



Migration Profile

BENIN

A. Executive Summary

Benin is a small state located in West Africa and bordered by Togo, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Niger, with 121 kilometres of coastline along the Gulf of Guinea. Benin's economy is dependent on the agricultural sector as well as formal and informal re-export and transit trade with Nigeria.ⁱ

Benin is a host country for many migrant workers from neighbouring countries and West Africa due to its political and social stability and economic potential.ⁱⁱ Migrants to Benin mainly come from Togo, Nigeria, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, Benin is also a destination country for people who seek protection, fleeing their countries due to armed conflicts and political crises, especially from the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Cameroon.^{iv}

Nevertheless, Benin is mainly an emigrant country.^v Factors related to poverty, informal employment, and access to education drive the Beninese population to emigrate to other countries in search of work opportunities and better living conditions.^{vi} Migrants from Benin mainly emigrate to Nigeria, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, and Niger.^{vii} Beyond the African continent, many try to reach Europe (especially France, Italy, and Germany) as well as other states such as Canada.^{viii} Internally, climate change and lack of economic opportunities are important driving factors for rural-to-urban migration (mainly north-south).^{ix}

In the year 2021, Benin's economic activity saw a strong recovery, with an estimated annual growth rate of 6.6% on its GDP.^x The services and construction sectors were the main drivers of the growth. Inflation averaged 1.7% over the year, driven by rising food prices.^{xi} This situation has been aggravated by the consequences of the Russia-Ukraine crisis since the end of February 2022, affecting, *inter alia*, the oil and agricultural input sectors.^{xii} The fiscal deficit increased from 4.7% of the GDP in 2020 to 5.8% in 2021, while fiscal policies remained expansionary. The Foreign Direct Investment in net inflows decreased from 1.5% of the GDP in 2019 to 1.1% of the GDP in 2020.^{xiii}

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Benin is a small state located in West Africa. In 2021 it had a total population of 12,451,031 inhabitants^{xiv} and a surface area of 114,760 km².^{xv} The state is divided into 12 departments and 77 communes.^{xvi} The southern regions of the country are the most urbanised and populated (comprising more than two thirds of the total population)^{xvii}.

French is the official language of Benin, spoken by 35% of the population. Nevertheless, there are other 50 languages spoken in the state, of which Fon is the most popular (with nearly 24% of the population speaking it). Other languages include Dendi, Mina, Yoruba, and Bariba^{xviii}.

Benin features wide ethnic diversity: Fon is the largest ethnic group in the state (39%), followed by Yoruba (18%), Adja (15%) and Bariba (9%), and Fula (7%), among many others.^{xix} According to the most recent census in 2013, the most practised religion is Christianity (48.5%). Muslims (mainly Sunni) represent 27.7% of the population. There are also multiple West African traditional beliefs, such as Voodoo.^{xx}

II. International and Internal Migration

According to the United Nations, there were 390,112 immigrants in Benin in 2019,^{xxi} representing approximately 3.3% of the total population.^{xxii} Among immigrants, there are more females (52.9%) than males, most of whom are between 20 and 64 years old.^{xxiii} The principal countries of origin for immigrants to Benin are Togo, Nigeria, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana.^{xxiv} Likewise, the increase in Asian migration to Benin between 2013 and 2019 is considerable.^{xxv}

Regarding internal migration, the flow is mainly rural to urban.^{xxvi} In 2013, internal migrants primarily came from the Littoral, Atlantique, Collines, and Porto-Novo departments.^{xxvii} This same year, in 2013, 57.6% of the internal migrants were employed, compared to 55% of the non-migrant population.^{xxviii} The highest employment rates among internal migrants are found in the department of Ouémé (68.2%), mainly working in commerce, restaurants, and hotels (21.7% of internal migrants), and other services (22.4%).^{xxix} Manufacturing industries (11.4%) and agriculture (8.1%) are the next most significant areas of employment.^{xxx}

