

GUINEA-BISSAU



Official name: República da Guiné-Bissau

Form of government: Republic with one legislative house (National People's Assembly [1022])

Head of state: President José Mário Vaz

Head of government: Prime Minister Umaro Sissoco Embaló

Capital Bissau

Official language: Portuguese

Official religion: none

Monetary unit: CFA franc

Population: 1,834,000

Total area: (sq mi) 13,948

Urban-rural population

Urban: 48.6%

Rural: 51.4%

Life expectancy:

Male: (2015) 48.2

Female: (2015) 52.3

Literacy:

Male: 68.2%

Female: 48.3%

GNI per capita: (U.S.\$) 590

INTRODUCTION

When the former colony of Portuguese Guinea won its independence in 1974 after more than 10 years of warfare, it became the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, a small West African nation. The Bijagós



Archipelago, lying off the coast to the southwest, forms part of the country. It is one of the poorest countries in Africa, and the name Guinea remains a source of debate. It is perhaps a version of an Amazigh (Berber) word meaning “land of the blacks.” The country also uses the name of its capital, Bissau, to distinguish it from Guinea, its neighbor to the east and south.

LAND and CLIMATE

Although small, the country can be divided into three regions: coastal lowlands, the interior plain, and the northeastern highlands. Rainfall is highest along the coast, averaging 100 inches (254 centimeters) per year. But is less than 50 inches (130 centimeters) in the highlands. April and May are the hottest months, and temperatures can reach the high 90s F.

Guinea-Bissau’s three ecological zones—the tidal estuaries, the heavily forested interior plain, and the savanna—are home to remarkably diverse flora and fauna. Aquatic birds such as flamingos and pelicans are especially numerous in the coastal swamps, which are also inhabited by a variety of reptiles such as snakes, crocodiles, and endangered sea turtles. The are also home to a unique breed of saltwater hippopotamuses. In the plains and forests, lizards, gazelles, antelopes, monkeys and apes, parrots, hyenas, and leopards abound.

PEOPLE

The four major ethnic groups in the population are the Balante, Fulani, Mandyako, and Malinke. The official language is Portuguese, but Crioulo, a mixture of Portuguese and national dialects came about during the slave trade, is spoken throughout the country. Some 40 percent of the people practice Islam, and another one-fifth is Catholic. Much of the rest of the population practices traditional beliefs, including worshiping ancestors and

animals.



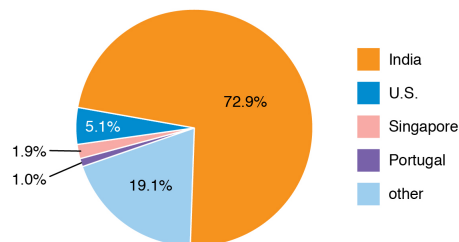
Population growth in Guinea-Bissau is lower than that of the rest of the African continent. Life expectancy for both men and women is well below the African average and substantially lower than the world average, and infant mortality is high. The population of Guinea-Bissau is, on the whole, very young: about two-fifths of the population is under age 15 and about two-thirds under 30. Guinea-Bissau does not have a significant expatriate population living outside the country, except those in the neighboring countries of Guinea and Senegal.

The poor performance of the economy has led to a variety of social ills. Health conditions are among the worst in the world. Illiteracy is extremely high, and only about 40 percent of school aged children (7-14) attend school.

ECONOMY

Guinea-Bissau is underdeveloped. About 60 percent of national production comes from agriculture, most at the subsistence level which. And farming employs more than 75 percent of the labor force. Leading crops include rice, millet, roots and tubers, and various fruits.

Major export destinations (2011)



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Since more than 70 percent of the land is forested, wood is the most common fuel. Much lumber is also used for industrial purposes. Wood products are among the country's leading exports; cashew nuts are by far the top export, however.



HISTORY

The pre-colonial history of Guinea-Bissau has not been fully documented in the archaeological record. Though, the area has been occupied for at least a millennium, first by hunters and gatherers and later by decentralized agriculturalists who used iron implements for their rice farming. Starting in the 13th century gold, slaves, and marine salt were exported from Guinea toward the interior of the Mali empire, which ruled over the area, which was then known as Guinea-Bissau.

Contacts with the European world began with the Portuguese explorers and traders who arrived in the first half of the 15th century. Although Portugal had long claimed it, Portuguese control over the colony was not achieved until 1915. Resistance to Portuguese rule erupted in 1961, and independence was won in 1974.

Initially, Guinea-Bissau was a socialist dictatorship. Political unrest continued after independence, and the government was overthrown in a military coup in 1980. The coup was staged in protest against part of the 1980 constitution that promoted Cape Verde domination in its unification with Guinea-Bissau. Under a new constitution in 1984 the Council of State replaced the Revolutionary Council that had taken over the country four years earlier.

In May 1991 the parliament legalized opposition parties, ending 17 years of one-party rule. The country held its first multiparty elections in 1994. An attempted military coup in 1998 developed into a bloody civil war, followed by a successful military coup in 1999. Elections were held again in 2000, but

coup attempts continued. The elected president was overthrown by another military coup in 2003. Under a transitional government, legislative elections were held in 2004, and in the 2005 presidential election, João Bernardo Vieira (who was in power from 1980 to 1999) emerged the victor.

Mounting conflict between the military elite and Vieira's administration generated increasing domestic instability. Vieira survived two coup attempts in 2008. In March 2009, however, he was assassinated by soldiers in retaliation for a bomb attack that had claimed the life of the chief of the armed forces. Parliamentary leader Raimundo Pereira took power as interim president, and new elections were held in June and July. Malam Bacai Sanhá won the presidency in a runoff vote and was sworn into office on September 8.

FUN FACT: The country's proportion of land under forest (73 percent) is the second highest in Africa after Gabon

FUN FACT: Off the coast of Guinea-Bissau is the Bijagos Archipelago, a group of about 88 islands and islets located in the Atlantic Ocean. Only some 20 islands are populated year-round.

FUN FACT: The country is now the world's sixth-largest producer of cashews.

FUN FACT: The country made its Olympic debut at the 1996 Atlanta Games, where it competed in wrestling events.