



Migration Profile

GUINEA-BISSAU

A. Executive Summary

Guinea-Bissau is a small country in the West coast of Africa. It was a Portuguese colony from the 19th century until its independence in 1973.ⁱ At that time, the country also established a strategic partnership with Cape Verde. In 1998 the country was embroiled in a political and military conflict.ⁱⁱ These historical and political factors have pushed the state to a fragile, post crisis situation with a scrambled economy and high rates of poverty (ranked 172 out of 177 in the UNDP's Human Development Index).ⁱⁱⁱ

Even though this political and economic context has fostered emigration from Guinea-Bissau to other countries, the State also hosts immigrants and refugees from bordering countries, mainly from Senegal and other nations in West Africa.^{iv}

Agriculture is the main financial resource and employment provider in Guinea-Bissau, although the country has high rates of labour informality and unemployment. Illegal activities such as drug trafficking^v and human trafficking^{vi} are also noteworthy. These factors, together with the weak economic and political structure,^{vii} hinder the reintegration of returnees. Health remains a real concern for the State: its HIV rate on the reproductive age population is 5.3%, the second highest rate in West Africa.^{viii}

As for internal migration, the country experiences mainly rural to urban migratory movements in search of job opportunities or due to storms and other climate disasters.^{ix} The capital, Bissau, hosts approximately one fifth of the total population, a prime example of high population concentration in urban areas.^x

Guinea-Bissau's GDP for 2020 stood at US\$ 1.43 billion.^{xi} While its growth rate was 4.5% of the GDP in 2019, it dropped to -2.4% in 2020.^{xii} Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) experienced a surplus in 2018 comprising 4.94% of its GDP, up from 1.36% in 2017. In 2019 the country had a deficit totalling 1.42% of its GDP.^{xiii}

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Guinea-Bissau is located in the Western coastal area of Africa, with Senegal to the north and Guinea to the southeast. Guinea-Bissau has a total surface area of 36,130 km²,^{xiv} and a

population of 2,058,258 inhabitants.^{xv} Most of the population lives in the capital city of Bissau and the rest is distributed across rural areas.^{xvi} The country is divided into 37 municipalities.^{xvii}

The official language is Portuguese, but only 11-14% of the population speaks it today, compared to Guinea-Bissau Creole, which is spoken by approximately 65% of the population.^{xviii} Likewise, there are multiple native languages in the State, such as Balanta, Fula, Mandjak, and Mandinka.^{xix} The main ethnic groups are the Fulani (28.5%), the Balanta (22.5%), the Mandinka (14.7%), and the Papel (9.1%).^{xx}

Regarding religion, the most practiced is Sunni Islam (45%), mainly in the eastern and northern areas of Guinea-Bissau, although there is a considerable percentage of Christians (31%) concentrated in the coastal and the southern region.^{xxi} The rest of the population mainly adhere to traditional African beliefs.^{xxii}

II. International and Internal Migration

Guinea-Bissau is a post-crisis State with a struggling economy and high rates of poverty.^{xxiii} Its fragile infrastructure and high unemployment rate make it an emigrant country that is highly dependent on foreign remittances (totalling US\$ 47 million or 3.1% of its GDP).^{xxiv} Economic activity in the country is highly informal and driven by agricultural activity. Lockdowns for the COVID-19 pandemic were detrimental for Guinea-Bissau's population.^{xxv} Following the pandemic, economic recovery has been hindered by limited social protection schemes and depleted public finances.^{xxvi}

Internal migration mainly occurs due to economic and climate factors. The low opportunities in rural areas foster the need for Bissau-Guinean young people to move to the cities in search of a job and better living conditions.^{xxvii} Furthermore, there are forced internal displacements due to storms and devastating droughts.^{xxviii}

Despite its high rates of emigration, the State is also a destination and transit country for many migrants from West and Central Africa.^{xxix} According to the most recent official data on migration, the number of immigrants in 2017 in Guinea-Bissau was 22,700 (including refugees), representing 1.19% of its total population.^{xxx} The State is willing to use the next census in 2023 to gather more information on immigration.^{xxxi} The principal countries of origin in 2017 were Senegal, Guinea, Gambia, Liberia, and Portugal.^{xxxii} In recent years, Guinea-Bissau has also received many evacuees from rescue operations in Libya assisted by the IOM.^{xxxiii}

Additionally, the State is making efforts to integrate returnees by implementing reforestation programmes in the eastern Gabu region.^{xxxiv} In 2019, 125 returned migrants and 76 community members participated in sanitation and reforestation activities.^{xxxv} Other income-generating activities are being developed in cooperation with the IOM, such as computer centres for the training of returnees.^{xxxvi}