Regarding international migrants, the employment rate in 2013 was 59.6%. This figure was highest in the Collines department (72%) and lowest in Alibori (46.2%)^{xxxi}. Most international migrants live in the southern regions of the country, mainly in Littoral.^{xxxii} They mostly work the commerce sector (47% of the total international migrant population in 2019).^{xxxiii}

The informal market for the migrant population is mainly concentrated in the agricultural, industrial, and commerce sectors.^{xxxiv} Furthermore, migrants are exposed to smuggling and human trafficking.^{xxxv} They are also victims of discrimination, mainly regarding the school fees for the children of immigrants, which are disproportionately higher than for nationals.^{xxxvi}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

According to data provided by the UN, Benin was the country of origin for 666,357 emigrants in the year 2019, which represents 5.65% of Benin's population.^{xxxvii} The main destinations are Nigeria (55.35%), Togo (10.82%), and Ivory Coast (10.53%). Other destinations are Gabon (7.78%), and Niger (2.91%).^{xxxviii} On the other hand, it should be noted that of those who emigrate beyond the African continent, 64.26% go to France, 8.46% to Italy, 8.42% to Canada and 7.30% to Germany.^{xxxix}

There are more males (53.83%) than females (46.16) among the emigrant population from Benin.^{xl} The state differentiates between migrant workers, students, and migrants in an irregular administrative situation.^{xli} Approximately 40% of migrants from Benin have completed primary education, 11.4% have secondary education, and 34.4% have higher education.^{xlii} However, in the case of migrant workers with tertiary education, when they migrate, their skills and qualifications are usually not recognised due to a certain lack of standardisation in the definitions of skills and qualifications between countries of origin and destination.^{xliii}

Most of migrant workers from Benin are employed in low-skilled occupations, such as agricultural, forestry, and fishing labourers (20.1%), plant and machine operators (19.7%), direct service personnel, traders, and salespersons (10.7%).^{xliv} Irregular migrants from Benin are mainly present in the informal economies of developed and developing countries.^{xlv} They work in domestic services, construction, and the agricultural sector.^{xlvi} They also work in the health, education, commerce, and fishing sectors. Beninese migrant women tend to work in the catering and domestic sectors.^{xlvii}

The main factors that explain emigration from Benin include the economy.^{xlviii} Benin has experienced an increase in cost of living, but the minimum wage has not been augmented accordingly.^{xlix} Since 2006, the minimum wage has stood at 31.625.0 FCFA,^l which means that the Beninese population has little purchasing power.^{li, lii} Thus, many look for more favourable prospects for their children,^{liii} greater job security, and a more pleasant working environment. Other factors driving emigration are the non-recognition of merit, administrative blockages, and lack of enforcement of legislation.^{liv}

IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)

According to the UNHCR, Benin registered 1,396 persons with refugee status and 464 asylum seekers in 2020.^{lv} The majority of refugees come from the Central African Republic (75.21%), Côte d'Ivoire (11.96%), Mali (2.58%), and Cameroon (2.51%).^{lvi} Regarding the asylum seekers for the year 2020, the main countries of origin were: the Central African Republic (36.85%), Cameroon (13.79%), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (11%).^{lvii}

Refugee movements involve more males (70%) than females (29%), and the primary age group is between 18-59.^{lviii} The leading causes of forced population displacement to Benin are armed conflicts and political crises in West and Central African countries.^{lix} Refugees mainly settle in the country's southern departments, especially in Atlantique and Mono.^{lx}

Benin currently recognises refugee status through its legislation Ordonnance No. 75-41 of 1975.^{lxi} People with refugee status have the right of movement and receive the same treatment as native persons regarding access to education, scholarships, labour rights, and social benefits.^{lxii} Regarding employment, beneficiaries of refugee status are similar to the foreign population whose countries have a more favourable Convention of Establishment concerning employment.^{lxiii} Likewise, beneficiaries of refugee status may only be expelled from Benin for reasons of national security, if they are engaged in activities contrary to public order, or if they are sentenced to deprivation of liberty for acts qualified as crimes or offences of particular gravity.^{lxiv}

