

Djibouti

Country Overview

Politics

Djibouti is a presidential republic characterized by a strong executive branch and a unicameral legislative body. The legal system is mixed, with aspects of French civil law, Islamic law, and customary law all recognized in official courts.¹ The president has the power to appoint the head of state (prime minister) as well as the majority of Supreme Court justices. In 2010, the presidential term had been shortened from six to five years and that the two-term limit was abolished.² Having held the office since 1999, President Ismail Omar Guelleh was reelected for a fifth term in 2021. Opposition parties had boycotted this election, asserting presidential power was overly concentrated, and the only other candidate was not deemed credible. They are subject to harassment and intimidation at the hands of security forces. While international observers from the African Union declared the 2018 Djiboutian legislative elections to be “free and fair,” opposition groups tended to disagree.³

Economy

Djibouti is classified by the World Bank as a “low-middle-income” country.⁴ As of 2017, approximately 17 percent of the population lives under the national poverty line, and the small east African nation is almost completely dependent on imports to insure its food, water, and energy supplies.⁵ This leaves the country especially vulnerable to international markets and price shocks. Increasing during 2020, unemployment was at a high of 28.4 percent in 2021.⁶

Djibouti’s geostrategic location provides access to the Suez Canal, linking Europe and Asia. The economy is presently driven by its sophisticated ports, which is expected to grow alongside the economic development of Ethiopia, its main trading partner. The country’s GDP has steadily increased since the 1990s, and as of 2021, stood at a value of USD 3.37 billion. Moreover, the 2021 GDP growth rate of 4.3 percent demonstrated that Djibouti was able to bounce back from a decrease of 1.2 percent in 2020.⁷

As per the 2022 BTI Transformation Index, Djibouti is placed at 4.12 on a scale of 1-10, the 104th country of 137. This index considers indicators including those relating to political transformation, governance, and economic transformation. For economic transformation alone, the country is placed at 89 of 157, or 4.57. This report principally attributes the country’s growth to debt-financed investments.⁸

Social/Human Development

Djiboutian society is made up of two main ethnic groups: Somali (60 percent), Afar (35 percent), Other ethnic groups include Yemeni Arab as well as French, Ethiopian, and Italian, comprising the remaining 5 percent. 94 percent of Djiboutians identify as Muslim, with the majority of the remaining 6 percent being foreign-born residents. Over 75 percent of the population resides in cities and towns, and the vast majority are concentrated in the capital, Djibouti City.⁹ Djibouti’s Human Development Index (HDI) value for 2019 was 0.524 (putting the country in the low human development category), positioning it at 166 out of 189 countries and territories.¹⁰



U.S. Department of State TIP Report Summary (2021)

U.S. Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 2 Watch List

In 2021, Djibouti was downgraded from Tier 2 to the Tier 2 Watch List in the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report. While it is making efforts to eliminate trafficking, it does not yet meet the minimum standards for its elimination. Efforts have included funding civil society organizations, helping vulnerable populations, and providing training to magistrates. Nevertheless, it was not viewed that the country's efforts in 2021 were an improvement on the previous year. For the sixth consecutive year, the Djiboutian government did not initiate its national action plan to eliminate trafficking. Further to this, there has been a lull in investigations and prosecutions, with no convictions of a trafficker since 2017. Further to this, training has been inadequate and generally, officials have misunderstood human trafficking and migrant smuggling, which has impeded Djibouti's overall anti-trafficking efforts.

Read the full TIP report at: www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/djibouti/¹¹

