

Equatorial Guinea

Country Overview

Politics

Equatorial Guinea is a multiparty constitutional republic in name. The president, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo has been in power since October 1979. He was reelected in 2016, during elections which many deemed to be neither free nor fair. His party holds complete executive power,¹ and 2016 elections were largely boycotted by opposition parties.² President Obiang's party holds 169 of 170 parliament seats, and the president has the power to hire and fire judges as he sees fit. His administration has taken advantage of this, using the courts to ban and harass political opposition groups.³

Economy

Equatorial Guinea is classified as an upper middle-income economy by the World Bank.⁴ In 2020, the country's GDP was USD 10.02 billion, and the country experienced a 4.9 percent decline in GDP from 2019.⁵ The country's economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas, which account for more than 85 percent of export earnings,⁶ and the 2014 drop in oil prices sent the country into a recession. Equatorial Guinea also produces minerals such as gold, zinc, and diamonds, as well as agricultural products which include coffee, cocoa, root vegetables, livestock, and timber.⁷

The government has made efforts to diversify the economy away from oil and attract investment in the country's agriculture, fishing, mining, tourism, and financial services sectors. However, widespread corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency have made it challenging for Equatorial Guinea to find international investors.⁸

Social/Human Development

According to Human Rights Watch, Equatorial Guinea has "by far the world's largest gap between per capita wealth and human development score."⁹ The Human Development Index score for Equatorial Guinea for 2020 was 0.592, and the country ranked 145 out of 189 countries.¹⁰ According to the CIA World Fact Book, in 2011 44 percent of the population lived in poverty.¹¹ The country faces severe income inequality, and its substantial oil revenues are primarily used for infrastructure development and have not significantly impacted standard of living for the majority of the population.¹²



Equatorial Guinea had a population of roughly 857,008 as of July 2021. Approximately 85.7 percent of the population are part of the Fang ethnic group. Other ethnic groups include the Bubi (6.5 percent), Mdowe (3.6 percent), Annobon (1.6 percent), and Bujeba (1.1 percent).¹³ About 88 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, and 5 percent is Protestant, however many Christians also incorporate elements of traditional indigenous religions into their faith.¹⁴

U.S. Department of State TIP Report Summary (2021)

U.S. Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 2

The U.S. Department of State reports that staff of sub-contractors in the oil industry and related construction sectors are reportedly vulnerable to indicators of forced labor. The oil sector is linked to a demand for commercial sex as well as workers in the domestic, hospitality, and restaurant sectors, who are often exploited under conditions of forced labor.

Read the full TIP Report at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/equatorial-guinea/>

Migrant and Other Vulnerable Populations

Equatorial Guinea had a positive net migration of roughly 80,000 people in 2017.¹⁵ The international migrant population in the country was estimated to be 227,600 as of 2019, or 16.8 percent of the total population.¹⁶

