

Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailedanalysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



Equatorial Guinea

Population: 0.72 millions (#168 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 28,051 square km. Located in Central Africa by the equator, Equatorial Guinea comprises a tiny portion of Continental Africa named Rio Muni and five inhabited islands. Bioko, the largest island, is off the coast of Cameroon. Tropical climate remains consistent throughout the year, resulting in tropical rainforest in the interior and mangroves along the coast. The islands are volcanic in origin, and the mainland has plains and hills toward the interior. Equatorial Guinea is administratively divided into seven provinces.

Peoples

Fang: 85.7%

Bubi: 6.5%

Mdowe: 3.6%

Annobon: 1.6%

Bujeba: 1.1%

Other: 1.4%

Tribal peoples all share Bantu ties. Most of the population lives in Rio Muni. Bubi are indigenous to Bioko Island and the Annobon to Annobon Island.

Population: 797,457 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 2.41% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 4.29 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 63.8 male, 66.2 female (2018)

Languages: Fang (68%), Bube (6%), other/unspecified (26%). Spanish and French are both official languages. Twelve indigenous languages are spoken. The most spoken native languages are Fang and Bube. Approximately 90% of the population speaks Spanish as a second language.

Literacy: 95.3% (2015)

History

Bantu tribes settled in Rio Muni over one thousand years before the arrival of Europeans. Portuguese explorers first arrived in the late fifteenth century. The Spanish ruled Equatorial Guinea for 190 years under the name of Spanish Guinea. Independence occurred in 1968. President Teodoro Obiang has ruled since coming to power in a coup in 1979. Elections are held periodically, but international observers have expressed concern regarding irregularities. Since independence, the economy has grown dramatically through oil revenues, although most Equatorial Guineans have seen little improvement in their living conditions. The economy has been in recession since 2014 due to low oil prices.

Culture

The culture of Equatorial Guinea includes Portuguese, Spanish and native influences. The Catholic Church dominates many areas of social life. Polygamy is legal. Alcohol consumption rates are comparable to world averages, whereas tobacco cigarette usage rates are low. Cuisine consists of African, Spanish, and Moroccan dishes.

Economy

GDP per capita: $37,400 (2017) [62.5% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.588 (2018)

Corruption Index: 16 (2018)

Oil extraction and export has significantly increased economic growth over the past couple of decades. In 2007, the GDP grew by an estimated 22.5%. The economy is sensitive to fluctuations in the price of and demand for oil. Industry comprises 54.6% of the GDP, whereas services constitutes 42.9% of the GDP. An estimated 44% of the population lives below the poverty line. Agriculture remains an important part of the economy, primarily producing coffee, cocoa and rice. Primary import/export partners include China, Spain, the United States, and South Korea.

Corruption ranks among the worst worldwide. No other country has as high of a GDP per capita and as high a level of perceived corruption as Equatorial Guinea. The government has taken most of the nation’s wealth for its leaders. There have been chronic concerns about the lack of financial transparency from the government. Little has been done internationally to reduce corruption.

Faiths

Christian: 93%

Indigenous beliefs: 5%

Muslim: 2%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Roman Catholic – 701,762

Evangelicals – 30,442

Seventh Day Adventists – 1,623 – 29

Jehovah's Witnesses – 2,586 – 25

Latter-day Saints – less than 20 – 0

Religion

Roman Catholics are the largest religious group. The government is sensitive to criticism from Catholic officials. Indigenous beliefs are often syncretized with Christianity. Protestants are a small but growing minority. The number of Muslims is increasing as immigrants from West Africa continue to arrive.[1]

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is generally upheld by the government in practice. Religious groups are required to register with the government and face fines and penalties for not doing so. To register, a religious group must submit information about its leadership, membership, construction plans for religious buildings, property ownership documents, religious beliefs, and accreditations. A fee of 100,000 Central African francs must also be paid. Door-to-door proselytism requires a permit which is easily obtained. However, proselytism activities are prohibited between 6 AM and 9 PM. There have been no recent incidents of societal disrespect of religious freedom.[2]

Largest Cities

Urban: 72.6% (2019)

Malabo, Bata, Ebebiyin, Mbini, Luba, Evinayong, Moca, Mongomo, Aconibe, Acurenam.

No cities have an official congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the

national population lives in the ten most populous cities.

Church History

The first Latter-day Saint converts from Equatorial Guinea appeared to join the Church in the United States in the 1990s. In 1998, a parade celebrating the arrival of the Mormon pioneers featured a float consisting of members from Equatorial Guinea who joined the Church in 1995.[3] At least one member from Equatorial Guinea attended LDS Business College in 2001.[4]

Equatorial Guinea was assigned to the Cameroon Yaoundé Mission in 1992. A year later, mission headquarters were transferred to Cote d'Ivoire, but jurisdiction remained with the mission. In 1998, the Africa West Area was created and included Equatorial Guinea until 2003 when the country was transferred to the Africa Southeast Area and was not associated with a mission. In the late 2000s, the Democratic Republic of Congo administered Equatorial Guinea. Equatorial Guinea was assigned to the newly created Republic of Congo Brazzaville Mission in 2014.[5] In 2019, the Church announced that Equatorial Guinea will be reassigned to the Africa Central Area when it is organized in August 2020. The country may be reassigned to the new Cameroon Yaoundé Mission when it is organized in July 2020.

