

# Liberia

## Country Overview

### Politics

Liberia is a presidential republic with a bicameral National Assembly comprised of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The judicial system is a mix of common and customary law.<sup>1</sup> George Weah was elected President in December 2017, succeeding President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman elected head of state in Africa. In January of 2018, President Weah was inaugurated coinciding with the completion of the UN Security Council's 15-year peacekeeping mission which formally ended in March 2018.<sup>2</sup> The mission was established in 2003 to monitor the Accra Peace Agreement which instituted a cease fire between the government and rebel forces.<sup>3</sup>

### Economy

Liberia is classified by the World Bank as a low-income country. The Liberian economy has struggled in recent years and contracted by 2.3 percent in 2019.<sup>4</sup> This follows a modest growth rate of 1.2 percent in 2018, growth of 2.5 percent in 2017, and stagnation between 2014-2016. The stagnation has been attributed to the Ebola crisis and falling commodity prices.<sup>5</sup> Economic growth is not consistent among sectors, and growth in the Liberian economy has been supported by expansion in the mining sector and increased investment in the gold sector.<sup>6</sup> Over the past several years, the mining sector has had positive contributions to GDP growth while areas like forestry and services have had negative contributions.<sup>7</sup>

### Social/Human Development

Poverty rates are high in Liberia, with the majority of the population living on less than a dollar a day. A 14-year conflict that ended in 2003 left the country with a deficit around development indicators, particularly health care, education, and child and maternal mortality.<sup>8</sup> However, child mortality rates have declined every year since 1991, from an under-five mortality rate of 263.8 per 1000 live births to 70.9 per 1000 live births in 2018.<sup>9</sup> Access to health care is still low and infrastructure in general is weak. 16 percent of the population is food insecure.<sup>10</sup> Over 5,000 Liberians were killed by an Ebola outbreak that began in 2014.<sup>11</sup>

The vast majority of Liberian citizens are young people, and more than 60 percent of the country's population is under 25.<sup>12</sup> More than half (52.1 percent) of the Liberian population lives in urban areas, and approximately a third of the country's entire population resides within 80-km of the capital, Monrovia, alone.<sup>13</sup>



## TIP Report Summary

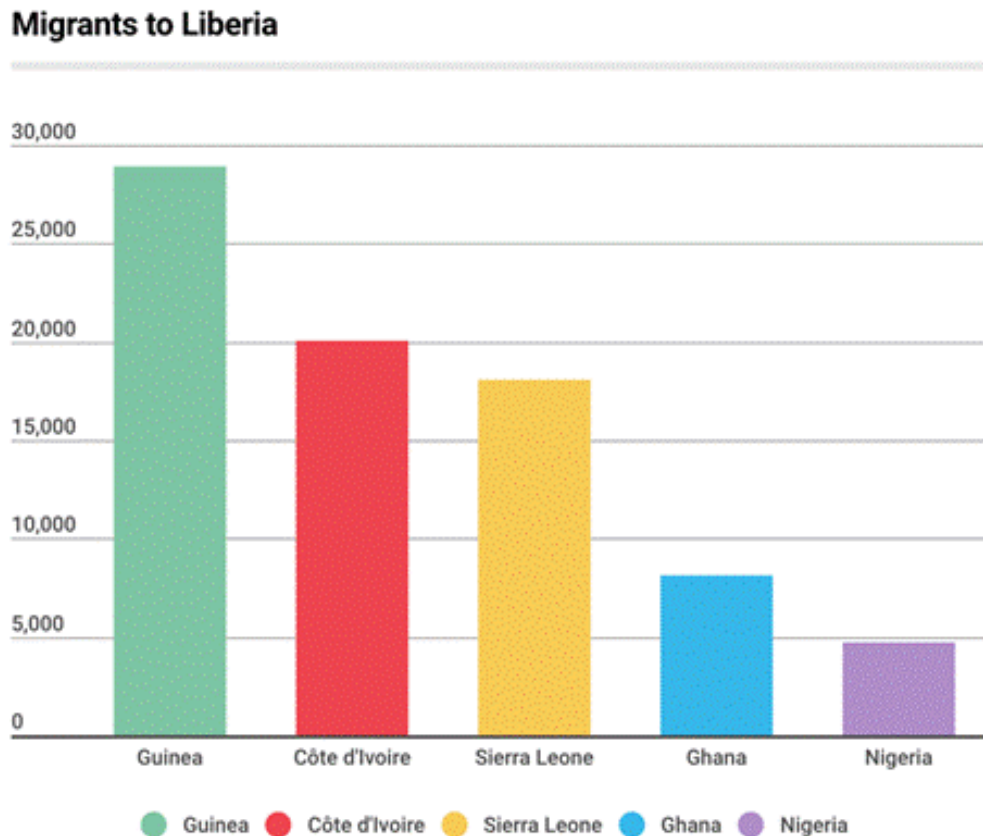
US Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 2