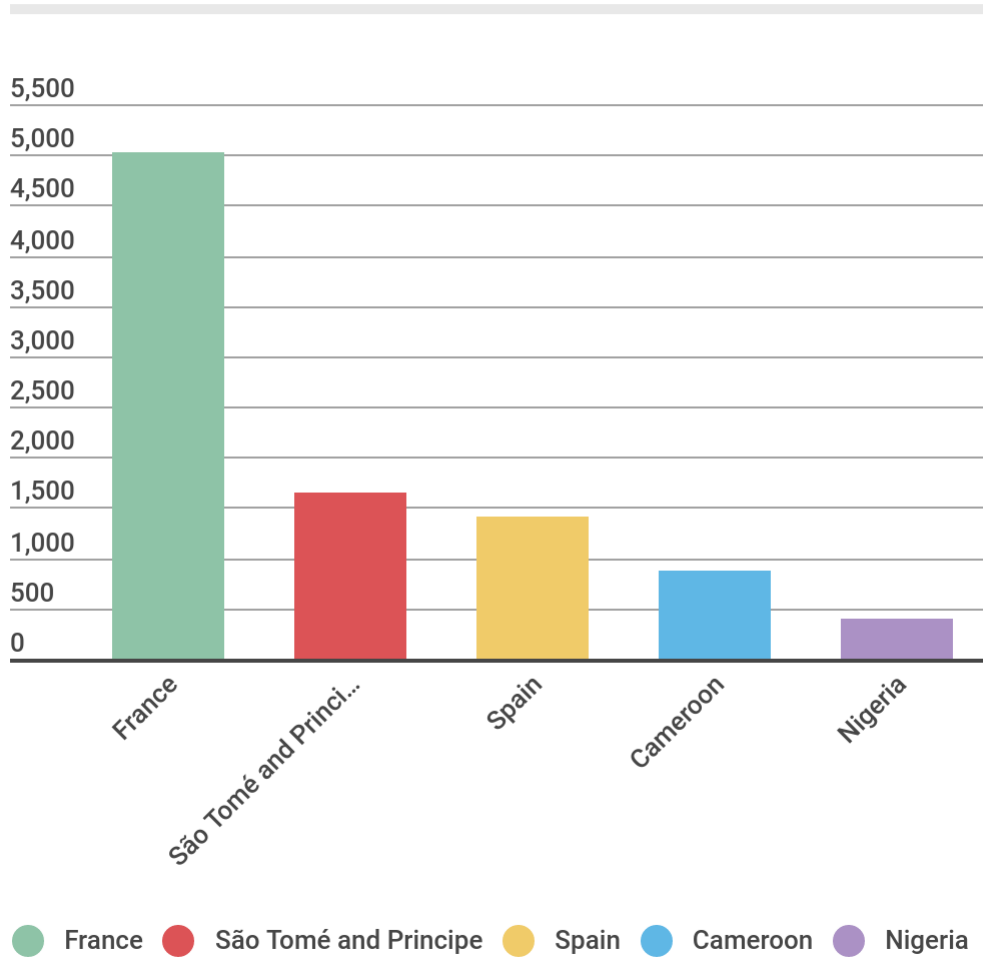
The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) does not have data for vulnerable populations such as internally displaced persons and stateless persons within Equatorial Guinea. According to the U.S. Department of State, the Equatorial Guinean government has not cooperated with organizations providing protection for refugees and other persons of concern, nor have they created their own system for protecting refugees. UNHCR does not have an office in the country.¹⁷

A country of origin for the vast majority of migrants to Equatorial Guinea could not be identified, and the majority of migrants have been classified as arriving



from “Other South” followed by “Other North.” The top identifiable sending countries for migrants to Equatorial Guinea in 2019 were France, São Tomé and Príncipe, Spain, Cameroon, and Nigeria.¹⁸

