

Liberia



Population: 3,441,790
Population Growth Rate: 2.665%
Birth Rate: 42.25 births/1,000 population
Life Expectancy: total population: 41.13 years; male: 40.71 years; female: 43 years
Literacy Rate: total population: 57.5%; male: 73.3%; female: 41.6% (2003 est.)
Net Migration Rate: 5.13 migrant(s)/1,000 population
Unemployment Rate: 85%
Gross Domestic Product per Capita: \$500
Religions: Christian 40%, Muslim 20%, indigenous beliefs 40%
Languages: English 20% (official), some 20 ethnic group languages, few of which can be written or used in correspondence
Ethnic Groups: indigenous African (including Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kru, Grebo, Mano, Krahn, Gola, Gbandi, Loma, Kissi, Vai, Dei, Bella, Mandingo, and Mende) 95%, Americo-Liberians (descendants of immigrants from the U.S. who had been slaves) 2.5%, Congo People (descendants of immigrants from the Caribbean who had been slaves) 2.5%
Capital: Monrovia¹

Trafficking Routes

Liberia is a country of origin, transit, and destination for trafficking in persons. Most trafficking occurs within the country from rural areas to urban areas for domestic servitude, forced labor, street vending, and sexual exploitation. Reports have indicated that children were recruited from Liberia to fight in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire, and to Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Sierra Leone.² Liberian women are trafficked from rural to urban areas within the country, and to London and Sierra Leone.³ Women are also trafficked from Eastern Europe to Liberia.

¹ CIA, THE WORLD FACTBOOK 2009, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html> .

² COALITION TO STOP THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS, CHILD SOLDIERS GLOBAL REPORT 2008 (2008), available at: <http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/liberia> .

³ *Young West African Girls Face Perils of Prostitution, Trafficking*, VOICES OF AMERICA NEWS.COM, May 26, 2005, available at: <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2005-05/Young-West-African-Girls-Face-Perils-of-Prostitution-and-Trafficking.cfm> .

Factors That Contribute to the Trafficking Infrastructure

Liberia continues to be challenged by a history of 14 years of warlord violence and remains in transition from dictatorship and civil war to democracy. In June 2006, Liberia's unemployment rate was 85 percent.⁴ The country's socioeconomic indicators are among the lowest internationally. Its 2007 national budget was \$128 million.⁵

Youths are challenged by the expansion of organized crime; the proliferation of small arms and light weapons; unemployment; narcotics and alcohol abuse; a perceived culture of violence; distrust of past and current leadership; cross-border security issues; and child soldier recruitment.⁶ Liberia's inadequate social structures and counseling facilities along with lack of havens for neglected or abused children may contribute to what United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has identified as a growing social problem of family violence.⁷ All such factors greatly contribute to the trafficking infrastructure.

The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare does not consistently enforce its minimum standards regarding orphanage accreditation, based on UNICEF's Convention on the Rights of the Child. Delay in closure of unaccredited orphanages leaves children open to the risk of neglect, abuse, and health problems.⁸ The law concerning inter-country adoptions was written in 1956 and does not accurately represent the vastly increased number of adoptions.⁹

HIV/AIDS also complicates Liberians' conditions. The prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS has been reported at around 1.5 percent but is believed to be greater.¹⁰ HIV/AIDS is often a result of gender-based violence.¹¹ HIV/AIDS contributes to the growing number of child orphans who often become victims of violence, exploitation, or trafficking.¹²

Lack of infrastructure and poor education exacerbate the risks of being lured into trafficking. Save the Children found that many sexually exploited girls in Liberia work for aid workers, government officials, and teachers. Many girls are being forced to have sex in return for food, school fees, and even better grades.¹³ Liberian orphanages are also involved in the trafficking of children through fraudulent promises to parents.¹⁴

⁴ Press Release, International Labor Organization (ILO), H.E. Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, addresses ILO annual Conference Calls for urgent action for peace and development as unemployment reaches estimated 85 per cent (June 7, 2006), *available at*: http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Media_and_public_information/Press_releases/lang--en/WCMS_070502/index.htm.

