



Migration Profile

LIBERIA

A. Executive Summary

Liberia is a Western Africa country bordered by Sierra Leone to the northwest, Guinea to the north, Cote d'Ivoire to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south and the west. Liberia is the first African country to have had an elected female head of state, who served as its 24th president from 2016 to 2018.

Internal conflict in the country led to an eight-year long civil war from 1989 to 1997, when about 200,000 people were killed. The civil war resulted also in some 175,000 people becoming either internally displaced or refugeesⁱ. In addition to being a country of origin, destination, and transit for migrants, Liberia has seen the return of more than 155,000 of its citizens, who had fled the country during the civil warⁱⁱ.

Liberia has a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.480 and is ranked at 175 out of 189 countries, putting it in a low human development categoryⁱⁱⁱ. More than half of the population (50.9%) lives below the national poverty line. This means more than 2.3 million Liberians are unable to meet their basic needs^{iv}.

Ravaged by civil war for eight years and two health crises – Ebola and Covid-19, Liberia continues to face massive development challenges, like attracting more foreign direct investment, infrastructural development, and diversifying its economy.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Liberia is a Western Africa country bordered by Sierra Leone to the northwest, Guinea to the north, Cote d'Ivoire to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south and the west. It has a total surface area of 111,369 sq. km, and a population of over 5 million people^v. Monrovia is its capital city. Liberia is an ethnic polarised society, with 28 ethnic groups and languages. Its ethnic composition is as follows: Kpelle 20.3%, Bassa 13.4%, Grebo 10%, Gio 8%, Mano 7.9%, Kru 6%, Lorma 5.1%, Kissi 4.8%, Gola 4.4%, Krahn 4%, Vai 4%, Mandingo 3.2%, Gbandi 3%, Mende 1.3%, Sepo 1.3%, other Liberian 1.7%, other African 1.4%, and non-African 1%^{vi}. English is spoken by 20% of the population, and it is the country's official language with some 20 other ethnic languages, of which few can be written and used for

correspondence. Christianity is the predominant religion (85.6%), Muslim (12.2%), traditional (0.6%), other (0.2%), none (1.5%)^{vii}.

II. International and Internal Migrants

In Liberia it is the rural production (iron ore, diamond, gold, and most especially agricultural products) that sustains the country; however, rural areas do not have adequate development projects. Road networks, hospitals, or schools to enable them to grow, as well as government transformational policies and programs are usually developed in urban areas, creating there more opportunities and perpetuating an increase in rural-urban migration^{viii}. Poverty incidence in rural areas stands at 71.6%, more than twice as high if compared to the one in urban areas (31.5%)^{ix}. The search for employment and a source of livelihood are the main drivers of internal migration in the country.

In Liberia, 53.1% of the whole population live in urban areas, especially in the Greater Monrovia, which is comprised of the cities of Monrovia and Paynesville, the Townships of Congo Town, Westpoint, Garwolin, Gardersville, Bardenersville and Borough of New Kru Town harbours, where over 40% of Liberians reside.

In 2019, there were 94,448 immigrants in Liberia. The stock of male immigrants stood at 53,857, while female immigrants were 40,591. The top 5 countries of origin are Guinea (28,963), Côte d'Ivoire (20,090), Sierra Leone (18,099), Ghana (8,081), and Nigeria (4,689)^x.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

In 2019, there were 219,338 Liberian emigrants, representing 4.44% of the total population^{xi}. The stock of male emigrants stood at 109,444, while females were 109,894. The top 5 countries of destination for Liberians are the United States of America (92,311), Ghana (34,234), Côte d'Ivoire (27,962), Nigeria (21,522), and Sierra Leone (9,393)^{xii}.

High unemployment, delayed payments, and comparatively low salaries for professionals in Liberia make the emigration of skilled people particularly attractive for young professionals. Liberia has approximately 300 medical doctors^{xiii}, and a doctor-patient ratio of 1:15,000^{xiv}. Despite the scarcity of skilled professionals in the country, the European Federation of Liberian Association (EFLA) indicates that more than 50% of trained Liberian professionals have migrated and remained abroad^{xv}.