Migrants to Equatorial Guinea

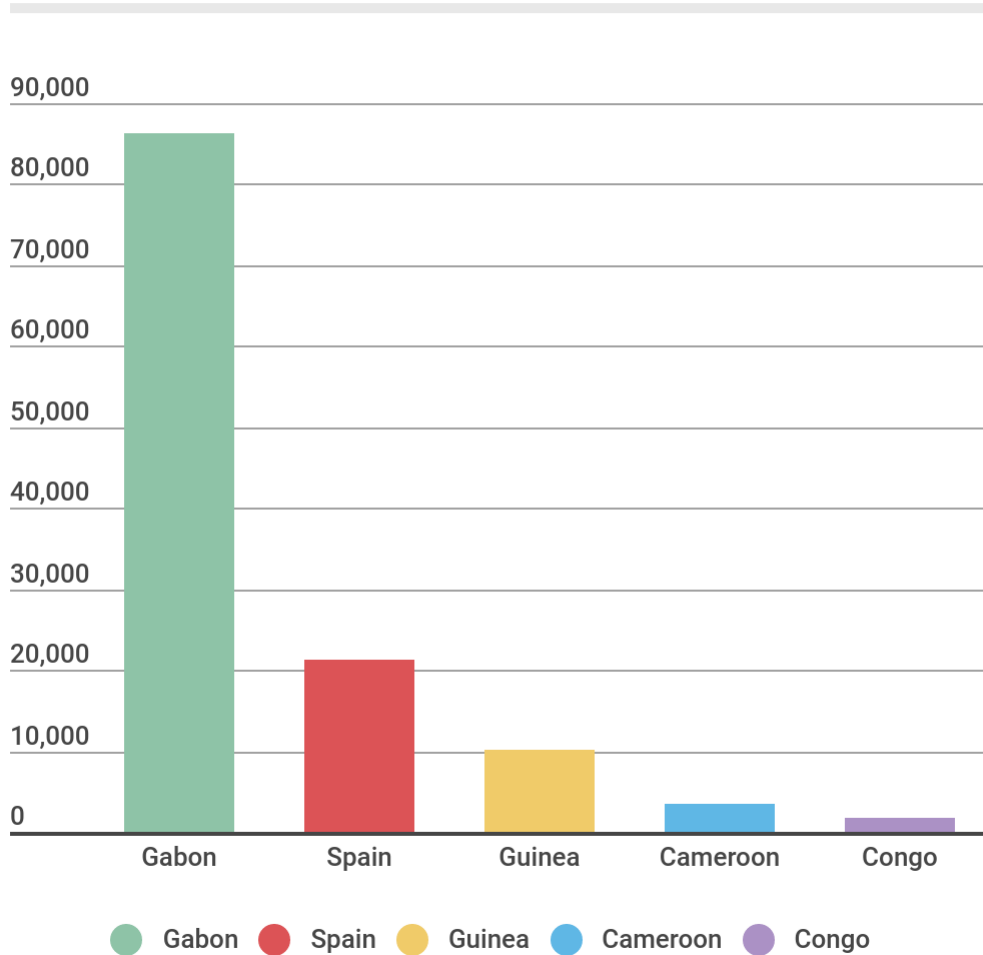


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The top destination countries for migrants from Equatorial Guinea in 2019 were Gabon, Spain, Guinea, Cameroon, and Republic of the Congo.²⁰



Migrants from Equatorial Guinea



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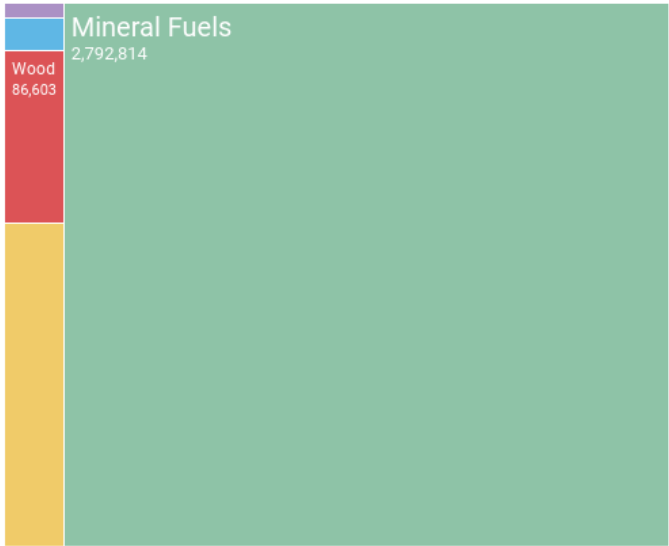
Exports and Trade

The top export for Equatorial Guinea in 2019, by far, was mineral fuel. Other key exports include organic chemicals, wood, iron and steel, and other unspecified commodities.²²



Top Commodity Exports (USD/Thousands)