Migrants confront difficulties such as smuggling, human trafficking, torture, violence, and cruel treatment.^{xxxvii} Guinea-Bissau is a major centre of recruitment for child trafficking in the West African region, mainly for forced begging in Senegal.^{xxxviii} Moreover, the drug trafficking

industry and the insecurity that it perpetuates makes it more difficult to achieve stability in the country and to integrate returnees.^{xxxix}

According to the IOM, the operational and administrative capacity to manage migration flows must be developed, including: bilateral and regional border checkpoints; raising awareness of the risks of irregular migration; smuggling and human trafficking; preventing crimes; and stimulating youth employment and entrepreneurship.^{xl}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

In 2019, 103,587 people emigrated from Guinea-Bissau, which constituted 5.39% of the population.^{xli} However, the available data has certain gaps due to non-registered movements through the porous border with neighbouring states. What's more, Guinea-Bissau's emigrants acquire other nationalities before arriving in Europe, which makes it difficult to ascertain the total number of Bissau-Guinean residents who reach the continent.^{xlii}

In general, the Guinea-Bissau emigrant profile is 52.87% male and 47.12% female.^{xliii} The main destination countries were Senegal (29.51%), Portugal (27.90%), and Gambia (13.31%).^{xliv} Emigrants from Guinea-Bissau are principally young people seeking livelihood opportunities abroad.^{xlv}

The emigrant profile varies according to their department of origin and due to internal inequalities. For instance, most of the emigrants from Braima Sori are male, mainly going to Europe and employed in the construction sector.^{xlvi} In contrast, emigration flows from Caimente are predominantly female, moving to Bissau or Senegal in search of education or job opportunities in domestic service and cleaning.^{xlvii} Braima Sori has a higher capacity to send remittances, while Caimente in contrast is a more precarious context and faces significant economic difficulties.^{xlviii}

Likewise, the brain drain of qualified personnel, especially in the health and education sectors, is a persistent problem that Guinea-Bissau has tried to address through the promotion of circular migration of members of the Bissau-Guinean diaspora in key areas.^{xlix}

The main drivers of emigration in the country are political instability, structural poverty, high unemployment, and difficulty in accessing education and healthcare.^{l, li} Guinea-Bissau is also heavily dependent on the cultivation and exploitation of cashew nuts and has not invested sufficiently in the diversification of its economy, making it difficult to create new job opportunities for the population.^{lii}

Indeed, Guinea-Bissau faces considerable problems of irregular emigration, particularly from the regions of Gabu, Oio, Bafata.^{liii} Young people face especially brutal situations, such as smuggling, and many die due to the extreme conditions while crossing the desert on the Central Mediterranean Route.^{liv}

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

According to the UNHCR, there were 1,861 refugees registered in Guinea-Bissau in 2020, of which 54.22% were women and 45.78% were men.^{lv} The main age group was 18-59 year olds (40.52%).^{lvi} In 2022, Guinea-Bissau recognised 2,114 refugees (2,075 of them from Senegal) and 37 asylum seekers.^{lvii} Other protection seekers came from countries such as Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Burundi, and Guinea.^{lviii} Among refugees and asylum seekers in Guinea-Bissau, the principal religion is Islam.^{lix}

The main reason for the arrival of the Senegalese population in search of refuge is the conflict situation that has ravaged Senegal since the 1980s.^{lx} Senegalese refugees mainly come from the Casamance region of Senegal, between Gambia and Guinea-Bissau.^{lxi} The Senegalese population lives in the north of the country (specifically in the Cacheu region) and it is spread over 57 villages along the borderline.^{lxii} Since the 1980s, the State has given the “*prima facie*” status to the Senegalese population.^{lxiii} However, Guinea-Bissau’s instability has significantly worsened the living conditions of refugee communities.^{lxiv}

Among the rights that Guinea-Bissau grants to refugees is that of access to the land: almost all refugees living in rural areas own the land where they have built their home.^{lxv} Traditional owners, and in some cases Bissau-Guinean authorities, have ceded the land to refugees at their arrival in the country. However, the process of formalising land transfers is subject to much red tape (including surveying all affected plots); and if their right to use the land is not recognised, refugees are exposed to arbitrary and abusive eviction, which has a negative impact on their livelihoods and autonomy.^{lxvi} Likewise, regarding the access to basic public services, many refugee communities are located far from public lighting, water supply, transport, primary care centres, hospitals, schools, and nurseries and thus have limited access to their basic needs and scarce information.^{lxvii}

As for Climate Displaced Persons, in 2018 there were 4,112 internal displacements registered due to storms.^{lxviii} The country has also experienced devastating droughts in the recent past (2002 and 2004).^{lxix} Natural disasters severely damage Guinea-Bissau’s economy and perpetuate internal displacements.^{lxx}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Guinea-Bissau is Tier 3 on the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report, since it does not meet the minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking, nor is the State making sufficient efforts to achieve it.^{lxxi} Foreign victims from Guinea, Gambia, and Sierra Leone are forced to beg in Bissau by corrupted Quranic teachers. The State collaborated with Senegal to repatriate 18 child trafficking victims in 2020.^{lxxii}