Migrants and Other Vulnerable Populations

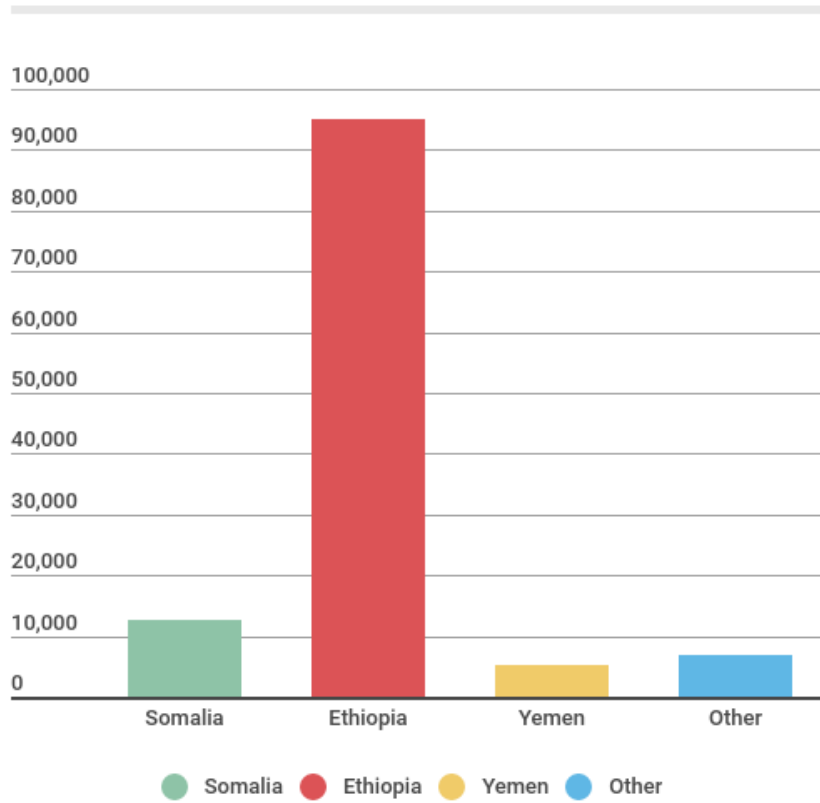
Djibouti has a high migration rate with 4.59 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2022 est.), ranking it 24 in the world for incoming migrant flows. Currently, Djibouti hosts approximately 35,000 refugees and asylum seekers, over 40 percent of whom are classified as children due to the country's strategic position as a transit point.¹² Djibouti's location on the eastern coast of Africa makes it a hub of regional migration, with Somalis, Yemenis, and Ethiopians traveling through the country en route to the Gulf and northern Africa. Djibouti has received a massive influx of migrants from Yemen. Over 20,000 Yemenis had arrived in the country as of August 2017.¹³

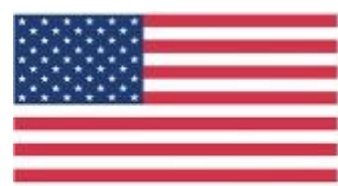
According to Migrants and Refugees, information on internally-displaced persons is not generally available but internal displacements are generally caused by weather-related disasters. In 2019, flash floods caused 10,000 internal displacements and 11 in 2020.¹⁴

There are several large camps, but many migrants choose to head for the capital city rather than live in the camps, which are affected by unemployment and often lack sufficient supplies of food and water.¹⁵ Migrant women and children were found to be vulnerable to forced labor which included domestic service, forced begging, and peddling. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened the risk of forced labor and sex trafficking for migrants.¹⁶ The U.S. Department of State reported that migrant children were vulnerable to sex trafficking in Djibouti City, the trucking route to Ethiopia as well as around the principal terminal for arrivals and departures to Yemen.¹⁷