⁵ *Africa: Home Sweet Home? The Challenge of Peace*, IRIN NEWS, Feb. 14, 2007, *available at*: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=70188>.

⁶ FEDERATION OF LIBERIAN YOUTH, A NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY FOR LIBERIA: A FRAMEWORK FOR SETTING PRIORITIES AND EXECUTING ACTION (2005), *available at*: <http://flyliberia.org/>.

⁷ UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN LIBERIA (UNMIL), UNMIL LAUNCHES REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN LIBERIA'S ORPHANAGES 3 (2007) *available at*: http://www.unmil.org/documents/final_biannual_report_jan_june_2009.pdf.

⁸ *Id.* at 7, at 18.

⁹ LINDSAY MARKEL, SCHUSTER INSTITUTE FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM, ADOPTION: LIBERIA (2008), *available at*: <http://www.brandeis.edu/investigate/gender/adoption/liberia.html>.

¹⁰ INTEGRATED REGIONAL INFORMATION NETWORK (IRIN), LIBERIA: HIV RATES LOWER THAN FEARED, (2007), *available at*: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73962>.

¹¹ UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT, PANEL DISCUSSION: ADDRESSING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN LIBERIA, Dec. 6, 2007, *available at*: http://www.unfpa.org/emergencies/symposium06/docs/report_6december.pdf.

¹² Cozay, <http://cozay.com/ONE-WORLD.php> (last visited Mar. 29, 2010).

¹³ *Liberia sex-for-aid 'widespread'*, BBC NEWS, May 8, 2006, *available at*: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4983440.stm>.

¹⁴ United Nations Secretariat *supra* note 11.

Forms of Trafficking

Many children are forced to work in diamond mines, family businesses, subsistence farming, street trading, and domestic work. Child trafficking for the purpose of child soldiering and sexual exploitation remains a major problem in Liberia due to a lack of information, solutions, and education.¹⁵

The severe problems of sexual assault and exploitation of girls by male authorities persist. Peacekeepers of UNMIL, police, and soldiers stationed along the border of Sierra Leone and Liberia have been accused of sexually assaulting girls between the ages of 12 and 16 before allowing them passage. Similarly, Save the Children found that girls cross into Liberia in exchange for sex with UNMIL peacekeepers.¹⁶

Young child and baby trafficking in the form of inter-country adoption is another form of trafficking in Liberia. In 2006, 335 children underwent intercountry adoption, an alarming number for a country whose population is just 3 million.

Government Responses

In response to youths' traumatic experiences in the country's civil war, the government of Liberia created a National Youth Policy Initiative in 2005. The policy defines concepts related to challenges faced by youth, identified as those between the ages of 15 and 35, and classifies youths into priority target groups. It outlines measures to take for the promotion of youth participation in the post-conflict recovery and reconstruction agenda: education and training; employment; health care provision; peace and reconciliation; promotion of gender equity; leadership development; adolescent reproductive health; HIV/AIDS prevention, especially for women and girls; drug abuse and crime prevention; and protection against child labor. The policy includes a short- to medium-term action plan, as well as a plan for national consultative meetings to be held annually. The initiative is a partnership between the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Federation of Liberian Youth, the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, UNMIL, Action Aid, and USAID.¹⁷

With the help of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, efforts toward combating human trafficking and violence are increasing greatly. The president chose to appoint a Minister for Gender and to create a special court to deal with violence against women.¹⁸ In December 2005, a rape law was enacted that made its punishment a maximum of a life sentence, but the state has not yet successfully implemented rule of law with regard to sexual violence against women. In October 2006, Johnson-Sirleaf created an Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force to develop a national plan for human trafficking.¹⁹

¹⁵ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers *supra* at 2.

¹⁶ SAVE THE CHILDREN –UK, NOTE FOR IMPLEMENTING AND OPERATIONAL PARTNERS BY UNHCR AND SAVE THE CHILDREN-UK ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE & EXPLOITATION: THE EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE CHILDREN IN GUINEA, LIBERIA, AND SIERRA LEONE, 6-7 (2007), available at: http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/docs/sexual_violence_and_exploitation.pdf.

