



Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

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



Comoros

Population: 0.77 millions (#165 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 2,235 square km. Located in the Mozambique Channel between Madagascar and Mozambique, Comoros consists of three primary islands. The volcanic islands are subject to a tropical maritime climate with a rainy season from November to May. The terrain of the islands' interior varies from hills to rugged mountains. Cyclones and volcanoes are natural hazards. Environmental issues include deforestation and declining soil quality and erosion due to ineffective agricultural practices. Comoros is administratively divided into three islands and four municipalities.

Peoples

Comorian: 99%

Other: 1%

Population: 808,080 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.64% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 3.34 children born per woman (2017)

Life Expectancy: 62.3 male, 67.0 female (2017)

Languages: Comorian dialects (99%), other (1%). Arabic and French are official languages. Three Comorian dialects are spoken, one for each island. The Comorian language is a compound of Malayo-Polynesian, Arabic, and Swahili languages and is written in both the Latin and Arabic scripts. Arabic is taught in public schools for Quran reading.

Literacy: 77.8% (2015)

History

Austronesian and Bantu settlers first populated the islands during the first millennium AD. Arab traders and merchants traveled from the Horn of Africa and established a trading and transit center on the islands to traffic goods from the African interior. Arabs

introduced Islam to the indigenous inhabitants and intermarried. The name Comoros derives from qamar, the Arabic word for moon. In the nineteenth century, the French gained control and established colonies on the islands. Comoros has suffered extreme political instability for most year since independence from France occurred in 1975. Two of the three islands—Anjouan and Moheli—declared independence in 1997. In 2000, an agreement between the three islands was reached in which the presidency of the federal government rotates between the islands, and each island elects its own president. Anjouan was the last island to come under control of the federal government in 2008. Comoros claims nearby French-controlled Mayotte. Political conditions have significantly stabilized within the past decade.

Culture

Islam is a major influence on Comorian culture as it has contributed to the islands' history and nearly the entire population is Muslim. Arabs have heavily influenced culture, but the islands each retain their own cultural practices, customs, and some indigenous beliefs. There is little tolerance for non-Muslim groups. Rice, fish, coconuts, and roots are staple foods. Alcohol consumption rates are among the lowest worldwide and compare with many Muslim nations that forbid alcohol use. Cigarette consumption rates are modest compared to world averages.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$1,600 (2017) [2.69% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.497

Corruption Index: 27 (2017)

Comoros remains one of the poorest nations worldwide, as the islands lack natural resources and infrastructure. The rapidly growing population strains limited resources. Comoros depends on foreign assistance to stabilize the economy and provide skilled labor. Political turmoil since independence has delayed economic growth and development. The government struggles to attract foreign investment and to address its current social and economic issues. Forty-five percent (45%) of the population lives below the poverty line. Agriculture employs 80% of the workforce and produces 50% of the GDP, whereas services and industry employ 20% of the workforce and together account for 50% of the GDP. Primary agricultural products include vanilla, cloves, and ylang-ylang—a tree from which a perfume is extracted to treat a variety of ailments. Industries include fishing, tourism, and perfume distillation. Primary trade partners include France, the United Arab Emirates, China, and India.

Corruption is perceived as widespread. Although there are penalties for government officials committing corrupt acts, such laws have not been enforced.[\[1\]](#) The centralized government has prevented greater transparency due to tight control of economic affairs.

Faiths

Muslim: 98%

Other (primarily Shia Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant): 2%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Catholic 4,300

Latter-day Saints less than 10

Religion

Sunni Muslims constitute 98% of the population. The remainder of the population is comprised of other Muslim groups (e.g. Shia, Sufi, and Ahmadi), Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Protestants. Non-Muslim religious groups primarily function for foreigners. Most non-Muslims lives in Moroni and Mutsamudu.[\[2\]](#)

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, but the law prohibits the preaching of non-Islamic religions. Islam is the state religion, and Islamic holidays are nationally recognized. Christians are prohibited from proselytizing, and foreigners found engaging in missionary activity are deported. Conversion from Islam to another religion can be legally prosecuted. Non-Muslims may peacefully assemble, build meetinghouses, and train clergy, but most worship in private for fear of persecution. Non-Muslim foreigners tend to experience little social opposition in practicing their faith, whereas non-Muslim Comorian citizens are subject to ridicule and social pressure, leading most to worship in private.[\[3\]](#)

Largest Cities

Urban: 29%

Moroni, Moutsamoudou, Fomboni, Domoni, Sima, Ouani, Mirontsi, Koni-Djodjo, Moya, Mbéni.

Cities listed in **bold** have no LDS congregation.

None of the ten largest cities have an LDS congregation. Nineteen percent (19%) of the national population resides in the ten largest cities.

LDS History

Comoros has pertained to the Africa Southeast Area since 1998. The Madagascar Antananarivo Mission currently administers the islands. There has been neither an official nor unofficial LDS presence in Comoros.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: less than 10 (2018)

The first known Comorian Latter-day Saint convert joined the Church in Madagascar in 2001. This convert later served as a senior missionary with her husband in the mid-2010s. Any Church members residing in Comoros are foreigners or natives who joined the Church abroad.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 0 Branches: 0 (2018)

There are no organized congregations. The Madagascar Antananarivo Mission Branch administers Comoros.