The *Trafficking in Persons Report* notes trafficking or trafficking vulnerability in potentially exported supply chains including diamond mining and rubber plantations.

Read the full TIP Report at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>

## Migration

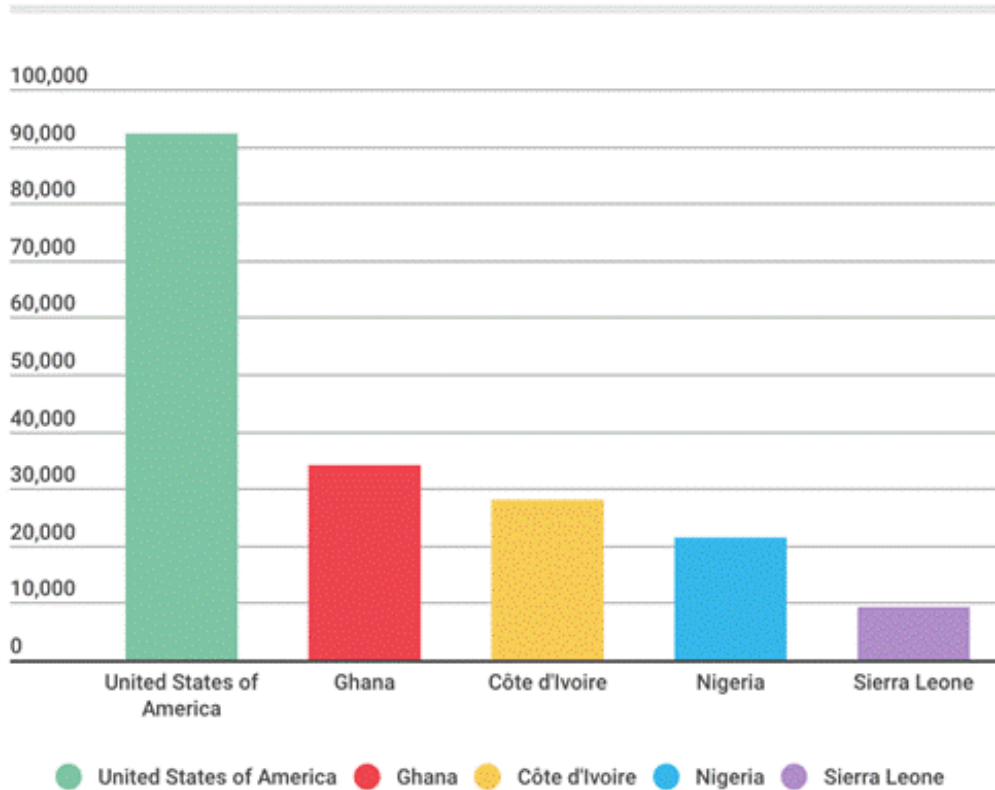
The top five countries sending migrants to Liberia include Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Nigeria.<sup>14</sup>



The top destination countries for migrants from Liberia include the United States, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.<sup>15</sup>