Membership Growth

Church Membership: less than 20 (2019)

A handful of foreign members appeared to live in Malabo in the late 2000s. By year-end 2013, the Church reported two known members in the country.[6] In the mid- to late 2010s, the Republic of Congo Brazzaville Mission provided Church literature to interested individuals who lived in Equatorial Guinea.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 0 Groups: 0 (2019)

No official member group or branch has ever appeared to operate in Equatorial Guinea. The country was assigned to the Republic of Congo Brazzaville Mission Branch in early 2020.

Activity and Retention

Few Latter-day Saints live in the country. Activity rates are unknown, and there are no reports of convert baptisms.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Spanish, French.

All Church scriptures and curriculum materials are translated into French and Spanish. Gospel Principles Simplified and The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith are both available in Fang.

Meetinghouses

No meetinghouses operate in Equatorial Guinea. The first meetings will likely be held in members' homes or rented spaces.

Health and Safety

HIV/AIDS infects 7.1% of the population. Tropical diseases are endemic, road networks are underdeveloped, and accidents are common. Access to care is uneven with many living below the poverty line.

Humanitarian and Development Work

No humanitarian or development projects sponsored by the Church had occurred in Equatorial Guinea as of early 2020.[7]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church may have challenges with meeting some of the registration requirements, particularly in regards to information that must be submitted for membership and local leadership given the lack of Latter-day Saints in the country. Otherwise, there are no significant legal impediments for the Church to become established. Societal tolerance for religious freedom and an overwhelmingly Christian population present excellent opportunities for future outreach notwithstanding significant problems with corruption in Equatorial Guinea.

Cultural Issues

The strength of the Catholic Church may challenge Latter-day Saint efforts to establish an official presence. The strong Christian background of most people will likely contribute to growth once an official Church presence is established. High literacy rates present good opportunities for Equatoguineans to study and learn about the gospel.

National Outreach

The establishment of a Church presence in the cities of Malabo and Bata will be required to extend at least minimal outreach to Equatorial Guinea as these are the two most populous cities. The organization of congregations in Malabo and Bata would permit outreach on Bioko Island and Rio Muni – regions of the country where most people reside. High rates of urbanization present good opportunities to reach the vast majority of Equatoguineans with a limited number of Latter-day Saint congregations. There are good opportunities for missionary activity on the Internet that targets Equatoguineans.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

A fraction of the total membership is likely active due to the long interval without a Church presence since the first members arrived in the country. Locating members will likely be challenging once outreach begins. Use of social media to locate isolated members may be effective when Church leaders begin to explore opportunities for a Church establishment.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The Fang constitute the majority of the population. Outreach to minority ethnic groups may be challenging, as they have small populations and often speak languages in which there are no Church materials.

Language Issues

Spanish will likely serve as the language for conducting Church meetings, as it is an official language, widely spoken among different ethnic groups, and has ample amounts of Latter-day Saint materials and scriptures translated. Additional language materials in Fang may be translated because it is the native language with the most speakers. Church meetings and missionary work may use Fang instead of Spanish in Rio Muni.

Leadership

Very few, if any, members native to Equatorial Guinea have served missions. A lack of leadership has appeared the primary obstacle for a formal Church establishment.

Temple

Equatorial Guinea pertains to the Kinshasa Democratic Republic of the Congo Temple district.

Comparative Growth

The status of the Church in Equatorial Guinea is comparable to the Church's current status in São Tomé and Príncipe. Both nations were first assigned to full-time missions in the twenty-first century. Equatorial Guinea and São Tomé and Príncipe both have predominantly Christian populations and adequate religious freedom to permit missionary activity. Neither country has had problems with societal abuses of religious freedom in recent years. A lack of a Church presence in either nation appears primarily attributed to few local members who have joined the Church abroad and have returned back to their home countries, comparatively small populations, and distance from mission headquarters.

Other Christian denominations have experienced moderate or rapid growth. Seventh-day Adventists have experienced steady growth in the past decade. The number of active Jehovah's Witnesses has increased by approximately 1,000, and the number of congregations in the country has doubled within the past decade.

Future Prospects

Definite opportunities exist for the establishment of congregations and mission outreach in Equatorial Guinea, and some Latter-day Saints are known to live in the country. Other denominations have taken advantage of the opportunities for religious freedom and proselytism and have experienced rapid growth, whereas The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has not yet utilized these opportunities. Too long a delay may result in missing a window of religious freedom, or entering under circumstances of decreased receptivity due to increasing materialism or an environment in which religious interest has waned and most religious seekers have already been discipled into other denominations. Nonetheless, there appear to be no specific plans for the Church to enter Equatorial Guinea at present. The creation of the Cameroon Yaoundé Mission in 2020 may

present an adequate impetus to permit mission and area leadership to seriously consider the establishment of the Church in Equatorial Guinea.

[1] “2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Equatorial Guinea.” U.S. Department of State. Accessed 4 January 2020. https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/equatorial-guinea/

[2] “2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Equatorial Guinea.” U.S. Department of State. Accessed 4 January 2020. https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/equatorial-guinea/

[3] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/31500/Creativity-dazzle-highlight-annual-Days-of-47-parade.html

[4] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/39767/LDS-Business-College.html

[5] "Two new missions," Deseret News, 5 April 2014. http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865600158/Two-new-missions.html?pg=all

[6] Martinich, Matt. “Prospective LDS Outreach in Equatorial Guinea.” 24 September 2014. https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=view_case_studies&story_id=385&cat_id=6

[7] “Where We Work.” Latter-day Saint Charities. Accessed 4 January 2020. https://www.latterdaysaintcharities.org/where-we-work