Benin's commitment to refugee policy was highlighted on World Refugee Day in June 2022, when the Beninese government reaffirmed its commitment to the international community to respect the right to asylum and the principle of non-refoulement by continuing to grant asylum; as well as recognising that the pattern of forced displacement is changing due to the multiplication of conflicts that have a significant impact on regions and sub-regions.^{lxv}

On the other hand, the impact of climate change in Benin cannot be ignored, as it is forcing the population to internal displacement.^{lxvi} The main problems are soil degradation and the increased frequency of natural disasters.^{lxvii} The causes of climate-related displacement of the population in Benin are related to the decline in fish production due to: the congestion of Lakes Nokoué and Ahémé; regular flooding and destruction of crops by stray animals and parasites; reduced economic activity due to the constraints of a complex ecological environment; and strong population growth which makes it difficult to redistribute the scarce resources available.^{lxviii, lxix}

In 2021, 10,000 climate-related displacements were recorded, mainly due to flooding.^{lxx} It should also be noted that violence and conflict are other factors that push people to move: 2,701 displacements were recorded for this reason in 2021.^{lxxi}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Benin is classified as Tier 2 in the US 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report since it does not meet the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking but is making significant efforts. COVID-19-related border closures limited cross-border exploitation but also hindered repatriation efforts. The economic impact and the school closures increased the risk of exploitation. Migrant workers were especially vulnerable since they were usually employed in the industries that were most impacted by the pandemic (particularly the services sector).^{lxxii}

Trafficking in the country is predominantly internal and involves Beninese children from low-income families who are exploited in forced labour or sex trafficking. Community members promise education or employment (under the so-called *vidomenon* practice) to recruit Beninese children from northern rural areas to the urban southern corridor. Forced marriage and informal employment agents are other means of recruiting child victims in Benin.^{lxxiii}

Girls are especially exploited in sex trafficking in Cotonou and Malanville. Many young female victims of trafficking are recruited in the departments of Oueme and Djougou. Moreover, traffickers exploit boys, girls, and women from Djougou, Bassila, Parakou,

Zakpota, Djida, Agbaizoun, Lobogo, Pobe, Sakete, and the Adja region.^{lxxiv} On the international level, cross-border criminal groups exploit Beninese children in forced labour in Nigeria, Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo. Furthermore, criminal groups fraudulently recruit young Beninese women for domestic work in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Algeria, exploiting them in forced labour or sex trafficking.^{lxxv}

In 2020, the Beninese government investigated at least 49 child sex and labour trafficking of children cases, compared to 117 in 2019. Moreover, authorities reported prosecuting 72 cases under the child trafficking and illegal transport of minors laws as well as 323 other cases that contained exploitative aspects. A total of 82 suspected child traffickers were reported to the court of Cotonou. Most arrests occurred along Benin's southern corridor in the cities of Abomey-Calavi, Port Novo, and Cotonou.^{lxxvi}

The Beninese state reported identifying and providing services to 363 potential victims. They patrolled borders, bus stations, and large markets to proactively detect child trafficking victims and refer them to shelters and services. NGOs identified 539 child trafficking victims (271 girls and 268 boys) and 63 adult victims (59 women and four men) and referred them to government social services. The OCPM (Central Office for the Protection of Minors) shelter provided legal, medical and psychological assistance to victims. The Ministry of Social Affairs and the network of Social Promotion Centres also provided essential services to victims in Benin's 77 communes.^{lxxvii}

Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice trained 75 magistrates on human rights and the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2020. It partnered with international organisations to train judges, prosecutors, social workers, and police to adjudicate human trafficking cases and to provide trauma-informed care to victims. Beninese consuls participated in a cross-border investigation of domestic servitude in Brazzaville involving Beninese children, and the Congolese judiciary convicted four of the traffickers. Moreover, the Beninese government provided documentation for a trafficking investigation involving Beninese children in the United States, resulting in the indictment of three suspects.^{lxxviii}