2020

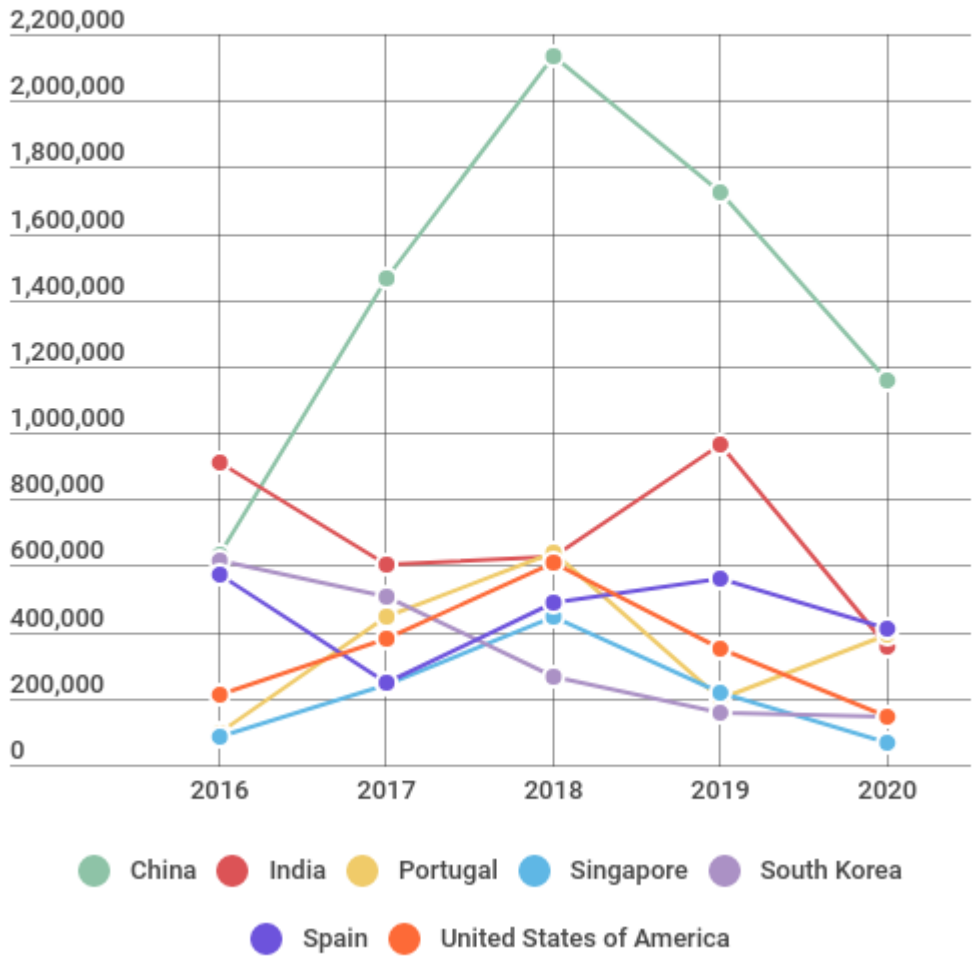


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The top importers of all goods from Equatorial Guinea in 2020 were China, Spain, Portugal, India, and South Korea.²⁴



Equatorial Guinea Export Partners (USD/Thousands)



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Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors Analysis

Legal/Policy Risk Factors

Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers' Rights



Freedom of Association

The right to Freedom of Association is protected by law but severely restricted in practice. Although the law provides workers the right to establish unions, it also requires a union to have 50 members from a workplace to register, which effectively blocks union formation. As of 2020, there was only one functioning union. The right to strike was affirmatively protected by legislation, but no law protected workers fired for union activity.²⁶

Working Conditions

The monthly minimum wage varies by occupation from CFA 129,000 (USD 219) to CFA 1,290,000 (USD 2,190) in the private sector.²⁷ The standard workweek is 48 hours per week for daytime work, 36 hours per week for nighttime work, and 42 hours per week for mixed day and night work. The U.S. Department of State reports that the government seldom monitors workers in the informal sector, where most of the workforce is employed, and does not effectively enforce worker protection laws in the formal sector.²⁸

Discrimination

Equatorial Guinean law prohibits discrimination based on race, skin color, sex, religion, political opinion, national origin, social status, or union affiliation. However, the law does not prohibit discrimination based on age, disability, sexual orientation, language, refugee or stateless status, or HIV/AIDS status. The U.S. Department of State reports that the labor laws are not effectively enforced, and employment discrimination with respect to political affiliation, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, disability, and HIV/AIDS status has occurred, as well as discrimination against foreign migrant workers. Large gender gaps in equal pay and employment opportunities have also been reported.²⁹