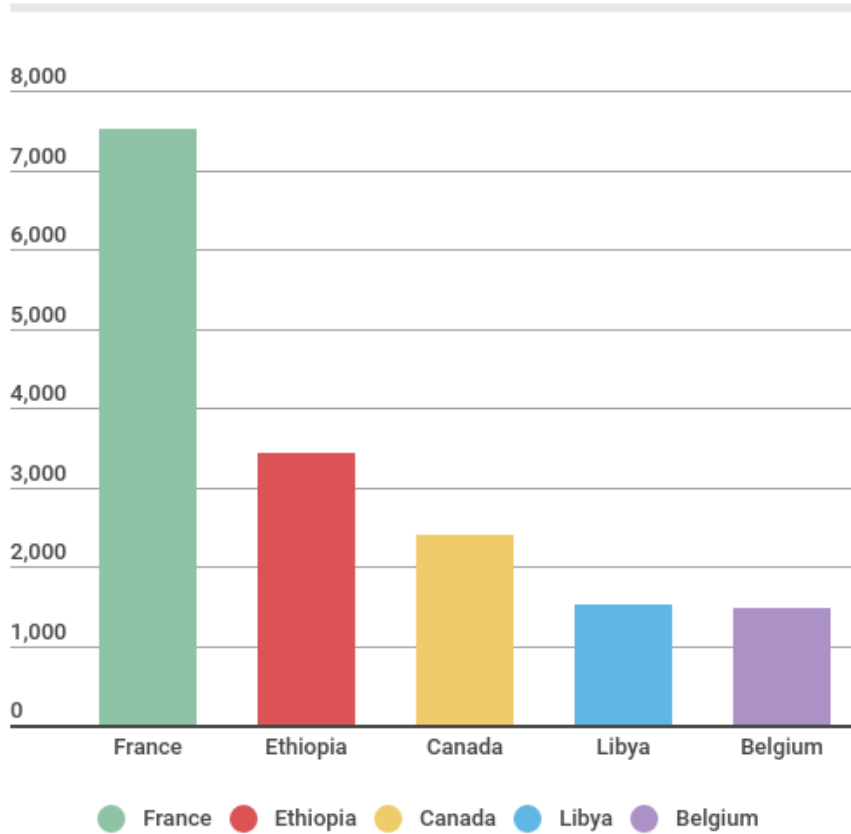


Migrants to Djibouti





Migrants from Djibouti



Exports and Trade

According to mirror data, Djibouti’s top exports in 2021 included animal or vegetable fats and oils, inorganic chemicals, live animals, edible vegetables, as well as electrical parts and machinery.¹⁸



Top Commodity Exports (USD/Thousands)

2021



The top importers of goods from Djibouti in 2021 were Ethiopia, China, India, the United States, and Saudi Arabia.¹⁹

Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors Analysis

Legal/Policy Risk Factors

Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers' Rights

Freedom of Association

The law in Djibouti allows workers to form unions, bargain collectively, and strike (after providing advanced notice to the Ministry of Labor) to some degree. Anti-union discrimination is legally prohibited, necessitating the reinstatement of workers fired for union participation. However, the law allows for employers to suspend a worker's contract if they hold an office within a trade union. State authorities reportedly actively infringed upon workers' rights to free association and labor union related activities. Union registration is highly complex, with Ministry of Labor officials maintaining high degrees of authority and discretion.²⁰

Working Conditions

Djibouti abolished its national minimum wage with the introduction of the 2006 Labor Code, meaning that there is no legally mandated minimum wage in the private sector. As such, rates of pay have to be directly agreed with the employer. Public sector workers, however, continue to have a minimum wage



of DJF 35,000 (USD 198) per month, which is above the World Bank poverty income level. Furthermore, there is a large informal sector, spanning much of the labor market. The legal workweek is 40 hours, over 5 days, with a 48-hour period of rest.²¹

There is also no law or regulation explicitly allowing workers to remove themselves from hazardous working conditions, without jeopardizing their employment. Migrant workers were especially vulnerable to hazardous working conditions in the construction industry and in employment at ports. However, workers did not generally report unsafe working conditions, using the service to report unjust terminations of labor.²²

In 2018, the government attempted to prosecute nine traffickers the country's 2016 anti-trafficking law, under but due to a lack of evidence were only able to convict them of smuggling. The Ministry of Labor conducted only 30 inspections of worksites in the entire year of 2020. This was a decrease from 103 in 2019, because inspections were only conducted in Djibouti City due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the U.S. Department of State, no trafficking victims were identified in the scope of these investigations.²³

Discrimination

Djiboutian law prohibits employment discrimination based on “language, origin, race, sex or religion”.²⁴ Despite this, abuses remain widespread. The law does not prohibit discrimination due to disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV-positive status, or having other communicable diseases. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of State has stated that the Labor Inspectorate did not adequately carry out inspections for discrimination. There is also no law mandating equal pay for equal work. Migrant workers are legally entitled to the same protections as citizens under the law but are reportedly denied them in practice.²⁵

