



## Migration Profile

### EQUATORIAL GUINEA

#### A. Executive Summary

Equatorial Guinea is located in Central Africa and its capital city is Malabo. The official language is Spanish and most of the population is Catholic.

The country is a member of the African Union (OAU), the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).<sup>i</sup>

Migratory flows in Equatorial Guinea have undergone significant changes over time.<sup>ii</sup> Initially, the country experienced large-scale internal migrations marked by an accelerated process of rural exodus and the growth of the country's main cities.<sup>iii</sup> The economic prosperity also attracted foreign labour.<sup>iv</sup> In fact, since 2015 immigration has increased, and in 2020 migrants represented 16.79% of the population.<sup>v</sup> Their main countries of origin are France, Sao Tome and Principe, Spain, Cameroon, and Gabon,<sup>vi</sup> while the main countries of emigration are Gabon, Spain, Guinea, and Cameroon.<sup>vii</sup>

Regarding refugee and asylum applications in Equatorial Guinea, although the country has recognised in its Fundamental Law (1991) the right of asylum<sup>viii</sup> and adopted the OAU Convention regulating the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa in 1969,<sup>ix</sup> the government has not established a system to provide protection for refugees.<sup>x</sup>

Equatorial Guinea is currently one of the leading economies in Africa, with the highest per capita income on the continent.<sup>xi</sup> It is a country rich in natural resources such as oil and gas, and has a solid industry in sectors like agriculture, livestock, fisheries, and forestry.<sup>xii</sup> The United Nations considers Equatorial Guinea a medium-developed country.<sup>xiii</sup>

In 2021 Equatorial Guinea's GDP amounted to 12,269,392.79 USD,<sup>xiv</sup> with an annual growth rate of -0.9%.<sup>xv</sup> In 2020 Foreign investment (FDI) net inflows represented 5.2% of the country's GDP. <sup>xvi</sup> The inflation rate in 2020 was 4.8%. <sup>xvii</sup>

#### B. Country Profile

##### I. Basic Information

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is located in Central Africa. It is formed by an insular and a continental area and has a total surface of 28.051,46 sq. km,<sup>xviii</sup> with a total population in 2021 of 1,454,789 inhabitants.<sup>xix</sup> The main ethnic groups are the Fang that is originally from the mainland, the Bubis from the island of Bioko, the Ndowe located on the coast of the

Continental Region, and the Annoboneses on the Island of Annobon, the country's only territory located in the southern hemisphere.<sup>xx</sup>

The official language is Spanish, but also French and Portuguese are widely recognised as official languages.<sup>xxi</sup> In addition, some other native languages are spoken within the country, like Fang, Bubi, Annobonese, and English Creole (Pichinglish).<sup>xxii</sup>

The main religion is Catholic, representing 87% of the whole population. However, most recently Protestants and Muslims have increased because of the immigrant population.<sup>xxiii</sup>

## **II. International and Internal Migrants**

In 2020, Equatorial Guinea registered 230,618 immigrants.<sup>xxiv</sup> The main countries of origin were France (52.18%), Sao Tome and Principe (17.08%), Spain (14.62%), Cameroon (9.11%), Nigeria (4.09%), and Gabon (2.92%).<sup>xxv</sup> Immigration is mainly male (77.06%), and the main age group is 25-29 years old.<sup>xxvi</sup>

There are three categories of immigrants in Equatorial Guinea: firstly, highly qualified foreign workers (from France and Spain) who occupy senior management positions in key sectors of the economy (i.e., hydrocarbons, technical support for higher education).<sup>xxvii</sup> Secondly, skilled and semi-skilled workers (from Cameroon, Lebanon, China, Morocco, and Senegal) who because of their technical expertise are employed in sectors such as construction, electricity, hotels, and restaurants, where workforce is lacking.<sup>xxviii</sup> Third, there are low-skilled or unskilled workers (from Burkina Faso, Mali, Benin, and Chad) employed in the informal urban trade, agriculture, logging, fishing, and forestry.<sup>xxix</sup>