Forced Labor

The law prohibits forced labor, but the government has not fully met the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking despite making significant efforts to do so, according to the U.S. Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons* Report. The government has recently prosecuted two potential trafficking cases, dedicated more funding to and expanded governmental coordination for anti-trafficking efforts, and developed formal victim screening and referral procedures. However, penalties, enforcement mechanisms, and victim identification and protection remain inadequate, and corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes are of significant concern. The State Department has reported various situations of forced labor around the country, predominantly in domestic service, commercial sex, and the hospitality and restaurant sectors.³⁰



Child Labor

The law prohibits the employment of children under the age of 18, except for light work between ages 16 and 18 that does not interfere with their schooling. However, the U.S. Department of State reports that child labor laws are not effectively enforced and the government does not keep data on the worst forms of child labor. Education is compulsory until age 13, and most children attend school through the sixth grade.³¹

Civil Society Organizations

The U.S. Department of State reports that the government severely restricts the authorization and operations of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and has harassed, intimidated, and detained members of civil society organizations without charge. Additionally, the government reportedly monitors NGOs through internet and telephone surveillance. No international NGOs have offices in Equatorial Guinea.³²

Ratification of ILO Conventions Related to Human Trafficking or Rights of Workers and Migrants

Conventions	Status
ILO 29 Forced Labor	In force
ILO 87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize	In force
ILO 98 Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining	In force
ILO 100 Equal Remuneration	In force
ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor	In force
ILO 111 Discrimination	In force
ILO 138 Minimum Age	In force
ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies	Not ratified
ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor	In force
ILO 97 Migration for Employment	Not ratified



Political Risk Factors

Political Instability or Conflict

Equatorial Guinea scored 84.1 on the 2021 Fragile States Index and was placed in the “High Warning” category as the 44th most fragile state. The score increased by 1.1 points from 2020.³⁴ The U.S. Department of State reports that the political process is corrupt, with civil servants being removed for political reasons without due process, and opposition members subject to arbitrary arrest, harassment, surveillance, and torture. The electoral process lacks transparency and includes irregularities such as polling station intimidation and social media restriction.³⁵

In 2019, 130 people suspected of participating in an attempted coup were brought to trial. The prosecution obtained some confessions under torture and restricted defendants’ access to lawyers. President Obiang appointed two new military judges during the trial, and these judges prevented defendants from presenting evidence of previous misconduct.³⁶

Level of Crime and Violence

The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), a division of the U.S. Department of State, reports that the most common crime reported by foreigners in Equatorial Guinea is extortion by corrupt police officers. Armed and unarmed robberies are also an issue.³⁷

The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime reported that Equatorial Guinea had a homicide rate of 5.8 intentional homicide victims per 100,000 people in 2018.³⁸

State Persecution

The U.S. Department of State reports that societal discrimination and political marginalization of minorities are problems in Equatorial Guinea. The Fang group dominates political and economic power, and the president has referred to foreigners as a security threat in multiple public speeches. The U.S. Department of State has reported that security forces frequently harass and extort foreigners and members of minority groups with impunity, sometimes at gunpoint. Security forces also reportedly discriminate against LGBTI persons and groups; these abuses have not been investigated by authorities.³⁹

Level of Corruption

The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index scored Equatorial Guinea as 16 out of 100 in 2020, where a 0 signals “Highly Corrupt” and a 100 signals “Very Clean.” Equatorial Guinea ranked 174 out of 180 countries on that



index.⁴⁰ The U.S. Department of State reports widespread corruption across all levels of government. While the law provides criminal penalties for corruption, the government does not effectively enforce the law, and many officials engage in corruption without facing repercussions.⁴¹ Human Rights Watch reports that few private media outlets exist, and they are mostly owned by those close to the president.⁴²