In terms of gender disparity, the Protection Law addressed discrimination against women in the workplace and the government promoted women-led small enterprises, however, the U.S. Department of State reported that custom and tradition resulted in a continual secondary role in public life for Djiboutian women.²⁶

Forced Labor

Article 2 of the Labor Code stipulates that forced labor is prohibited and forced labor may form an element of trafficking under Article 23 of Law No. 111.²⁷ In 2018, Djibouti ratified the Forced Labor Protocol to the Forced Labor Convention – being the 23rd country to do so.²⁸

Nevertheless, women and children from both local and migrant populations were considered to be vulnerable to forced labor including domestic servitude, forced begging and peddling. Migrants who travel from or through Djibouti, are also at risk of both forced labor and sex trafficking in their intended destinations.²⁹

Allegations of forced labor were often settled by families or village elders, through informal means instead of through formal courts. In total, 30 cases were inspected by labor inspectors in 2021 but the government did not report identifying any trafficking victims.³⁰

Child Labor



Djiboutian law has ratified key instruments relating to the rights of children, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Djiboutian law proscribes the employment of children under the age of 16 and incorporates provisions against dangerous work for minors. However, the minimum age provision only applies to children in connection with a formal labor contract. Children frequently worked in family-owned businesses, but also carried out work shoe shining, cleaning cars, street selling, as domestic servants, farming, begging and other informal means of labor. The law further dictates that child should not work a night or work in excess of 40 hours per week.³¹

The Ministry of Labor is responsible for the prevention of child labor, however, inadequate staffing and resources impeded investigations which were only focused on the formal economy. The U.S. Department of State has stated that the Djiboutian government’s enforcement of the law is ineffective, penalties are inadequate, and the government has not yet criminalized the worst forms of child labor. As such, child labor is present in all forms across the country, including the worst forms of child labor such as use in illicit activities, forced domestic work and begging and commercial sexual exploitation.³²

The U.S. Department of Labor found that in 2020, Djibouti had made a moderate advancement to eliminate the worst forms of child labor following the adoption of a national labor inspection strategy which targeted sectors in which children were at risk of child labor and child labor in its worst forms.

Civil Society Organizations

Freedom House reports that civil society organizations are permitted to operate without government interference as long as their work is not considered to be politically delicate. These groups have sometimes been subject to intimidation. Furthermore, journalists and activists are not free and that those who criticize President Guelleh or his party are regularly harassed or arrested.³³

Immigration Policies Limiting the Employment Options or Movement of Migrants

Even though migrant workers who obtain residency and work permits are entitled by law to the same working conditions as citizens, it is not done so in practice. Generally, migrants were at higher risk of hazardous working conditions.³⁴

According to the U.S. Department of State, migrants were detained at the Nagad Detention Facility, which was not part of the prison system until the COVID-19 pandemic. There were reports that police and gendarmes abused prisoners within the center. However, the Djiboutian government did provide some temporary protection to individuals who were mainly unaccompanied minor migrants enrolled in a voluntary program of return to their home country.³⁵

Ratification of ILO Conventions Related to Human Trafficking or Rights of Workers and Migrants³⁶

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	In force
ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor	In force
ILO 111 Discrimination	In force
ILO 138 Minimum Age	In force
ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies	Not Ratified
ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor	In force
ILO 97 Migration for Employment	Not Ratified

[Use of Export Processing Zones \(EPZs\)](#)

There are currently multiple “free zones” in Djibouti. Companies that operate within them do not pay neither direct nor indirect taxes for a period of up to ten years. Companies which are located in the Djibouti Free Zone (DFZ), established in 2004, do not pay corporate taxes, have a simplified registration process, and receive other benefits such as assistance obtaining work permits and visas. This has attracted approximately 180 companies from 30 countries, which specialize in areas such as marketing, regional logistics, trade, warehousing, processing, and re-exportation.³⁷ This was followed by the DAM Commercial Free Zone, established in 2013 and in 2018, construction began on the Djibouti International Free Trade Zone. When complete, the latter will be the largest free zone in Africa.³⁸