VI. National Legal Framework

Benin lacks a migration policy document, specific programmes, and an institutional framework covering migration.^{lxxix} However, multiple regional and international agreements governing migration issues conform to the nation's legal framework.^{lxxx} Regarding migrant workers, the Constitution of December 11, 1990, recognises several rights and obligations, such as access to education, to work, and to required documentation.^{lxxxi}

As for refugees, it must be highlighted that Law No. 75-41 from July 16, 1975 embodies rights for refugees in the state in line with the refugee status of the UNHCR.^{lxxxii} Regarding human trafficking, articles 499-504 of the Penal Code criminalise activities related to labour and sex trafficking and prescribe penalties in Benin.^{lxxxiii}

Regionally, being part of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), Benin has signed Protocol A/p 1/5/79, which recognises the free movement of people in the region and the right of residence and establishment in Member States.^{lxxxiv} This principle is reaffirmed by

the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA),^{lxxxv} which also recognises the right of nationals to seek employment and establish throughout the territory of the Union.^{lxxxvi} Moreover, Benin also has multiple bilateral agreements to protect the diaspora and control migratory flows, like the agreement of November 28, 2007 with France,^{lxxxvii} that of July 16, 2009 with Kuwait, or others with neighbouring states such as Niger^{lxxxviii} and Burkina Faso.^{lxxxix}

On the international level, Benin has been a signatory of the International Convention for the Protection of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families since 2005.^{xc} Likewise, Benin has signed Convention No. 143 of the ILO,^{xci} which aims to eradicate irregular migration.^{xcii} In 2001, Benin ratified the Convention against Torture and the Convention against all forms of Racial Discrimination,^{xciii} as well as the UN Convention against Transnational Crime^{xciv} and its Protocol^{xcv} in 2004.

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Ministry of Interior, through the Directorate of Emigration and Immigration (DEI), controls the entries and exits of migrants as well as their status in the territory.^{xcvi} It also ensures the application of legislative migration measures, airport and maritime security, and fights against illegal immigration. Likewise, the National Civil Protection Agency (ANPC) is responsible for issuing foreign visas and residence permits for Benin.^{xcvii}

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs protects migrant workers' rights abroad and fosters cooperation with other states.^{xcviii} It also assists returnees, reintegrates them into Benin, and examines the issuance and refusal of visas to enter the territory through Beninese consulates abroad.^{xcix}

The National Commission for Assistance to Refugees (CNAR) manages the files of asylum seekers and refugees.^c Furthermore, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the OCPM (Central Office for the Protection of Minors) coordinate to identify, assist, repatriate, and reintegrate child trafficking victims.^{ci}

International Organisations

The IOM, through the project "Partnership for Labour Migration," supports Benin, Cameroon, Mali, and Senegal to encourage the effective management of international mobility of migrant workers and stimulate the positive effects of labour migration on development.^{cii}

The National Program 2014-2020 between the EU and Benin,^{ciii} part of the European Development Fund for Africa, aims to collect missing data, create better networking opportunities, and make public international job offers (together with the IOM).^{civ}

ECOWAS and UEMOA help regulate the migration and integration of all their Member States.^{cv} They ensure the protection of migrant workers' rights through syndicalism.^{cvi} The

Multi-actors Platform on Migration (PNM) gathers different actors in protecting migrants' rights.^{cvii}

For its part, the UNHCR ensures the International Protection of refugees and asylum seekers in Benin in cooperation with the state actors. The organisation has provided medical assistance, carried out awareness campaigns about HIV, sexual violence, and refugees' rights, and works for legal promotion in Benin.^{cviii} UNICEF also helps displaced families in Benin: in 2021, it helped 186 displaced persons from Burkina Faso, providing them with hygiene, school kits, and medicine.^{cix}

