farmland and the encroachment of transhumance corridors.

Besides, relating to trade and movements within these locations, the strategic reasons for the locations of these PoEs are that, communities situated within the Falaba crossing points with Guinea are far away from Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. Participants during the focus group discussion in fact noted that, inhabitants within some of these communities preferred trading and buying products by travelling to neighboring Guinea, instead of venturing to urban towns in Sierra Leone or Freetown, which they noted is far removed and expensive, than traveling to and doing business across urban towns in Guinea which are closer and more easily accessible. Many Sierra Leoneans in these border communities, therefore, are engaged in trade activities with counterparts on the Guinean side of the border. Additionally, during the raining season, participants noted that most of their road networks in these Sierra Leone border communities linking major urban towns in Sierra Leone are heavily impacted to the point of becoming impracticable, and even cut-off completely, and the only often option and means left for them is to move towards Guinea to transact their business. Likewise, travellers from Guinea often move through crossing points in Falaba district as far as to major urban towns in Sierra Leone.

Thus, the identification of these PoEs within Falaba district play vital role relating to accurate data on the movement patterns including points of departure and destinations of travellers. This is a fundamental drive and factor towards enhancing disease surveillance system and contact tracing in situations of infectious disease outbreaks.

### Pujehun District

Pujehun district has fourteen chiefdoms, and unlike Kailahun, it shares a border only with Liberia in the south, with a population of 346,461. The participatory mapping targeted only two of its border chiefdoms- Makpele and Sorogbema chiefdoms- because of frequent movement patterns in these chiefdoms and the type of cross border activity across Sierra Leone and Liberia, such as fishing. Sulima, Jendema, Bomborhun and Daresalam were the four major crossing points mapped out, with another four unofficial crossing locations identified within these two chiefdoms. Majority of the points of entry in Pujehun district are border (water crossings). As noted, by nature of its geographical location, fishing remains the major activity characterizing these crossing points which are often traded across border, and these border locations have high volume of migrants resident fishermen from Liberia and Ghana.

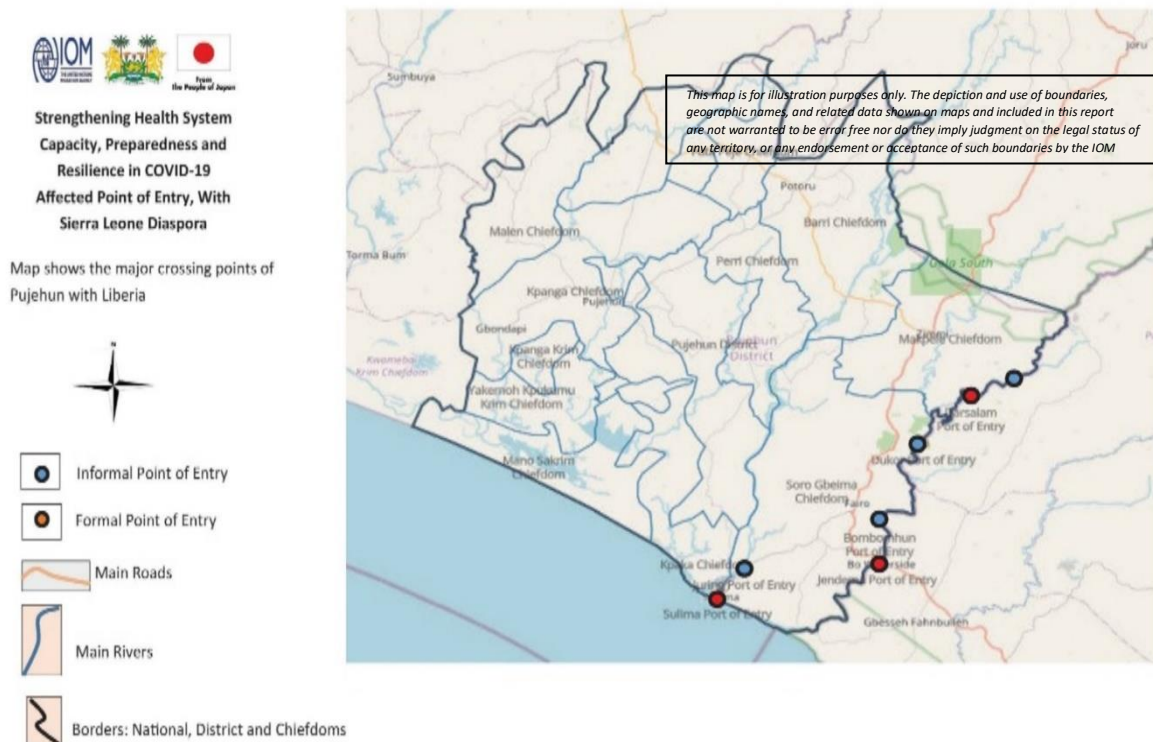
Furthermore, these crossing points are often used to access neighboring country of both countries. In fact, in one of the focus group discussions held in these communities, they noted sometimes people cross over to their communities to escape justice over crime they accused



them of committed on the other side, and because they have expertise in sailing across the sea with canoe, easily do so unknowingly to them, and such instances have resurfaced in their community.

It is noted that at these points of entry approximately 300 people cross on a daily basis. Particularly a large number of travellers cross from and to Liberia at the Jendema point of entry in Pujehun, whose paved road network makes it easier to reach Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone and Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, for trade, work and family related issues.

Enhancing efficient surveillance system for COVID-19 and other infectious disease at these points of entry play an important role in the early detection and response mechanism through the provision of crucial information on the movements patterns of travellers.