Bissau-Guinean boys attending Quranic schools (known as *Daaras*) are also exposed to forced begging, for example in the Afia neighbourhood. The traffickers are usually men from the notorious Gabu and Bafata regions. Weak institutions and porous borders enable traffickers to transport large numbers of Bissau-Guinean boys to Senegal, Mali, Guinea, and Gambia, forcing them into exploitative *Daaras* or into the agricultural and mining sectors. Within

Guinea-Bissau, boys are recruited and forced to beg, shine shoes, or harvest cashews during the annual harvest.^{lxxiii}

Girls are mostly forced into sex trafficking, street vending, and domestic work in Guinea, Gambia, Senegal, and Spain. They are supposedly recruited for modelling or traveling football clubs. In Bissau, girls are exploited in bars, nightclubs, and hotels in the archipelago of Bijagos, which is a hotspot for trafficking. French nationals own hotels on the islands and use Bissau-Guinean intermediaries to exploit minor girls for sex tourism. They also provide jobs and support to the island community, deterring victims from notifying law enforcement. Due to structural poverty, some families even encourage their children to be exploited in order to profit financially.^{lxxiv}

The main problems for combating human trafficking in Guinea-Bissau are a lack of resources, high rates of corruption and official complicity, and the absence of effective legislation of judicial prosecution and formal procedures to identify victims. In 2020, the State investigated 34 trafficking cases, 26 of them of which were sex trafficking cases and eight of which were for forced begging.^{lxxv} However, the State has never convicted a trafficker, and for the second consecutive year there have been no prosecutions of any alleged traffickers. Efforts in identifying and protecting victims are still insufficient. The Government identified and referred to care a total of 75 child forced begging victims and 24 child forced marriage victims in 2020, compared to the 158 victims of child forced labour and forced begging identified in 2019.^{lxxvi} The lack of formal procedures to identify trafficking victims and the high illiteracy rates among security services hamper victim detection and protection. Furthermore, the State relies on international organisations and local NGOs for protection services. The three existing shelters by NGOs for child trafficking victims are overcrowded and lack finance.^{lxxvii}

In the prevention field, some efforts were made by the State in 2020. There is an inter-ministerial committee (led by the IMC – Institute for Women and Children – and including government agencies, NGOs, and religious groups) who met seven times during the year. In addition, a new national action plan to combat human trafficking was adopted, although it has not yet been implemented. The lack of training and coordination between State and civil society actors causes difficulties in addressing human trafficking. The Ministry of Tourism and the IMC developed a code of conduct against sexual exploitation in the tourism sector in Bissau, Budaque, Bijagos Islands, and São Domingos. However, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, no activities were conducted. Moreover, the labour inspectorate lacks personnel, funding, and material resources; thus domestic workers are not protected by labour laws, which makes them vulnerable to human trafficking.^{lxxviii}

VI. National Legal Framework

Migration legislation in Guinea-Bissau is enshrined in the Citizenship Law of 1992 and the Nationality Law of 2010.^{lxxix} The latter protected against loss of nationality and enabled dual citizenship for the first time.^{lxxx} Nationality laws are also regulated in Article 44 of the Guinea-Bissau Constitution, as amended in 1996.^{lxxxi} The State lacks any specific laws regulating the rights of migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers, entry and stay in the country, and asylum applications.

Regarding human trafficking, Public Law 12/2011 criminalised sex trafficking and labour trafficking, prescribing penalties of three to 15 years' imprisonment and the confiscation of any proceeds from the crime.^{lxxxii}

On an international level, Guinea-Bissau has bilateral agreements with the Kingdom of Spain since 2008, in order to cover the admission of workers, to assist voluntary return, integration, and development; and to fight against irregular migration.^{lxxxiii} Guinea-Bissau has recently signed an agreement with Cape Verde (2021) in order to cooperate on consular services and the management of emigrant communities, as well as promote the integration and regularisation of Cape Verdeans nationals abroad through the creation of a legal framework.^{lxxxiv} Furthermore, Guinea-Bissau maintains bilateral agreements on migration with Algeria, Brazil, China, Cuba, Egypt, France, Gambia, Morocco, Portugal, Russia, Senegal, Tunisia, Turkey, and Venezuela.^{lxxxv}

Guinea-Bissau is a member of multiple international and regional conventions. The State acceded to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in 1976,^{lxxxvi} Guinea-Bissau has also been a signatory to the Protocol against Transnational Organised Crime since 2007,^{lxxxvii} as well as the Convention on the Reduction of Stateless Persons since its accession in 2016.^{lxxxviii} In 2011, the State ratified the Kampala Convention on IDPs in Africa,^{lxxxix} and also signed the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.^{xc} In 2013, Guinea-Bissau ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment^{xc} and the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture.^{xcii} Subsequently, the State ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in 2018.^{xciii}