### Migrants from Liberia



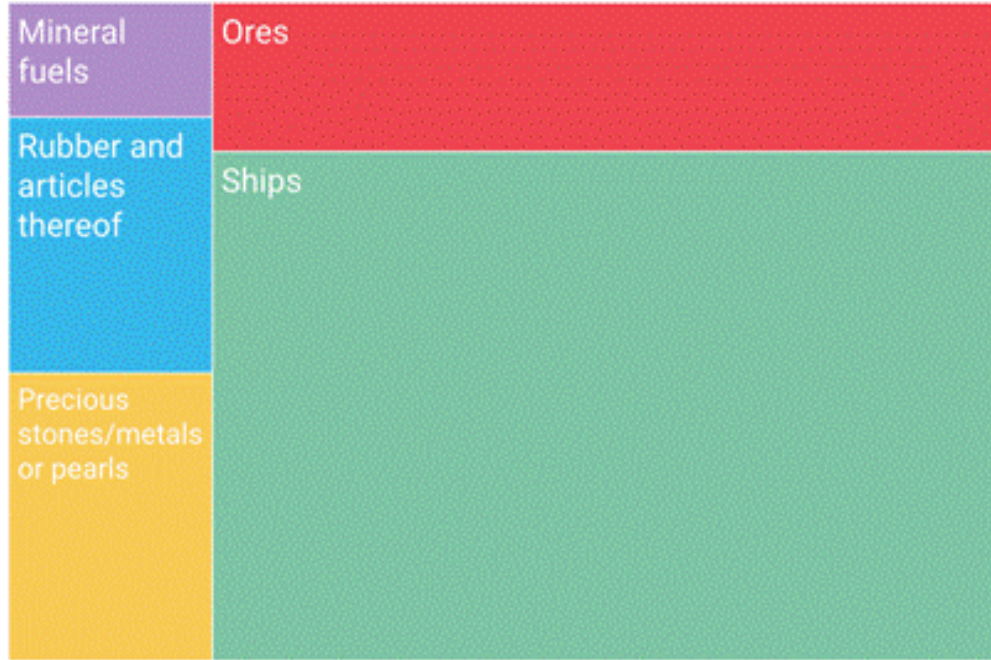
### Exports and Trade

The top exports from Liberia in 2019 include ships, gold, mineral fuels, ores, and rubber.<sup>16</sup>



**Top Commodity Exports (USD/Thousands)**

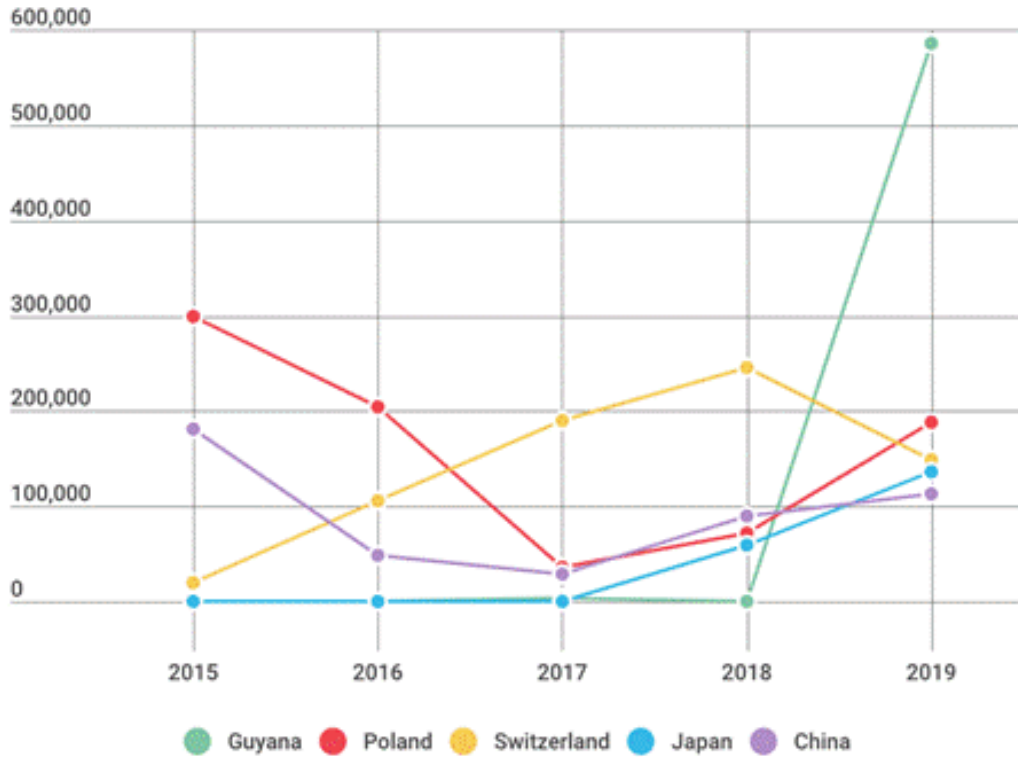
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In 2019, the top importing countries from Liberia include Guyana, Poland, Switzerland, Japan and China.<sup>17</sup>



