

Migration Profile COMOROS

A. Executive Summary

The Union of the Comoros is an independent country including three islands in southeastern Africa, in the Indian Ocean.ⁱ It is densely populated, and 53% of its population is under 20.ⁱⁱ

Most immigrants in Comoros are from the Sub-Saharan African region. In 2020, their main countries of origin were Madagascar, Reunion Island, France, and the United Republic of Tanzania.ⁱⁱⁱ Comoros has historically been marked by high emigration flows.^{iv} In 2019, their main destinations were Mayotte, France, Madagascar, Libya, and Réunion.^v Many emigrants moved to Mayotte irregularly and, during the Covid-19 pandemic, they reached the country by using speedboats.^{vi} Nevertheless, Mayotte's agriculture and fishing sectors' restrictions due to the pandemic forced many migrant workers who lost their jobs to return to Comoros.^{vii}

Regarding refugees, in 2020 UNHCR recognised 19 people with refugee status coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, there is no national legislation or system in place to grant asylum and refugee status, or to protect refugees in the country. Its location and topography make Comoros highly vulnerable to climate change, and 54.2% of the population lives in at-risk areas. As a matter of fact, in 2019, 19,372 forced displacements were recorded due to a significant storm. Xi

Comoros' economy is vulnerable to external shocks and has experienced a decrease in diaspora remittances. XII Nearly one-fourth of the population is extremely poor. XIII The leading sector of its economy is agriculture, followed by fishing, forestry, and hunting. XIV It represents 40% of the GDP and employs 80% of the labour force. However, the country is not self-sufficient in food production and must import rice. XIV

In 2021 Comoros' GDP amounted to US\$ 1,296,089,630,xvi experiencing an annual growth rate of 2.1% if compared to the previous year's rate of -0.2.xvii Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) net inflows represented 0.3% of the country's GDP,xviii while the inflation rate was 0.1% of its GDP,xix This has been impacted by high global inflation levels and remains a concern in Comoros,xx

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Comoros is an African archipelago located in the Indian Ocean, occupying the northern part of the Mozambique Channel, between Madagascar and the southeastern region of Africa.xxi The country consists of 4 islands (from northeast to southeast): Ngazidja (French: Grande

Comore), Mwali (French: Mohéli), Ndzwani (French: Anjouan), and Mayotte (administered by France). It has a mountainous volcanic relief. The Karthala volcano (Ngazidja) is the highest elevation (2,361 m.) on the islands and one of the most active volcanoes in the world. Administratively, Comoros is divided into three islands (Ngazidja, Mwali, and Ndzwani), each comprising 54 communes (grouped into 16 prefectures).xxii

Comoros has a total area of 1,862 sq. km and a population of 899,729.xxiii Moroni (Ngazidja) is the capital and largest city with 42,872 inhabitants.xxiv Comorian (spoken by 96,6% of the population), French, and Arabic are the official languages.xxv Concerning religion, 98% of the population are Sunni Muslims, while Christians represent roughly 1% (0.5% Catholics and the rest include Shia Muslims and Protestants).xxvi xxvii Ethnic groups comprise Antalote, Cafre, Makoa, Oimatsaha, and Sakalava.xxviii

II. International and Internal Migration

In 2020, the number of migrants in Comoros was 12,496.xxix 51.6% of them were women, whereas 49.4% were men. 76.86% of immigrants came from Madagascar, 6.76% from Reunion Island, a French Overseas Region, 3.83% from France's mainland, and 1.14% from the United Republic of Tanzania. Overall, the majority of immigrants were from the Sub-Saharan Africa region.xxx

Migrants in the Comoros archipelago have the same access to public healthcare, social protection and education as Comorian citizens. Immigrants may be naturalized after a ten year residence in Comoros, and foreigners born in Comoros may acquire citizenship status after 5 years. Despite that, no specific law protects immigrants from hate crimes, violence, or discrimination. As a result, many citizens from Madagascar are usually underpaid or not regularised in the country. For this reason, Comoros and Madagascar are considering establishing a consular representation to deal with Malagasy's regularisation. Sexxiii

Malagasy populations share common religious practices and lexical similarities with Comorians. Chinese and Indian communities, instead, have not reached the same level of integration and usually remain socially disengaged. The Chinese presence in Comoros is employed in infrastructure development especially in civil engineering projects, while the Indian diaspora mainly comprises men engaged in trade or business activities.xxxiv