Political Risk Factors

[Political Instability or Conflict](#)

Djibouti scored an 81.3 on the 2022 Fragile States Index (FSI), placing it in the “warning” category and ranking the country 48th out of 179. The FSI scale goes from 0 (indicating a “sustainable” political system) to 120 (indicating a political system on “alert”). For 2022, the key factors of instability were state legitimacy, external intervention, demographic pressures, factionalized elites, public services, economic inequality, and refugees and IDPs.³⁹

The Institute for Economics and Peace’s Global Peace Index 2021 ranks Djibouti 106th of 163 countries, globally – categorizing the country as having a “medium” state of peace.⁴⁰

[Level of Crime and Violence](#)

There is a moderate risk of crime in Djibouti with most reported incidents being opportunistic pickpocketing, theft, or burglary. Police response is slow to non-existent. The potential for cross-border conflict or terrorism exists as well, due to its location next to conflict-torn states.⁴¹

State Persecution

As of 2021, there were arbitrary arrests of civil society members critical of the government including journalists, bloggers, and opposition supporters.⁴² This resulted in widespread self-censorship.

While homosexuality is not illegal in Djibouti, no anti-discrimination laws are in place to protect LGBTQI+ individuals. There are reports of state security forces harassing same-sex couples in public under laws that prohibit attacks on “good morals.” Djiboutian LGBTQI+ individuals do not generally openly acknowledge their LGBTQI+ identity.⁴³

Level of Corruption

Djiboutian law provides criminal penalties for corruption, however, this law is not applied effectively, and officials are reported to have “engaged in corrupt practices with impunity”.⁴⁴ The 2021 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index scored Djibouti 30 out of 100, where a 0 signals “Highly Corrupt” and 100 signals “Very Clean.” Djibouti ranked 128 out of 180 countries on the index, seeing an increase of three places from 2020.⁴⁵

Socio-Economic Risk Factors

Level of National Economic Development

As per the 2022 BTI Transformation Index, Djibouti is placed at 4.12 on a scale of 1-10, the 104th country of 137. This index considers indicators including those relating to political transformation, governance, and economic transformation. For economic transformation alone, the country is placed at 89 of 157, or 4.57. The report principally attributes this growth to debt-financed investments. Nevertheless, unemployment and underemployment both remain high.⁴⁶

Level and Extent of Poverty

Djibouti, despite being reclassified as a low-middle-income country, still has an approximate poverty rate of 62.6 percent, with 21.1 percent of the population living in extreme poverty.⁴⁷ The Djiboutian government has had a strong focus on addressing extreme poverty, which resulted in its reduction from 42.2 percent to 21.3 percent of the population, between 2012 and 2017.⁴⁸ The World Bank’s April 2022 economic update on Djibouti confirms that poverty in Djibouti is decreasing. Djibouti’s rebounding growth, mainly due to infrastructure projects, is set to reduce the likelihood of poverty from 14.7 percent in 2020 to 12.4 percent in 2024.⁴⁹

The root causes of poverty in Djibouti are deemed to be the lack of resources, lack of development in the rural sector and poor conditions for rural workers.⁵⁰ However, these issues are compounded by high unemployment, food insecurity, governance challenges, poor health indicators and chronic water shortages.⁵¹ Due to Djibouti’s geographic location, the country is particularly vulnerable to climate change, which in turn can impact the country’s situation of severe food insecurity further. As the country imports about 90 percent of its food, the country is greatly affected by international market prices and particularly, the poor who spend approximately 77 percent of their household budget on food.⁵² The World Food Programme considers Djibouti to be susceptible to rising wheat prices due to their significant demand for and reliance on wheat imports.⁵³ Disruptions in the supply chain and an increase in food prices occurred as a result of the conflict in Ukraine. Having been affected by severe



drought and the impact of the Ukrainian conflict, the World Bank approved a grant of USD 30 million on the 27 June 2022, to provide safety net transfers to Djibouti following the adverse effects of multiple crises.⁵⁴