## Liberia Export Partners (USD/Thousands)



Liberia's top exports to the United States are rubber and diamonds; Liberia was the United States' 139<sup>th</sup> largest supplier in 2018.<sup>18</sup>

## TIP Risk Factors Analysis

### Legal/Policy Risk Factors

#### Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers' Rights

##### Freedom of Association

Workers in Liberia are legally permitted to freely join or form independent labor unions, except for those employed in the public sector or by state-owned companies. Unions are able to operate without the interference of the government or employers, and they are permitted to draw up their own constitutions and collectively bargain without restriction. Workers are



permitted to strike as long as they inform the Ministry of Labor of their intent to do so before the action takes place. The law protects workers from anti-union discrimination and mandates reinstatement for workers dismissed for union activity. Workers who participate in strikes are not protected by law against retaliation by their employers if they commit “an act that constitutes defamation or a criminal offense, or if the proceedings arise from an employee being dismissed for a valid reason.”<sup>19</sup>

The law governing workers’ right to free association does not go far enough in ensuring that workers’ rights are guaranteed, as penalties are often inadequate in deterring violations. These labor laws also only apply to the formal sector of the Liberian economy, and over 80 percent of workers in the country work outside of that sector in a largely unregulated environment.<sup>20</sup>

## **Working Conditions**

The “Decent Work Act” of 2015 is the primary guidance on working conditions, including conditions of work, health and safety, compensation and industrial relations. The Act set up a Minimum Wage Board to review and adjust minimum wage rates.<sup>21</sup> The minimum wage is set above the World Bank’s poverty level income.<sup>22</sup>

## **Discrimination**

Discrimination on the grounds of “ethnic background, race, sex, creed, place of origin, or political opinion” is prohibited by the Liberian constitution.<sup>23</sup> However, discrimination based on disability, sexual orientation, gender and gender identity is allowed and has been reported to occur.<sup>24</sup> Discrimination based on perceived HIV status in the workplace, school, and health care is prohibited, however there is still a large social stigma against those with HIV. Equal pay for equal work is called for in the Liberian constitution, but women often face hiring and/or pay discrimination in their places of work.<sup>25</sup>

## **Forced Labor**

Liberia outlaws all forms of forced/compulsory labor, but these laws are not effectively enforced in practice, due to limited resources.<sup>26</sup>

## **Child Labor**

The minimum age for full-time employment is 15; children ages 13-15 are only permitted to engage in “light work” for no more than 14 hours a week. That work must not conflict with school hours and must not be harmful to the child’s physical health. The National Commission on Child Labor (NACOMAL) is responsible for enforcing child labor laws in Liberia, but has not effectively done so. Child labor is reportedly prevalent in almost every sector of the Liberian economy. In urban areas, children worked as street vendors, and in rural areas children were employed in the agricultural, mining, and rock crushing industries.<sup>27</sup>



## Civil Society Organizations

Non-governmental organizations concerned with human rights are able to operate freely in Liberia, and governmental officials are reported to be generally cooperative and responsive to concerns raised by such groups. There are reports that investigations pertaining to atrocities committed during the Liberian civil war can be slow-moving and meet resistance from those within the government.<sup>28</sup>

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

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	Not ratified
ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor	In force
ILO 111 Discrimination	In force
ILO 138 Minimum Age	Not ratified
ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies	Not ratified
ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor	In force

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## Political Risk Factors

### Political Instability or Conflict

Liberia scored a 90.5 in the 2019 Fragile States Index (FSI), placing it firmly in the “alert” category. The FSI scale goes from 0 (indicating a “sustainable” political system), to 120 (indicating a political system on “high alert”).<sup>30</sup> Liberia ranked 20 out of 178 on the index.