¹⁷ Federation of Liberia Youth *supra* note 6.

¹⁸ *Study Finds 3 Out of 4 Liberian Women Experience Rape*, MS. MAGAZINE, Mar. 12, 2007, available at: <http://www.ms magazine.com/news/uswirestory.asp?id=10195>.

¹⁹ *Liberia: Task Force on Anti Human Trafficking Set Up*, THE INQUIRER, Nov. 5, 2006, available at: <http://www.humantrafficking.org/updates/445>.

In September 2007, the Liberian government passed an education policy that imposes fines or arrest on parents and guardians who allow their children to be street vendors during school hours. The measure aims to increase school enrollment and reduce child labor and child trafficking.²⁰

In October 2007, Johnson-Sirleaf signed a law creating the Governance Commission, an autonomous entity that replaces the Governance Reform Commission. The new commission's purpose is to promote good governance at all levels in the public and private sectors, and it will review the constitution, law reforms, judicial reforms, and land reforms.²¹

In December 2008, UNMIL called on the government to instill a fully functioning Independent Human Rights Commission. UNMIL also recommended that the administrative board be reactivated to ensure the closure of orphanages that do not meet minimum standards, promulgate a nationwide awareness campaign, and amend or repeal legislation that infringes on human rights.²²

On March 6, 2009, the president of Liberia set forth a national plan of action that addresses the issues of child soldiers, violence against women, and HIV/AIDS.²³

On May 1, 2009, a new border control post was opened between Liberia and Sierra Leone aimed at deterring human trafficking and cross-border trade in weapons. The new immigration and customs office will improve security and stability in the region.²⁴ In March 2009, Liberia's Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) announced it would spend three weeks learning about travel issues, such as documentation, and how to identify and assist victims of trafficking.²⁵

Nongovernmental and International Organizations Responses

Student World Assembly-Liberia and related organizations met with the Labor Ministry in January 2008 to discuss ways to coordinate countertrafficking efforts. Each organization present agreed to focus on one of the four areas of countertrafficking programs: research, sensitization, advocacy protection and prevention, and trauma healing and counseling.²⁶

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) education and advocacy campaign has worked in Liberia since mid-2005 to combat sexual violence. It has trained more than 3,200 justice officials and community leaders in the provision of legal assistance to victims of sexual assault, has offered direct legal aid to victims, and has argued for the allocation of more resources at the national level. The IRC Protection and Gender-Based Violence Prevention unit

²⁰ *Liberia: Go to School or Go to Jail*, IRIN NEWS, Sept. 21, 2007, available at: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=74422>.

²¹ Republic of Liberia Governance Commission, <http://libgovernance.org/> (last visited Feb. 22, 2010)

²² *Further steps needed to enhance human rights in Liberia, UN report says*, UN NEWS CENTRE (Dec. 3, 2008), available at: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=29173&Cr=liberia&Cr1>.

²³ Press Release, United Nations Mission in Liberia, Liberia Breaks New Ground for Women, Peace and Security, (Mar. 8, 2009) available at: <http://unmil.org/1article.asp?id=3196&zdoc=1>.

²⁴ UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, NEW BORDER POST KEY TO ENDING SIERRA LEONE-LIBERIA TRAFFICKING (2009), available at: <http://content.undp.org/go/newsroom/2009/june/sierra-leone-and-liberia-strengthen-control-over-trafficking-with-key-border-control-post-en;jsessionid=axbWzt8vXD9>.

²⁵ Press Release, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM), MANAGING MIGRATION AND COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN LIBERIA, (Mar. 24, 2009), available at: <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/media/press-briefing-notes/pbnAF/cache/offonce?entryId=24125>.