Socio-Economic Risk Factors

Level of National Economic Development

The UN Human Development Index places Equatorial Guinea in the medium human development category, ranking the country 145 out of 189 countries with a score of 0.592 for 2020. The majority of Equatorial Guinea's neighbors rank lower than Equatorial Guinea, including Nigeria, Central African Republic, and Cameroon.⁴³

Level and Extent of Poverty

The poverty headcount ratio at the national poverty lines is 44 percent in 2011, according to the CIA World Fact Book.⁴⁴ This number represents the percentage of the population living below the national poverty line. The Central Intelligence Agency reports that the unemployment rate in Equatorial Guinea was 8.6 percent in 2014.⁴⁵ Unemployment has been an issue for the country in recent years, since the oil sector dominates the economy and relies primarily on skilled foreign labor. Income inequality has also been an issue, due to government corruption and mismanaged funds.⁴⁶ However, the government has not maintained accurate statistics on unemployment in the country.⁴⁷

Degree of Gender Inequality

The UNDP Human Development Report estimates that 54.8 percent of the female population ages 15 and older participates in the labor force, compared to 67.1 percent of the male population.⁴⁸ The constitution guarantees equal treatment of men and women, but the law discriminates against women in matters of nationality, property, and inheritance, and discrimination is compounded by negative stereotypes and adverse cultural norms and customs around gender. The U.S. Department of State reports that women are paid less than men for the same work. Additionally, since most women work in the informal sector, they have limited access to benefits such as social security.⁴⁹



Landlessness or Dispossession

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reports that more than half of the total land area in Equatorial Guinea is made up of protected areas and productive forests.⁵⁰ The U.S. Department of State reports that individuals may hold the title to land, but the state has full power of eminent domain and does not offer compensation to the titleholders when they exercise that power.⁵¹

Environmental Factors

According to the U.S. Department of State, current environmental issues include deforestation, desertification, water pollution, and the preservation of wildlife. The country's expansive forests are threatened by agricultural expansion, fires, and grazing.⁵²

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Oil and Gas

Oil and Gas Overview

The exploitation of oil and gas has driven economic development in Equatorial Guinea since the 1990s.⁵³ That sector accounted for more than 60 percent of GDP, 80 percent of government revenue, and 86 percent of exports in 2015.⁵⁴ However, almost none of the state funds coming from oil revenues have been allocated to public projects or development initiatives. Instead, they have been funneled to state elites, particularly those close to President Obiang.⁵⁵

Documented TIP Risk in Oil and Gas

Sub-contractors from the oil/gas sector and related construction industry reportedly confiscate foreign workers' passports and subject workers to substandard working conditions.⁵⁶ Equatorial Guinea's oil wealth has attracted migrants from China, neighboring countries, and Latin America. The U.S. Department of State reports that the oil sector is linked to a demand for sex trafficking and trafficked domestic work.⁵⁷ Recently, decreasing oil prices and production as well as economic decline exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the replacement of some foreign domestic workers with child laborers from rural areas.⁵⁸



Forestry/Wood Sector

Forestry/Wood Overview

Forests cover 93 percent of the landmass in Equatorial Guinea.⁵⁹ The forests include tree species that are used for plywood and veneers, both of which are desirable for Asian manufacturers.⁶⁰ The government banned logging exports in 2007 but, following a two-year drop, China has continued to import wood in large quantities.⁶¹

Documented TIP Risk in Forestry

Equatorial Guinea lost over 12 percent of its forests between 2000 and 2012,⁶² and it is expected that deforestation will continue in spite of the ban if China continues to import products. Over half of the population relies on forest resources for subsistence livelihoods,⁶³ meaning that a significant portion of the population will be at risk of losing their livelihoods and being displaced should deforestation continue. Greenpeace has reported, “The country is failing to enforce laws and create transparency in a forest sector plagued by rampant corruption, a lack of accountability and collusion between authorities and timber companies.”⁶⁴ In 2021, the Equatorial Guinean government has launched a new USD 1 million project alongside the FAO to increase transparency in alignment with the Paris Agreement and strengthen capacity and techniques in the agriculture and forestry sectors to control levels of deforestation and land degradation.⁶⁵

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