The main factors attracting immigration to Equatorial Guinea are related to higher salaries.<sup>xxx</sup> Nevertheless, the low immigration from neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Nigeria and Gabon is striking. Despite the Free Movement Zone within CEMAC, there are still obstacles to the mobility of the population of the region.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Additionally, immigrants in Equatorial Guinea, especially regional migrants (from Cameroon, Nigeria, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Central African Republic, Chad, and Mali), often face difficulties<sup>xxxii</sup>. In 2017, the borders with Cameroon were closed and the construction of a border wall started, which was however interrupted in 2020.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Finally, in terms of internal migration, the country has experienced an accelerated process of rural exodus and consequently a growth of its main cities (the urbanisation rate in 2015 stood at 70.6%), because of the transition from an agriculture-based economy to a secondary and tertiary economy.<sup>xxxiv</sup> In fact, 50% of the population is concentrated in the provinces of Bioko Nord and Littoral, where the country's most important cities (Malabo and Bata) are located and are considered the main poles of economic attraction.<sup>xxxv</sup>

## **III. Emigration and Skilled Migration**

In 2020, Equatorial Guinea had 128,774 emigrants (15.38% of its total population). More men (53.39%) than women (46.61%) left their homeland and their main destination countries were Gabon (67.9%), Spain (17.5%), Guinea (8%), Cameroon (3%), and the Republic of Congo (1.2%).<sup>xxxvi</sup> Among the main reasons are the exploitation of natural resources and the low level of social prosperity.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

It is estimated that until the 1990s, about 33% of Guineans were emigrants, generating one of the greatest diasporas of post-colonial Africa.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Most of them moved out after the independence and went to Europe (especially Spain), although the low emigration before the 1970s meant a lack of support networks in the destination countries.<sup>xxxix</sup> In addition, in the 1980s Guineans moved to countries of the region such as Nigeria and Cameroon, due to economic and educational reasons.<sup>xl</sup> Those pursuing higher studies went as far as the Soviet Union, Cuba, China, and North Korea.<sup>xli</sup> The sudden discovery of oil deposits reversed, however, the regional migration flow since the mid-1990s,<sup>xlii</sup> and many Equatoguinean citizens formed new educational migration bonds with France, the USA, China, and many other countries of the world.<sup>xliii</sup>

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

Regarding refugee and asylum applications in Equatorial Guinea, although the country has recognised in its Fundamental Law (1991) the right of asylum<sup>xliv</sup> and adopted the OAU Convention regulating the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa in 1969, there is no system in place to protect refugees.<sup>xlv</sup>

In 2021, 168 persons coming from Equatorial Guinea applied for refugee status mainly in France (35.71%), Spain (17.86%), Germany (16.07%), Canada (11.31%), and the United States (10.12%), and also 296 asylum applications were submitted.<sup>xlvi</sup> In 2022, 165 Equatoguinean refugees and 296 asylum applications were recorded.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Research on climate change and its impact on forced displacement and the environment in Equatorial Guinea is very limited; therefore, it is difficult to find specific data on this subject.<sup>xlviii</sup>

Nevertheless, the leading causes of displacement within the country are related to agricultural practices, logging, indiscriminate hunting and destruction of mangrove habitat, and artisanal mining. Unregulated mining affects the availability of essential resources for the national economy, especially in rural areas, where these represent the primary source of employment and livelihood.<sup>xlix</sup> This situation increases the workload of the people living in the affected areas and the resulting migration flow of most of the working population to the cities.<sup>l</sup>

#### **V. Victims of Human Trafficking**

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea was ranked Tier 2 in the 2022 US trafficking report since it did not meet the TVPA's standards for eliminating trafficking activities, but is making efforts to do so.<sup>li</sup> The government dropped all the anti-trafficking law enforcement compared to the previous report, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity.<sup>lii</sup> Because of this decision, the country has remained on the *Watch List* for the second consecutive year since 2020.<sup>liii</sup>