²⁶ Student World Assembly. <http://www.studentworldassembly.org/SWA/Events.aspx?EventID=300> (last visited Feb. 15, 2010).

helped justice officials in Nimba County to prosecute six people accused of rape and convict four of those six people. The IRC also created child protection resource units; however, they are challenged by a context of porous borders, weak local authorities, and lack of regulation of orphanages and Koranic schools.²⁷

The Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) established an endowment to assist victims of sexual and gender based violence in September 2007. The endowment, which is financially supported by the Danish government, is created to support victims' psychosocial and medical needs.²⁸ A recent report by AFELL identified the reality of continuing sexual violence against women as rooted in "pervasive corruption, a dire lack of judicial resources, the stigmatization of survivors, and an unwillingness on the part of justice officials to deal seriously with rape," which together cause "many cases reported to be compromised and dropped before they ever reach the proper court."²⁹

The A. G. Charities Faith Consortium organized a workshop series on human trafficking in Bo Waterside Community in Grand Cape Mount County. The workshops trained 24 law enforcement officers investigating trafficking issues, including officers of the BIN, the Liberia National Police, the National Security Agency, the National Bureau of Investigation, and customs. A. G. Charities Faith Consortium also conducted a series of sensitization campaigns targeting students and teachers.³⁰

In 2006, a U.N. Conduct and Discipline Unit became fully operational, with a compulsory induction course and collaboration with the Liberian government, NGOs, and the local Liberian communities. Thirty-five NGOs were trained to spread the U.N.'s message.³¹

In 2008, World Hope International launched 18 antitrafficking community groups, held workshops for religious leaders, and trained Liberian police in antitrafficking.³²

Multilateral Initiatives

In July 2006, a three-person delegation from Liberia attended the Euro-African Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development in Rabat, Morocco. The BIN representatives signed the Rabat Declaration between Europe and Africa regarding the return of migrants. Conference attendees also discussed illegal immigration, irregular migrants, civil wars, security and development, human trafficking, "brain drain," and migration flows.³³

In April 2007, the United Nations Development Fund for Women launched a two-year program, Supporting Women's Engagement in Peacebuilding and Preventing Sexual Violence in

²⁷ IRIN *supra* at note 5.

²⁸ C. Winnie Saywah, *Liberia: Afell Opens Endowment Fund for SGBV Victims*, THE INQUIRER (MONROVIA)/ALLAFRICA.COM, Sept. 13, 2007, available at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200709130678.html>.

²⁹ *IRC Helps Lead the Fight Against Sexual Violence in Liberia*, INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE, Aug. 14, 2007, <http://www.theirc.org/news/irc-helps-lead-the-fight0814.html>.

³⁰ "Fake Philanthropists" Lure Liberia's Kids Into The Unknown Can Gov't Rise To The Occasion?, THE ANALYST NEWSPAPER, June 14, 2006, available at: http://www.analystliberia.com/adoption_or_child_trafficking_june14.html

³¹ *UN in Liberia report shows decline in sex abuse allegations; envoys says some progress*, UN NEWS CENTRE, Mar. 9, 2007, available at: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=21817&Cr=liberia&Cr1>.

³² World Hope International, <http://www.worldhope.org/countries/liberia.htm> (last visited Feb. 17, 2010).

³³ France Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, *Regional Euro-African Conference: "Migration and Development"* (July 10, 2006), available at: http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/france-priorities_1/development-and-humanitarian-action_2108/immigration-migration_2396/regional-euro-african-conference-migration-and-development-rabat-july-10-2006_5197.html.

Conflict: Community-Led Approaches, funded by a \$6.5 million grant by the U.K. Department for International Development. The program is aimed at building gender sensitivity of local police and improving women's access to local justice institutions.³⁴

After its June 2007 participation in the 96th session of the International Labour Conference hosted by the International Labour Organization, Liberia was to receive assistance in strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Labor, in the areas of the elimination of child labor, HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, labor market information, antitrafficking, labor standards and administration, and social dialogue.³⁵

³⁴ *UNIFEM launches Community-Based Programme to Support Women in Peacebuilding and Prevention of Sexual Violence, International Alliance of Women*, ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE DES FEMMES [INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN], Newsletter No. 5, (2007), available at: <http://www.womenalliance.org/pdf/Apr2007.pdf> .

³⁵ Liberia: ILO to assist Liberia, AFRICA NEWS/THE INQUIRER, June 22, 2007.