*Map 4: Points of Entry in Pujehun District*



## Cross-Border Migration, Livelihood Activities and Factors of Mobility

Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba have huge untapped vegetation land cover by a thick rain forest. This has made these locations attractive for agricultural activities. In Kailahun, agriculture activities include the production of farm rice, and cash crops such as cocoa and coffee, while in Pujehun district, rice farming is most widely practiced. Falaba district mostly practice swamp rice farming and vegetable production. This description is important to note because, within these three districts bordering with Liberia and Guinea, agriculture is also the underlying reason accounting for some of the cross border mobility as noted during the focus group discussions, though such movement volume is not compare to that of trade. Participants mentioned that it has become a normalized practice, whereby inhabitants settling around these border districts cross over to neighboring country for farming and vice versa. This is noted to be particularly common in the Falaba and Kailahun district crossing over to Guinea and Liberia seasonally for farming during the dry seasons.

Beyond agriculture, another cross border activity in these border districts is trade. Travellers from Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia are involved on a daily basis in varied trading activities in the neighbouring countries to which they frequently travel, mostly with goods ranging from food stuff and apparel. Specific days such as Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday were designated as days during which travellers from these border communities move across points of entry for trading.

In Pujehun district, fishing is also a major activity widely practice in communities which live in areas surrounding points of entry, and is known as the main occupation for both the inhabitants of these communities and for migrants who settle in the communities. In the border communities in Pujehun, migrants from Liberia and Ghana have permanently settled in Sierra Leone to practice fishing.

Furthermore, in Falaba district (and distinctively, unlike the other two border districts), another widely practiced cross-border community activity is transhumance (seasonal nomadic herding practice whereby herders move seasonally with their cattle in search of grazing land and water points).

Another recurrent factor of mobility that has become a commonplace among the three districts is family visitation and the observance of certain traditional and cultural rites, for which members of cross-border communities travel to the neighbouring countries to attend. As noted during the focus group discussion, this is informed by the long historic and homogeneous ties among inhabitants of these communities.

## Mobility Patterns and Trends

Mobility patterns and trends across major points of entry, both official and unofficial, in the three districts appear to be predictable and regular in nature. This means that high flow (high volume of travellers) is noted always on market days, reflecting the significance of trade as a major factor of cross-border mobility between Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia and





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agriculture at a low scale. On these days, both the official and unofficial points of entry experienced high flow. There are notable days inhabitants from these communities move across with goods for exchange of cash and to buy desired products for retails. Characteristic of these movements on those marketing days as noted is that, mostly travellers tend to use one official crossing route in the morning to access the market locations for business transaction, however, on their return many of these travellers would tend to use the unofficial exit point in order to evade questioning from POEs personnel especially on issues relating to items crossing across with.

These organized patterns and trends of mobility for cross border trade has a long history and is a commonplace within and across these border regions. One of the main reason is that, major urban towns of these three countries are situated far away from the border communities. Inhabitants find it much convenient to spend limited days to easily cart their products to the nearby communities around the border locations for transaction than on spending couple of days locating urban centers to transact the same products with similar price tag. In addition, these border communities are deprived of easily accessible road networks, making the transport of large quantities of agricultural products and other goods to and from these communities very challenging. Therefore, the participation of nearby markets within these cross border communities as noted is something welcomes and encourages by many inhabitants, given the advantage of time saving and less expenditure it entails.

Remarkably important amongst movement patterns is the volume of women travellers. Indeed, the majority of travellers were female. Out of every 50 travellers recorded at each point of entry per day, as noted, women travellers constituted approximately 75 per cent of the flow crossing through points of entry, while men only represent 25 per cent of the travellers. Female travellers across these locations are noted to be mostly involved in trade, while the men travel mostly to conduct agriculture activities. As trade is the main factor for migration, this could explain the significance of the share of female travellers amongst cross-border mobility. Given that trade is a common practice in these communities both the inhabitants of the host community, migrants and travellers form the bulk of the major participants.

It is important to note that, because of the geographical conditions of these cross border districts and limited access of vehicles to many of the communities, mobility of travellers is often done through motorcycle, canoe and, largely, on foot.

Therefore, given the pattern of movements and activities, the identification of these POEs in all of these districts play major role, which is information provision on the demographic movement patterns relating to their departure locations and destinations. Such information is strategic for quick decision making by policy makers and other partners through the



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availability of quick detection of any infectious disease outbreak, and the response mechanism such as contact tracing through movement history of travellers from these points of entry.

## Conclusion

In this participatory mapping exercise, major crossing points were identified in Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba districts in Sierra Leone. Bomaru, Bailu, Baindu, and Yenga considered official points of entry were successfully identified as among the locations with which mobility is on the high scale in Kailahun district bordering with Liberia and Guinea. Similar points of entry locations were jointly mapped out in Pujehun district, which include, Jendema, Sulima, Bomborhun and Daresalam along with a couple of unofficial crossing points. In Falaba district, Fulamasa, Gentu, Koindukura and Walia were also mapped out as among the major crossing points and with high volume of flow. In essence, these mapped out locations that have led to these POE identifications revealed important information on the patterns and trends of movements, recurrent cross-border activities and health update within these border crossing points. These information are key in contributing to the overall aim of the project, which is “to strengthen health system capacity, preparedness and resilience of COVID-19 points of entry” through community event based surveillance system paramount for the mitigation strategy of COVID-19 and the spread of other infectious disease at these cross border settlements. More important, with the identification of these POEs, readily available information will be present that could be used for quick detection and response mechanism taken in an instance of any infectious disease outbreak within these communities.