VII. Main Actors

The State

The main State actor for migration management in Guinea-Bissau is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,^{xciv} which is responsible for assisting nationals abroad, as well as repatriated migrants and returnees.^{xcv} The Ministry also leads the Inter-Ministerial Committee on "Policies and Programs for the Promotion of Community Welfare and Development, including Migration," which serves as a high-level technical coordination mechanism for migration and community development.^{xcvi}

As for refugees, the National Commission for Refugees cooperates with the UNHCR to provide protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons, among others.^{xcvii}

Regarding human trafficking, the Institute for Women and Children is the organ responsible for coordinating identification and protection assistance for victims. However, the Institute lacks an operating budget and vehicles, making it deeply reliant on NGOs and other international organisations.^{xcviii} The Judicial Police had a specialised unit that investigated trafficking cases; but this also lacked nationwide coverage and a dedicated budget.^{xcix}

International Organisations

The main international actors in Guinea-Bissau's migration are the United Nations, the IOM, and the European Union. The UN Resident Coordinator and IOM established a country-based United Nations Network on Migration for Guinea-Bissau (known as "the Network") in order to facilitate effective, timely, and coordinated UN system-wide support on migration policy.^c Furthermore, the United Nations Country Team represents multiple agencies in Guinea-Bissau, such as the FAO, the OHCHR, the UNDP, the UNFPA, the UNHCR, UNICEF, and the WHO.^{ci} The work of the UNPAF in the country focuses on four main pillars: democratic governance; inclusive economic growth; human development and sustainable development; and disaster risk mitigation.^{cii}

As for the IOM, it is actively involved in multiple activities, in particular: migration health (including assessment and HIV counselling for refugees being processed for resettlement); financial development; regular migration flows; information services; legal and judicial capacity to combat human trafficking; and reintegration programmes for returnees.^{ciii}

In terms of EU action, the 10th European Development Plan aimed to, *inter alia*: improve stability and good governance in Guinea-Bissau; invest in human development, education, health, and social protection; and combat climate change.^{civ} The main objectives of the new 11th European Development Fund further concentrate on consolidation of the rule of law, urban sanitation, and health.^{cv} The UN Network on Migration for Guinea-Bissau endeavours to promote migration policy, and its implementation and review under the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM).^{cvi} What's more, the EU and the IOM have developed a common project on migrant protection and reintegration, with actions ranging from training and education to economic development and protection mechanisms, such as legal and psychological assistance.^{cvii} The IOM has recently created a new computer centre for returnees in the country involved in income-generating activities.^{cviii}

Guinea-Bissau is also member of the Economic Community of West African States,^{cix} the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation,^{cx} the Community of Portuguese Language Countries,^{cxii} and the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*.^{cxii}

NGOs and Other Organisations

The NGO Plan International has developed multiple programmes in Guinea-Bissau for the local integration of Senegalese refugees in the areas of health, education, water, and the coverage of other basic needs.^{cxiii} The recent project "Education for Senegalese refugees in Guinea-Bissau" has equipped 20 nurseries with furniture and school materials, and has developed educational activities.^{cxiv}

AMIC is an NGO that provides basic services to Guinea-Bissau's child population, for instance in welcoming.^{cxv} Other NGOs, such as SNLS (National secretariat against HIV^{cxvi}) or Tiniguena (for local development, biodiversity and youth protection^{cxvii}), also do considerable work in Guinea-Bissau.

The Catholic Church

The principal Catholic organisation in Guinea-Bissau is *Caritas*, which has been established in the country since 1982.^{cxviii} Its operations involve 41 parishes and missions throughout Guinea-Bissau, relating to the areas of health care, training, food security, emergency services, and support for income-generating activities.^{cxix} *Caritas* mainly operates in the two dioceses of Bissau and Bafatá.^{cxx}

Caritas has a strong presence in Guinea-Bissau, with 24 centres of nutrition rehabilitation, hospitals, and other centres specialised in HIV or maternal health. Moreover, there are education centres for raising awareness on HIV in schools, local products development, and technical-agricultural training in agriculture, beekeeping, fruit and vegetable processing, and cattle raising.^{cxxi} The majority of people arriving in Guinea-Bissau are Muslim and migrants arriving immediately seek to receive documents to quickly become Guineans. In this context, *Caritas* acts at the service of human promotion by its work in the areas of health, work, and education, addressing needs of all peoples.

Likewise, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has worked in Guinea-Bissau since 1998.^{cxxii} It has recently developed a four-year project (2019-2023) for the “promotion of educational and economic performance in educative communities,” which aims to increase literacy among school-aged children and develop good health, nutrition, and dietary practices.^{cxxiii}

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