French immigrants are mostly concentrated in urban areas. However, most of the local population lives in rural areas and does not speak French. The French language is normally associated with social elites and is taught in educational institutions and French cultural centres.xxxv For instance, Henri Matisse high school often recruits French and Malagasy qualified teachers. This establishment, located in Mohéli, follows the French education system.xxxvi French governmental organizations such as campus France, Agence Française du Développement and Alliance Française have offices spread throughout the Comoros archipelago. xxxvii Other temporary projects, supported by the French embassy, mobilize French experts to provide training and expertise in preserving and restoring cultural heritage.xxxviii

Agence Française du Développement has also been involved over the last decades, primarily in the health sector. Obstetrical expertise has been provided by new centres created to train paramedical professionals. Furthermore, non transmittable diseases training was provided in 2016 by professionals arriving from Reunion Island.xxxix

Internal migration and subsequent family fragmentation occur within the archipelago for different reasons. Flows typically arrive from Ndzuwani and move towards Mwali and Ngazidja islands. Ngazidja island receives the highest number of internal and international migrants. Meanwhile, Mwali island offers opportunities in the agriculture and fisheries sectors. The most popular regions for internal migrants are Moroni, Mutsamudu, Fomboni, and the Bambao regions. Immigrants from Mayotte prefer to settle in Ndzuwani, whereas most Malagasy, East Africans, and French settle in Ngazidja. Alii

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Comoros has historically been affected by high emigration flows.xiii Until the 19th century, Comorian youth emigrated towards Islamic countries like Yemen, Egypt, and Zanzibar. After the arrival of the French colonial empire in 1886, migratory movements varied, and Zanzibar and Madagascar became the main Comorian destinations. Following their independence, the emigration of Comorian nationals was redirected towards France.xliv

According to the United Nations, in 2019 there were 120,298 emigrants abroad.xlv The main destination countries that year were Mayotte, France, Madagascar, Libya, and Réunion.xlvi The net migration rate in 2021 was -2.2 migrants/1,000 population.xlvii Emigrants are mainly female and young.xlviii Their average age is 22, and they are usually chosen by their families to migrate because of their physical skills and low rate opportunities in the Comorian employment market.xlix

In Mayotte, Comorian emigrants mainly move to its northeastern municipalities, around Mamoudzou.¹ In order to migrate, they need a *Balladur visa* that was introduced to reduce the large number of irregular immigrants in the country.¹i The main push factors are the search for better economic opportunities, their historical links, and Mayotte's geographical proximity.¹ii Due to the limitations of the pandemic, many Comorians attempted to migrate by using speedboats.¹iii Meanwhile, restrictions in Mayotte's agriculture and fishing sectors determined the return of many migrant workers to Comoros.¹iv

Regarding remittances, in 2020 they represented 18.6% of Comoros' GDP.^{Iv} Remittances from the Comorian diaspora in France contributed positively to the national economic development.^{Ivi} In fact, most of their money was sent to Grand Comore island (86% in 2008, corresponding to the vast majority of emigrants and their better socioeconomic conditions.)^{Ivii}

Comorian emigrants are vulnerable to smuggling and human trafficking due to the high rates of irregular migration. Iviii lix In Mayotte, the number of Comorian immigrants in detention centres is very high. Ix Brain drain is also a concern since most emigrants do not plan to return, deeply affecting Comoros' economic development. Ixi

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

In 2022, 1,739 refugees coming from Comoros and 1425 asylum seekers were recorded abroad. Their main destinations were France (80%), Mozambique (16%), and Greece (1%). Livii Instead in Comoros, UNHCR recognised 19 people with refugee status, and all of them arrived from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Lixiii

The main reasons for the displacement of Congolese people are related to the major conflicts taking place in their country over the last two decades, increasing poverty, violence, and riots

that have driven thousands of people to seek refuge in other countries, including Comoros. lxiv

Comoros has no national legislation for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government has not yet established a system to protect refugees. lxvi In this regard, UNHCR has been entrusted to conduct remote refugee status determination interviews for asylum seekers. lxvii

Finally, in 2019, 19,372 forced displacements were recorded within Comoros because of a major storm. Laviii

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Comoros is Tier 2 in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report.