In 2017, Liberia held presidential and legislative elections that were deemed generally free and fair. George Weah was elected president after a presidential runoff election in December 2017.<sup>31</sup>



### Level of Crime and Violence

The U.S. Department of State rates the crime threat in Liberia as “Critical.”<sup>32</sup> Liberia had a homicide rate of 10.4 homicides per 100,000 people in 2015, a similar rate to the continent’s homicide rate of 10.3 homicides per 100,000 people.<sup>33</sup>

### State Persecution

Homosexuality, classified as “voluntary sodomy,” is illegal in Liberia, and persecution of LGBTQ individuals remains a rampant problem. LGBTQ individuals face discrimination in housing, employment, healthcare, and education.<sup>34</sup>

### Level of Corruption

The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index scores Liberia as a 32 out of 100, where a 0 signals “Highly Corrupt” and 100 signals “Very Clean.” Liberia ranks 120 out of 180 on that index.<sup>35</sup> The World Economic Forum in 2016 rated corruption as the third most problematic factor for doing business in Liberia,<sup>36</sup> and corruption remains a problem in the judicial system, state security forces, and in the awarding of contracts within the extractives industry.<sup>37</sup>

## Socio-Economic Risk Factors

### Level of National Economic Development

Liberia’s Human Development Index (HDI) value for 2018 was 0.465, positioning the country at 176 out of 189 and in the low human development category.<sup>38</sup> When adjusted for inequality, Liberia’s HDI value drops to 0.314 - a loss of 32.3 percent.<sup>39</sup>

### Level and Extent of Poverty

Liberia has a high and systemic level of poverty, with 64.9 percent of the population deemed to be living in multidimensional poverty according to the United Nations.<sup>40</sup> The entrenched nature of poverty in Liberia has been attributed to the civil war and the outbreak of Ebola.<sup>41</sup>

### Degree of Gender Inequality

Legally, women can inherit land and property, but in practice, customary law is often followed meaning men are often de facto in control of a woman’s land and property or women are prevented from inheritance altogether.<sup>42</sup> While women have access to credit and financial institutions by law, in practice they may be prevented from accessing financial services due to a lack of literacy or collateral. Further, women often cannot access the justice system due to lack of legal aid, information, and community pressure to settle issues informally.<sup>43</sup> Women held only 10 percent of seats in the national parliament, while men held 90 percent.<sup>44</sup>





## Landlessness and Dispossession

Liberia has long had a contentious relationship with land rights. Much of the population lives in rural areas where customary law is often used to delineate land ownership.<sup>45</sup> In many rural communities, people do not possess land titles, and according to Liberian law, all untitled land belongs to the state. In the years following the civil war, the state has signed away “more than 40 percent of its national territory in concessions for logging, mining, and agriculture.”<sup>46</sup> Thousands of hectares of land were purchased for palm oil development during the Ebola crisis, drawing criticism from local communities and civil society.<sup>47</sup>

The land grab by American and Malaysian palm oil companies directly led to the dispossession of farmers in many rural areas either directly or as subsistence farming areas were wiped out.<sup>48</sup> However, with the passage of the Land Rights Act in 2018, the government hopes to address some of these longstanding problems. Notably, the act allows communities to formalize ownership of customary land and clarifies land rights in the country by classifying categories of land ownership.<sup>49</sup>

## Environmental Factors

The main environmental issues in Liberia are tropical rain forest deforestation, soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, the hunting of endangered species, the pollution of waters from oil residue, industrial run off, and raw sewage.<sup>50</sup> Flooding during the rainy season has recently displaced thousands.<sup>51</sup>

## Documented Trafficking Risk in Key Commodity Supply Chains

### Gold

#### Gold Overview

Since the conclusion of its Civil War in 2003, Liberia’s mining sector has grown rapidly.<sup>52</sup> There are reports that much of Liberia’s gold is exported to gold processing hubs such as Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, sometimes undeclared.<sup>53</sup> Artisanal mining is widespread. Liberia’s first large-scale production mine (New Liberty) began full commercial operations in March of 2016. It is estimated that there are over 100,000 people working in the artisanal mining sector in Liberia (primarily extracting gold and diamonds), and an estimated 95 percent of the mining workforce is operating without a government license.<sup>54</sup>

#### Documented TIP Risk in Gold

The gold mining sector is regulated by the Mining and Minerals Law 2000, and the Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy is responsible for its enforcement and oversight of the industry.