NGOs and Other Organisations

Among the leading NGOs present in Benin is Plan International, which has been operating in the country since 1994 to support children in exercising their rights.^{cx} This organisation works alongside youth-led organisations, partners, and communities to ensure that vulnerable children, especially girls and young women, are informed, confident, and able to make critical decisions without fear of violence.^{cxii} Their work focuses on: ensuring that vulnerable young people have access to safe, high-quality sexual, reproductive, and maternal health services; providing children and young people with access to safe, inclusive, and quality education as well as suitable employment and entrepreneurship opportunities; protecting young people from all forms of violence and harmful traditional practices; and providing young children with early education and stimulation. They are present in Cotonou, Adjohoun, Bohicon, and Natitingou.^{cxii}

Another NGO working in Benin is *Terre des Hommes* (TDH). Many low-income families do not have access to health care, so many children suffering from serious pathologies cannot be treated. Given these situations, TDH pursues two main objectives in Benin: to facilitate access to specialised care on the ground and to ensure medical transfers of complex cases of children who cannot be operated on in their country to Europe.^{cxiii}

SOS Children's Villages supports children, youth, and families in Benin. Poor access to essential services, food, and education makes life for children in Benin a daily challenge. Very often, children have to work to financially support their families.^{cxiv} The work of this organisation focuses on providing support for family and young people, as well as foster care, education, advocacy, and training. The organisation collaborates with other care organisations and public authorities to raise awareness of children's rights.^{cxv}

The Catholic Church

Founded in 1970, the Benin Bishops' Conference (BBC) works for peace, social, and inter-religious dialogue. Regarding people on the move, the Episcopal Commission for the Sea and Migration Apostolate (*Commission Épiscopale de l'Apostolat de la Mer et des Migrations*) has been focusing on the pastoral care of seafarers as well as migrants and refugees, carrying out an increasing number of activities to support the most vulnerable. In 2021, the Episcopal Commission decided to start celebrating the World Day of Migrants and Refugees in order to raise awareness and highlight the need to overcome linguistic, national, regional, and racial divides so as to build a universal brotherhood.

Caritas Benin intervenes in several areas related to: essential social services (health, education, and water supply); humanitarian emergencies (help for the destitute and people in precarious situations); climatic emergencies (disasters such as floods, fires, famine, and transhumance); development (child protection, literacy, promotion and empowerment of women, agriculture, environmental protection, and fight against the structural causes of poverty).^{cxvi} This organisation works in partnership with grassroots communities and civil society organisations (CSOs). It also partners with international organisations and institutions such as *Secours Catholique (Caritas France)*, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), *Caritas Germany*, the UNHCR, Plan Benin, the Global Fund, UNICEF, *Terre des Hommes*, *Miséreor*, and USAID, among others.^{cxvii}

The Salesian Sisters, whose public figure in the country is the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians,^{cxviii} is dedicated to creating and promoting educational, cultural, social, and spiritual works, particularly in the service of youth and the promotion of women. Their work is divided into three sectors: the Laura Vicuña School of General and Professional Education; the Higher Institute for the Training of Specialised Educators; and the Social Works of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.^{cxix}

The work of the Salesian Sisters also includes operational centres such as *La Maison de l'espérance* (House of Hope), which focuses on assisting young people between the ages of 14 and 21 in difficult circumstances who have dropped out of school or have never attended school in searching for an education that will enable them to earn a decent living and to have hope for a better future. These young people also benefit from psychosocial and health support throughout their training received from the Sisters.^{cxx}

Finally, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) addresses the underlying factors affecting the health, education, and income of poor and vulnerable people in Benin by working on: improving family health and nutrition; getting more children into school, keeping them there, and improving their education level; enhancing household income equity; and building effective partnerships.^{cxxi}

CRS also provides a "partnership fund" to the *Caritas Benin* office that strengthens its support to and relationship with diocesan Caritas offices in order to address the social, educational, and health needs of local populations through helpful projects. Furthermore, CRS works in coordination with the government of Benin and contributes directly to the state's Action Plan - entitled "Benin Revealed"^{cxxii} - which consists of 45 major projects ranging from agriculture to tourism to improving living conditions (for example, by upgrading infrastructures, building social and economic housing units, and creating new job).

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