Within the country, traffickers exploit women and children coming from rural areas and place them in urban cities, such as Moroni, in forced labour and sex trafficking. Malagasy girls are also exploited in domestic servitude and sex trafficking in Comoros. Economic migrants and asylum-seekers attempting to reach Mayotte from Madagascar, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, are also forced into labour and sex trafficking at various transit points. Laix

Due to a lack of adequate border controls, corruption and international criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling, Comorians may be at risk of transnational trafficking. Traffickers employ Comorian adults in forced labour in agriculture, construction, and domestic work abroad, especially in Mayotte and continental Africa, and domestic servitude in the Middle East. Traffickers in Anjouan may subject children, some of them abandoned by their parents, to forced labour in domestic service, roadside and market vending, banking, fishing, and agriculture. Most Comorian children aged between 3 and 7 (and some up to 14 years old) studying in informal neighborhood Quranic schools headed by private instructors may be vulnerable to exploitation, as well as physical and sexual abuse. An estimated 3,000 to 4,000 unaccompanied Comorian children in Mayotte are particularly at risk. lxx

In 2021, the country investigated 4 trafficking cases (3 for forced labour and 1 for sex and labour trafficking). Moreover, the government initiated its first trafficking prosecution, which involved a French-Comorian man accused of exploiting a Malagasy girl in forced labour in Comoros. Likewise, for the first time, the government identified 8 victims (6 of forced labour and 2 in forced labour and sex trafficking). 3 had been exploited in Comoros, and 5 abroad (in Côte d'Ivoire, Oman, Tanzania, and Mayotte). All of them were assisted with temporary housing, medical care, counselling, job training, and voluntary repatriation. However, the services on Anjouan and Mohéli were limited compared to those available in Grand Comore. Social service centres also provided temporary housing, medical care, psycho-social counselling, and legal assistance to trafficking victims. Ixxi

The government has developed and implemented standard operating procedures for victim identification in partnership with an international organization. It further trained officials at the islands of Grande Comore, Anjouan, and Mohéli. It carried out anti-trafficking awareness campaigns for the first time in three years. Moreover, it continued to fund two toll-free emergency lines to report crimes, but the government did not track call data related to potential human trafficking victims. Ixxii

Nevertheless, despite these efforts, the government still faces significant challenges. It has never convicted a trafficker and lacks a national referral mechanism (NRM) to refer trafficking victims to appropriate care. In 2021 it did not complete a long-term anti-trafficking National Action Plan (NAP); therefore, it continued implementing the 2020's NAP. Furthermore, it did not allocate sufficient funding, especially for children vulnerable to trafficking. There is an essential lack of resources to investigate trafficking cases. Moreover, it did not provide anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel, nor did it try to reduce demand for commercial sex acts. lxxiii

VI. National Legal Framework

The Constitution of Comoros from 2018 regulates the nationality law, as amended, lxxiv as well as the Comorian Nationality Code from 1979 and its revisions, lxxv and various international agreements to which the country is a signatory. These laws determine who is, or is eligible to be, a national of Comoros. The legal means to acquire nationality, formal legal membership in a nation, differ from the domestic relationship of rights and obligations between a national and the nation, known as citizenship.lxxvi

Comoros has neither a national legislative framework on asylum nor any laws or procedures to protect rights and safeguards to which asylum-seekers and refugees are entitled.\(^{lxxvii}\) In addition, no laws establish procedures for statelessness status determination or provide a framework for protecting stateless persons in the country.\(^{lxxviii}\)

In June 2020, Comoros acceded to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol. lxxix In February 2021, the government amended the Criminal Code to convict sex trafficking and labour trafficking offenders. Article 266-11 of the new criminal code prescribes penalties of 7 to 10 years imprisonment and a fine for human trafficking crimes. lxxx

Comoros has not acceded to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (hereinafter jointly referred to as the 1951 Convention). In 2004, Comoros ratified the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, commonly referred to as the OAU Convention. Lexicology of the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, commonly referred to as the OAU Convention.

In 2004, Comoros ratified the 1969 International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, lxxxii as well as the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The country is also a party to the Palermo Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons. lxxxiii

In 2000, Comoros signed but not ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.xc

Comoros has also not acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (hereinafter referred to as the 1954 Convention) and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (hereinafter referred to as the 1961 Convention). Description of Statelessness (hereinafter referred to as the 1961 Convention).