However, many mining companies are reported to not meet these obligations.<sup>55</sup> Gold mining, especially in the informal sector, is a hazardous occupation. Many miners are either trapped or killed if mines collapse.<sup>56</sup>

## Rubber

### Rubber Overview

Liberia is home to the world's largest rubber plantation, the Firestone Rubber Plantation, which spans 119,000 acres.<sup>57</sup> There are an estimated 20,000 people employed in the commercial rubber industry, while an additional 60,000 people cultivate the product on smallholder farming operations.<sup>58</sup> The rubber industry in Liberia is currently rebuilding after the end of the 14-year civil war and the collapse of rubber commodity prices on the international market in the early to mid-2010s, declining 80 percent from 2011 to 2020.<sup>59</sup> In response to the economic downturn, Firestone Liberia has been laying off employees. In 2019 the company reduced its workforce by 13 percent.<sup>60</sup>

### Documented TIP Risk in Rubber

The U.S. Department of State has reported trafficking and forced labor on rubber plantations in addition to the use of dangerous materials such as machetes and acids.<sup>61</sup> Rubber tappers responsible for extracting liquid rubber from trees receive low wages and must meet high quotas which require assistance from family members including, according to reports, from children. However, since the passage of the Decent Work Act in 2015 and lawsuits on behalf of workers, there have been improvements in the standard of living for workers and their children.<sup>62</sup>

Verité conducted research on two large, foreign-owned rubber plantations in Liberia (LAC and Cocopa) in 2010 and found several potential indicators of human trafficking. The majority of workers on the rubber plantations are employed as tappers who manually extract rubber from trees and transport it to field stations. Tappers are paid by production and have a quota of how many trees they must tap per day. Those who do not reach the quota are subject to financial penalties. Additionally, wages may vary from month to month as paycheck deductions are made for services such as compulsory, subsidized bags of rice, school fees and voluntary savings programs. Researchers found that although the LAC plantation gave out loans to its employees, indebtedness was not a factor in keeping workers on the plantation. On both the plantations, child labor was observed. Because of the quota system, many families employ their children in order to reach the daily quota. Additionally, because of the poor quality of education and high school fees, many parents prefer to have their children working on the plantation rather than attending school. Researchers found that plantation workers, including children, face significant health risks.



In 2018, Firestone Liberia violated the terms of its collective bargaining agreement with the Firestone Agricultural Workers' Union of Liberia (FAWUL) by failing to recognize the union's election. Further, there have been reports of unfair dismissals of employees for showing union support. Other labor rights concerns include "unfair dismissal of union officials, summary eviction from company housing, and continuing poor labor practices, including problems transferring Firestone's pension liabilities to the state."<sup>63</sup>

## Palm Oil

### Palm Oil Overview

While historically palm oil has represented a small percentage of Liberia's economy, the sector is growing and is reported to be a key element of Liberia's poverty reduction strategy.<sup>64</sup> After its Civil War, the Liberian government signed contracts with large concessions allowing rubber, logging, and palm oil companies access to over a quarter of the country's land. Despite initial projections, some of those companies have only developed a fraction of that land primarily due to concerns regarding human rights and environmental protection.<sup>65</sup> Many have become concerned with the environmental effects of the palm oil industry, namely deforestation, contribution to climate change, and threatening wildlife.<sup>66</sup>

### Documented TIP Risk in Palm Oil

Over half of Liberia's population lives in forested zones and is reliant on the forest and forest products for livelihoods. 40 percent of the remaining Upper Guinean forest is in Liberia but international investments in palm oil plantation development may threaten forests. Land deals thus far have faced criticism from civil society, particularly concessions granted during the Ebola outbreak.<sup>67</sup> People who have given up their land to palm oil developers have reportedly done so out of intimidation and without proper compensation.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> UNICEF. *Overview: Liberia in Context*. <https://www.unicef.org/liberia/overview.html>

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