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)

In 2019, there were 8,746 refugees and asylum seekers in Liberia. Refugees came mainly from Cote d'Ivoire (8,623), constituting more than 98% of all refugees in Liberia, and other nationalities (77), while asylum seekers were only 46^{xvi}. The government of Liberia reported that with the new arrival of 27,920 Ivorian refugees between 2020/2021, the total number of refugees in 2021 stood at 31,944, with 18,208 opting to voluntarily return to Cote d'Ivoire^{xvii}. Refugees are located in three camps (Bahn, PTP, and Little Weibo), in host communities, and in the urban location of Monrovia^{xviii}. UNHCR cooperates with the government through the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), providing assistance

and protection to refugees and asylum seekers^{xxix}. The main reason for forced migration, for example, from Cote d'Ivoire was the political instability in their country. However, with peace being restored in their country, Ivorian refugees are voluntarily returning home (in June 2019, 232 refugees went back). Furthermore, the UN is recommending a general cessation of the Ivorian refugee status starting from June 30, 2022^{xx}, thus increasing even more the number of returnees over the coming years.

Recently, natural disasters, such as floods and droughts, have become the main drivers of internal displacement in Liberia. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), there were 1,200 IDPs in Liberia as of December 2020, as a result of environmental disasters^{xxi}. For example, in June 2020, the Montserrado and Margibi counties experienced torrential rainfalls that caused flooding in Monrovia and in parts of Margibi, displacing about 2,500 people^{xxii}.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Liberia is classified a tier 2 country in the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report. Despite its efforts in combating trafficking, Liberia does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Human trafficking in Liberia is more prevalent than transnational trafficking, and its victims are mostly moving from rural into urban areas. Victims also arrive from Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, India, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Tunisia, Morocco, China, and Cuba. Liberians are exploited in human trafficking in Thailand, Lebanon, and Finland^{xxiii}. In 2020, the government identified 29 trafficking victims^{xxiv}. They are predominantly children who are exploited by family members under the pretext of providing them with a better life in the cities. They are engaged in child sex trafficking, street vending, and the sale of illicit drugs. Women are exploited in sex trafficking, domestic servitude, while most men are employed in forced labour in gold and alluvial diamond mines.

The Ministry of Labour (MOL) opened a shelter for child labour and child trafficking victims, which could accommodate up to 13 children. The government also operated the Liberian child village for victims of neglect and abuse, providing short-term shelter for child trafficking victims. In addition, the government relied on NGOs and private shelters especially when its own places were still unavailable^{xxv}.

Some challenges faced by victims of human trafficking in Liberia include the lack of identity protection of victims hosted in shelters, making them more vulnerable, as well as a lack of shelter capacity.

VI. National Legal Framework

The most important piece of legislation governing immigration and emigration is the Alien and Nationality Law of the Republic of Liberia, regulating the legal regime of exit, entry, and residence of foreign citizens in Liberia. Concerning human trafficking, the 2005 Anti-trafficking law, that prohibits all forms of human trafficking and prescribed penalties for defaulters, set down guidelines on how victims of human trafficking will be treated. The

government is a signatory to the 2021 Roadmap for the Comprehensive Solution for Ivorian Refugees^{xxvi}.

Liberia is a signatory to several migration-related international conventions. For example, Liberia signed and ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the 1969 AU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugees Problems in Africa. Liberia has also ratified the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa – the Kampala Convention, the ECOWAS Protocol on Facilitation of Free Movement of nationals of member states, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants and Members of Their Families and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Liberia has also ratified several international human rights treaties, which include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW), the Convention against Torture and other cruel inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

VII. Main Actors

The State

The bureau of the Liberia Immigration Service (LIS) under the Ministry of Justice which is responsible to implement and enforce the Alien and Nationality Law of Liberia immigration and provide border management and control, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in charge of the protection of nationals abroad, are the two key ministries responsible for migration-related issues in Liberia^{xxvii}. Other migration-related ministries include the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MOGCSP) and the Ministry of Labour (MOL), which assist the victims of human trafficking and deal with labour related issues. The Anti-trafficking Task Force and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MOGCSP), coordinate victims' care. MOGCSP operates shelters in Lofa and Nimba for gender-based violence victims, where female victims have access to long-term care and social services^{xxviii}. MOGCSP also operates several transit centres where at least a trained nurse in sexual and gender-based violence, a social worker, and a police officer are offering services to victims.

Other related bureaus include the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission which provides assistance and protection to refugees and asylum seekers. UNHCR, in collaboration with the Government of Liberia, handles the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)^{xxix}.

International Organisations

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) are the two main international organisations dealing with migration-related issues in Liberia.

IOM works in the areas of assisting voluntary return, and reintegration, counter-trafficking, migration management, resettlement, and reintegration, and providing assistance to strengthen the health sector.