Activity and Retention

There have been no convert baptisms in Comoros. Any native members likely keep their faith private to avoid persecution.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Arabic, French, Malagasy.

All LDS scriptures are translated into Arabic, French, and Malagasy. Most church materials are available in Arabic and French whereas several unit, temple, priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, young women, primary, missionary, and family history materials are translated into Malagasy. The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony and Gospel Principles are translated in Comorian.

Humanitarian and Development Work

Since 1985, the Church has conducted only one community project and one emergency response program through LDS Charities.[\[4\]](#)

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Current government policy and law regarding the proselytism of non-Islamic religions creates a major barrier to establishing the Church among the indigenous population. Comoros does grant greater freedom regarding the religious observance of noncitizens as well as the private worship of Comorian Christians than most Muslim nations. Any Church establishment would occur in private among members who most likely joined the Church outside the country.

Cultural Issues

The strong influence of Islam on daily life, social standards, and government policy are the greatest obstacles for establishing an official Church presence. Even if anti-proselytism legislation was relaxed and Christians were permitted to preach, the deep Islamic heritage of the islands would prove challenging, along with the need to develop a culturally-tailored missionary approach. Illiteracy and rampant poverty are challenges encountered by LDS mission planners throughout much of Africa, but in combination with the high Islamic activity present a major obstacle for future mission outreach.

National Outreach

Comoros remains completely unreached by the Church despite being assigned to the Madagascar Antananarivo Mission. Distance from established mission outreach centers in the region presents logistical challenges for potential future outreach. The mission in Madagascar has experienced rapid membership growth and also administers Reunion and Mauritius, leaving few available resources for less-receptive or restricted areas like Comoros. High population density on the three islands will require few mission outreach centers and resources if proselytism is one day permitted.

Outreach is conducted in nations with Comorian communities where proselytism is permitted. Hundreds of thousands of Comorians live in France, where there are no proselytism restrictions. Many Comorians also live in Madagascar. Comorian converts abroad may share their faith with family and friends and return to their homeland, which may one day lay the foundation for the Church. However, few return permanently return due to poor living standards. It is difficult to reach Christian Comorians due to their limited numbers and the private nature of their faith as a result of government and societal restrictions on non-Muslims. There are several hundred Malagasy Christians, who may be among the most receptive to the Church if missionary activity commenced. Few in Comoros have Internet access, reducing the scope and penetration of prospective online missionary efforts.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Any Church members appear to meet in private. Member activity will largely depend on the degree of teaching and learning church principles prior to relocating to Comoros and persistence in studying and implementing gospel principles in daily living.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Limited ethnic diversity minimizes risk of ethnic conflicts, although the spectrum of Comorian dialects and low literacy rates will present challenges for teaching and understanding. If established throughout the country, the Church may face challenges integrating Comorians from different islands into the same congregation.

Language Issues

The Church has translated two basic proselytism materials into Comorian using the Latin script despite the lack of official presence in the islands. Due to widespread Arabic instruction for Quran reading in public school, Arabic language materials may be of use to mission efforts. Literacy rates remain low, which may make the distribution of church literature less effective yet provides opportunity for literacy programs as humanitarian service.

Missionary Service

No missionaries appear to have served from Comoros. Local members serving as missionaries at home or abroad will be central toward developing future self-sustaining leadership.

Leadership

No Comorian leadership has been developed.

Temple

Comoros pertains to the Johannesburg South Africa Temple district. No organized temple trips occur. Travel to the temple is time consuming and infeasible for most Comorians.

Comparative Growth

Only a few Muslim African nations have an LDS presence. A branch was established on Mayotte in the 2000s but was discontinued in 2009, and a United States servicemen branch was organized in Djibouti in 2010. The first LDS branches in predominantly Muslim nations in West African nations (e.g. Senegal, Guinea, and Mali) were organized in the mid-2010s. Like most of Muslim-majority Africa, Comoros remains unreached by mission outreach efforts.

Christian groups have a severely limited presence in the Comoros and experience slow growth due to anti-proselytism legislation, societal pressures to not convert from Islam, and the lack of native Christians. Missionary-oriented denominations have a small presence primarily limited to the few foreigners in the country. Nevertheless, some denominations have reported success in Comorian-specific outreach abroad. For example, in 2018 Jehovah's Witnesses in France reported one congregation and three congregation groups that held services in Comorian (Ngazidja).

Future Prospects

Past political instability, government policies and laws banning Christian proselytism, and a lack of native members have prevented national outreach by Latter-day Saints. Proselytism prospects are unfavorable for the foreseeable future. Outreach directed toward Comorians living in nations that permit LDS proselytism and humanitarian and development work in Comoros appear the most favorable courses of action in establishing a permanent presence on the islands. However, at a time when mission and humanitarian resources are stretched in many areas, it is unlikely that LDS mission or humanitarian outreach will be established in Comoros for years or decades to come.

[1] "Comoros," 2010 Index of Economic Freedom, retrieved 26 August 2010. <http://www.heritage.org/index/country/comoros>

[2] "Comoros," International Religious Freedom Report 2016, Accessed 19 July 2017. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=268634#wrapper>

[3] "Comoros," International Religious Freedom Report 2016, Accessed 19 July 2017. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=268634#wrapper>

[4] "Where We Work," LDS Charities. Accessed 19 July 2018. <https://www.ldscharities.org/where-we-work>