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Multi-sectoral Monitoring and Steering Commission for Migration Issues in the Union of Comoros, which was established in 2018 at the initiative of the Ministry of the Interior,

Decentralization and Territorial Administration in collaboration with IOM, oversees the ministerial coordination on migration issues. lxxxv

The Central Department for Immigration and Emigration, under the Directorate General for Police and National Security, reviews the conditions of entry and stay for foreigners in Comoros. The Law establishes the conditions for visiting or moving to Comoros, for remaining as a resident or to work, and for deportation handled by four agencies: the Central Border Police, the Central Service for the Production and Issuance of Biometric Documents, the Visa Service in charge of issuing visas on arrival in Comoros, and the Central Domestic Surveillance Service. Ixxxvii

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is responsible for emigration-related matters and policies for engaging with the diaspora. It promotes activities through its Office for Comorians Abroad, established in 2011 by Decree No. 11-234. The Office is mandated to identify diaspora members and upholds their rights as citizens of Comoros, especially regarding their right to vote and invest in Comoros. lxxxviii

International Organisations

UNHCR's South Africa Multi-Country Office (SAMCO) serves nine countries: Botswana, Comoros, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, and South Africa. Description

Since UNHCR has no presence in the Union of Comoros, the country is covered by UNHCR's Regional Representation for Southern Africa (ROSA), located in Pretoria, South Africa, which has had so far limited contact with the Comorian Government. Due to undocumented and irregular migration, persons of Comorian descent are exposed to a high risk of statelessness abroad, especially in Madagascar.xc

UNICEF financially contributed to the joint response efforts organised by United Nations agencies in collaboration with the Government, Comorian Red Crescent, and French Red Cross.xci These interventions focused on water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), providing education supplies and essential non-food items.xcii In addition, a UNICEF staff responsible for protection activities provided specific psychological support through daily visits to families in need.xciii

Comoros is under the IOM Regional Office for Southern Africa in Pretoria, South Africa.xciv The IOM Country Office in Mauritius runs IOM's activities in Comoros.xcv It supports migrants returning to Comoros from various destinations and transit countries to reintegrate sustainably within their communities.xcvi

In addition, IOM promotes the Comorian diaspora's active engagement in the country's sustainable development, including institutional capacity building and diaspora outreach activities.xcvii

NGOs and Other Organisations

Local NGOs in Comoros do not specifically target immigrants as individuals with special needs. However, many local projects focus on improving access to resources and essential services for people in vulnerable situations. *Mouvement Associatif pour l'Éducation et l'Égalité des Chances*, for instance, focuses on Early Childhood and Primary education. Their main mission is to promote equal education for Comorian civil society, including the diaspora.xcviii

International NGOs in the field of poverty relief are also active in Comoros. UK-registered organisations such as Humanity for East Africa^{xcix} work in this area. Meanwhile, international organisations such as Muntada Aid provide resources in emergency areas, assisting communities affected by disasters.^c

Other international NGOs, such as the Arab Scientific Community Organisation, gather researchers from Comoros, among other Arab countries, to promote scientific research to serve humanity. The organisation's main goal is to solve environmental problems and provide poverty relief.^{ci}

The Catholic Church

The Apostolic Vicariate of the Comoros Archipelago^{cii} is part of the Indian Ocean Bishops' Conference, encompassing the bishops of Mauritius, La Réunion, Mayotte, and Seychelles.^{ciii}

Caritas Comoros has three parishes: St. Therese of the Child Jesus in Moroni, Anjouan, and Our Lady of Fatima in Mamudzu (Mayotte, French department). Caritas Comoros has two areas of intervention. Firstly, its work focuses on providing healthcare services to the population through a medical centre and first aid locations in the three posts of the Union of Comoros. They also run a reception and support centre for the poor and a nutrition centre. Secondly, it works on women's self-sustainability, including three drop-in centres for women and girls, providing them with literacy, sewing, embroidery, and sewing courses. Caritas works with several local partners: the Ministry of Health, the Union of Comoros School of Medicine and Public Health, the French Embassy, UNICEF, and the Red Cross, among others.

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ci Arab Scientific Community Organisation, 2023 cii Catholic Hierarchy, ciii Kripkit civ Caritas

cv Ibid.