In addition to working in the areas of assisting voluntary return, resettlement, and reintegration, UNHCR cooperates with the government for refugee registration and documentation. It also provides humanitarian assistance to refugees, advocates for the inclusion of refugees in the development plan, and provides support to the government to develop policies and legislations, which are consistent with global commitments related to refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people.

Other UNHCR international partners in Liberia are the World Food Programme (WFP) which provides food assistance to refugees residing in the three refugee camps. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) seeks to provide all children with access to water, sanitation, nutrition, education, health, and protection services. The Red Cross Society (IFRC) provides help to strengthen the legal frameworks for international disaster legal assistance. Other project partners include the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Save the Children, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

NGOs and Other Organisation

Other NGOs involved in migration-related issues include the Platform for Dialogue and Peace. It is a Liberian peace-building NGO, involved in research and participatory action activities by strengthening the ability of state and non-state actors to prevent, manage, and transform conflict through collaborative action. Second Chance Liberia is a non-profit organisation created to bring hope and a sense of belonging to orphans and disadvantaged youths, locally referred to as *Zogos*. Women Solidarity Incorporated (WOSI) is a women-focus group working to alleviate abuses and exploitation of women and girls, providing for them opportunities to rebuild their lives, cater for their families and contribute to community building.

The Catholic Church

There are currently two dioceses (Cape Palmas and Gbarnga) and one archdiocese (Monrovia) in Liberia, serving the Catholic population. The presence of the Catholic Church through its humanitarian organisations makes a difference in the lives of so many people living in Liberia, especially the most vulnerable. With the high youth unemployment, many Liberian youth nurse the desire to better their lives in Europe through irregular migration, drawing their aspirations from stories related by their peers who have successfully made the journey. Most of these migrants end up in the hands of traffickers who either rob or exploit them, as they embark on their journey to Europe. Four out of five Liberian migrants find themselves stranded in Niger^{xxx}. Most of these migrants caught between a rock and a hard

place often decide to return home. For example, between January and June 2019, nearly 400 Liberians with the assistance of IOM voluntarily returned to their homeland^{xxx}. The Catholic Relief Services (CRS), in partnership with the Action for the Protection and Integration of Migrants in Africa (APIMA), creates economic opportunities for youths who return, by developing their personal sense of direction and hope for the future, through skills development programmes^{xxxii}.

With the government's limited capacity to handle disaster and emergency responses, CRS is exploring possibilities of building disaster preparedness and resilience within communities through community education on preventive measures. CRS also assists affected families with necessities like food, mattresses, clothing, and cash^{xxxiii}.

The National Commission for Justice, Peace, and Caritas through a participatory action approach, seeks to enhance the role of the Church in achieving transparent and accountable institutions, and in promoting access to basic services, economic and social inclusion of most marginalised communities, by encouraging faith actors to be immersed in the life and realities of the people they serve, while engaging with the government to promote greater citizenship participation. This approach enhances citizen engagement in the decision-making process on issues patterning to their development. Success through this approach is achieved through a partnership between faith actors and civil society.

The Salesian Missions offer educational (technical and vocational training), psychological and recreational activities and lifesaving meals to the vulnerable population in Liberia. For example, they provide after-school programs to students in the Don Bosco Centre in Monrovia, where former child soldiers and other young people have the opportunity to experience some of the joy of childhood^{xxxiv}.

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D. Endnotes

ⁱ UNHCR, 2013

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ UNDP, 2020

^{iv} The World Bank, 2021

^v CIA – World Factbook, 2022

^{vi} Ibid

^{vii} Ibid

^{viii} Apeh, C. et al, 2018

^{ix} World Bank, 2021

^x Countryeconomy, 2019a

^{xi} Countryeconomy, 2019b

^{xii} Ibid

^{xiii} European Commission, 2020

^{xiv} Gaber, 2018

^{xv} European Federation of Liberian Association (EFLA), 2020

^{xvi} UNHCR, 2019

^{xvii} Republic of Liberia, 2021

^{xviii} Ibid

^{xix} Ibid

^{xx} UNHCR, 2021

^{xxi} IDMC, 2021

^{xxii} IFRC, 2020

^{xxiii} US Department of State

^{xxiv} Ibid

^{xxv} Ibid

^{xxvi} Republic of Liberia, 2021

^{xxvii} Rabat Process, 2018

^{xxviii} Ibid

^{xxix} Republic of Liberia, 2021

^{xxx} CRS, 2019a

^{xxxi} Ibid

^{xxxii} Ibid

^{xxxiii} CRS, 2019b

^{xxxiv} Salesian Missions, 2022