The victims are foreign and local people, mainly trafficked for domestic forced labour and sexual exploitation to Malabo, Bata, Mongomo, and Ebebiyin,<sup>liv</sup> mostly wealthy and safe places attracting Central and West African migrant workers. Regarding female trafficking, it is mainly related to commercial sex in the Malabo neighbourhoods of Banapa, Paraiso, and Upper and Middle town.<sup>lv</sup> In fact, in countries such as China and North Korea, some firms

recruit people to work in the Equatoguinean sex industry and confiscate their passports, thus increasing their vulnerability to forced labour.<sup>lvi</sup>

In addition, the economic recession of the pandemic and the fall in oil prices have caused the exploitation of children in mining and agriculture as forced workers. Furthermore, Equatoguinean business owners use minors as vendors and launderers, primarily children from Benin, Cameroon, Gabon, Nigeria, and Togo.<sup>lvii</sup>

The main concern is the lack of awareness of the problem, which hinders the country's ability to identify victims and address the crime.<sup>lviii</sup> There is also a lack of professional agencies and personnel to handle the issue.<sup>lix</sup>

Despite this, the country undertook some initiatives in 2021 and started to carry out through the media a raising awareness campaign in society about human trafficking. International experts also offered different training sessions to government officials.<sup>lx</sup> Moreover, the government reported the allocation of funds to the Ministry of Justice and NGOs to boost its anti-trafficking efforts, resulting in the creation of different initiatives such as seminars to raise awareness among civil society actors and other activities to strengthen the country's institutional capacity to combat human trafficking.

## **VI. National Legal Framework**

Equatorial Guinea recognises in Article 18 of its Fundamental Law (1991) the right of asylum.<sup>lxi</sup> In addition, it adopted the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, that was signed in September 1969 and came into effect in 1974.<sup>lxii</sup> This recognises the need for an essentially humanitarian approach to solving the problems of refugees, understanding that their situation creates friction and emphasising proper screening of refugees to avoid fomenting undesirable foreign activity.<sup>lxiii</sup>

In 2018, Equatorial Guinea hosted an AU (African Union) ministerial meeting that included the adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on specific aspects of the right to nationality and the elimination of statelessness in Africa.<sup>lxiv</sup>

Additionally, in 2019 the country entered the Kampala Convention on Internally Displaced Persons,<sup>lxv</sup> when it took the lead in the African Union for refugee, returnee, and IDP issues.<sup>lxvi</sup> Equatorial Guinea committed in 2021 to working with UNHCR and the AU to establish more adequate standards in the treatment of refugees and to foster cooperation and solidarity with the countries of origin.<sup>lxvii</sup> The Fundamental Law regulates the Equatoguinean nationality but excludes those born in Equatorial Guinea to foreign parents.<sup>lxviii</sup> After ten years of residence, naturalisation is granted, however foreigners are excluded from political rights.<sup>lxix</sup>

Lastly, Law no. 3/2010, of May 30, Regulator of Immigration Law in Equatorial Guinea, manages the entry and exit of people, international agreements, residence permits, and the conditions of permanence in the country.<sup>lxx</sup>

## **VII. Main Actors**

### *The State*

In Equatorial Guinea, several public agencies related to migrations are subsidiaries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. Such is the case of the Presidential Board in Matters of International Organisations, the Regional Delegation of the Ministry and the

General Directorate of Consular, Cultural, Legal and Diaspora Affairs.<sup>lxxi</sup> In addition, the INTERPOL National Central Office is active in the country and works as a link between Equatoguinean law enforcement institutions and other countries, coordinating internal legislation with policing institutions in the region and the world.<sup>lxxii</sup>

### *International organisations*

UNHCR has a Multi-Country Office in Cameroon that also provides services in Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe.<sup>lxxiii</sup> It meets the needs of refugees and IDPs, providing them with the proper documentation and promoting their self-reliance.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

IOM (UN Migration), among other agencies, organises and handles integration processes in the region to implement protocols for free movement, residence, and establishment of citizens of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), with little success, nonetheless.<sup>lxxv</sup>

UNICEF is a trusted partner of the Equatorial Guinean state, with a leading role for its regional partners through the UN joint programs.<sup>lxxvi</sup> It also works on advocacy to place children at the centre of the country's development agenda through the 2019-2023 Country Program.<sup>lxxvii</sup> Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the African Union Commission, the Economic Commission for Africa (UN), and IOM are working together on the Joint Labour Migration Project to strengthen governance and regulation of labour migration and mobility, as well as the enhancement of sustainable development in African regional integration.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

In addition, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) works on efficient cooperation along migration routes and structurally connects public policy, research, capacity building, and migration dialogue.<sup>lxxix</sup> Its Migration Mobility Dialogue is the main programme developed in Equatorial Guinea.<sup>lxxx</sup>

Finally, it is worth mentioning three agencies that deal with labour rights and standards, integrated employment policies, and social security for migrants: the Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHS) of the AU Commission, the Specialized Technical Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons (AU), and the Experts Group Meeting on Development of Methodologies on Migration and Mobility Statistics in Africa (AU).<sup>lxxxi</sup>

### *NGOs and Other organisations*

The United Nations Population Fund is active in Equatorial Guinea and provides emergency obstetric and neonatal care, as well as sexual and reproductive health services for young people and migrants.<sup>lxxxii</sup> The organisation cooperates with national institutions to amend laws to protect women's rights and generate high-quality demographic data on population dynamics, youth, and gender equality.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

*Humanium* is another NGO that is present in Equatorial Guinea and focuses on respecting, defending and promoting children's rights with the aim of fighting human trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

*Manos Unidas* also collaborates with the Carmelite Sisters of Charity Vedruna Congregation in Equatorial Guinea in the fight against trafficking and the protection of minors.<sup>lxxxv</sup> *Manos*

Unidas funds projects related to the education and reception of victims, and provides legal support to them.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

The Red Cross is active in the country through the Cameroon Red Cross delegation.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> The delegation promotes international humanitarian law, assists people displaced by violence, re-establishes contact between separated family members, and visits detainees.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> It provides the migrant population with food aid, and easier access to water and health care.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

The Red Cross also cooperates with UNICEF to protect children, young people, and women in the country.<sup>xc</sup> Furthermore, it is actively involved during humanitarian emergencies caused by natural disasters (floods, droughts, epidemics, and population displacements), providing a timely and effective response. These two institutions work in accordance with national legislation on civil protection and emergencies.<sup>xcii</sup>

### *The Catholic Church*

Caritas Equatorial Guinea engages with the poor and disadvantaged, in addition to its ongoing presence in climate emergency situations, such as floods and fires. It is also active in the fight against AIDS, and in training for hygiene and nutrition.<sup>xcii</sup>

The Catholic Relief Services (CRS) deals with the most immediate necessities of the Equatoguinean society. It also handles the supply chain management of food, shelter, and basic services for refugees, especially those coming from Nigeria and Sierra Leone.<sup>xciii</sup>

The Association of Catholic Teaching Centres of Equatorial Guinea is an organisation established by the national Episcopal Conference. It focuses on education and health, with the endorsement and support of the Guinean government, and responds to the needs of society, especially children and youth, with projects that have a national impact on the Ministry of Education.<sup>xciv</sup>

The Carmelite Sisters of Charity Vedruna work in Equatorial Guinea. They are involved in schools for the promotion of agricultural activity, carpentry, and sewing workshops.<sup>xcv</sup> They also work in projects financed by Manos Unidas with the aim of combating human trafficking, and sexual and labour exploitation of children in the country.<sup>xcvi</sup>

The Dominican Sisters of Presentation established in 2016 the Samba Martine Human Rights Observatory which includes Equatorial Guinea and deals with accompaniment, awareness-raising, and advocacy on behalf of migrants and victims of human trafficking.<sup>xcvii</sup>

## **November 2022**

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