Degree of Gender Inequality

The constitution provides for equal treatment regardless of gender, but women face a secondary role in Djiboutian society due to customary practices and traditional societal discrimination.⁵⁵ Family and personal status laws have traditionally been based on Sharia law in Djibouti.⁵⁶ This code provides that women need to obtain a guardian's consent to marry, as well as other discriminatory provisions regarding marriage, inheritance, and divorce.⁵⁷

The legal code does not address spousal rape, and although rape is punishable by 20 years in prison, those cases are often settled informally via familial settlements. In 2020, the Protection Law entered into force. This law provided for protection against domestic violence, harmful customary practices, sexual harassment, and discrimination.⁵⁸ It has since been reported that sexual harassment has persisted, and domestic violence is rarely reported and prosecuted. The Protection law has also created a support fund for the survivors of violence and integrated care centers to give survivors care and psychosocial support.

While female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is illegal, rates continued to be high. Nevertheless, evidence from the United Nations Population Fund supports the notion that the practice is decreasing. For children aged up to 10, the incidence had decreased from 94 percent in 1994 to 21.2 percent in 2019. For women and girls older than 15, the 2012 result of 78.4 percent showed a 12 percent decrease on previous years. Rates continue to be more prevalent in rural areas.⁵⁹

In July 2021, there government prosecuted a high-profile incidence of domestic violence which had caused the death of the victim.

Environmental factors

Djibouti is a resource-scare and highly arid country which receives little precipitation. It is prone to natural disasters, which can be exacerbated by water scarcity, poor water-management, and adverse land-use planning.⁶⁰ The main environmental issues Djibouti faces are the lack of arable land, inadequate potable water resources, water pollution, deforestation, endangered species, and desertification.⁶¹

As such, the country is not highly productive in terms of agriculture and imports an approximate 90 percent of its food, meaning that it is highly dependent on the international market prices – this greatly affects the poor who spend over three-quarters their household budget on food alone.⁶²

Djibouti is considered to be particularly vulnerable to climate change and is expected to continue to experience negative impacts including rising temperatures, greater aridity, less precipitation, and increasing sea levels. The Climate Change Knowledge Portal expects that water resources, agriculture, livestock, coastal zones, health, and tourism will be most impacted.⁶³



Climate change is already causing extreme weather, such as heavy precipitation, and there has been a noted increase in the occurrence of flash flooding during recent years; while at other times, increasing aridity has resulted in intense droughts.⁶⁴ In 2022, the Horn of Africa region was experiencing one of its most severe droughts and likely, the worst in four decades, due to below average rainfall in the rainy season from March – May 2022. Across Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia there are currently 18.5 million people who are considered to be “acutely food insecure”.⁶⁵

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Livestock

Livestock Overview

The trade of live animals to the Middle East is critical to the economy in Djibouti. Many animals traded via the port are raised in Somalia or Ethiopia.⁶⁶ In 2016, the Oxford Business Group was of the position that conditions for the sector would improve upon the completion of the new livestock export terminal at Damerjog, which at that time already processed two million animals per year.⁶⁷

Documented TIP Risk in Livestock

There is evidence that child labor is involved in raising livestock in Djibouti, as well as in Somalia and Ethiopia, where much of the livestock exported from Djibouti originates.⁶⁸

¹ Central Intelligence Agency. “*The World Factbook. Djibouti.*” 2022, www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/. Accessed 8 July 2022.

² Official Journal of the Djiboutian Republic. “Constitutional Law No. 92 of 2010: Sixth Revision of the Constitution” 2010, www.rodra.co.za/images/countries/djibouti/legislation/portant%20r%C3%A9vision%20de%20la%20Constitution%2092%202010.pdf. Accessed 15 July 2022.

³ U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021: Djibouti*. 2021, www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/djibouti/. Accessed 8 July 2022.

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⁴ The World Bank. “Djibouti.” 2021, data.worldbank.org/country/DJ. Accessed 8 July 2022.

⁵ The World Bank, Data Bank. “Country Profile: Djibouti.” 2021, databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=DJ. Accessed 8 July 2022.

⁶ The World Bank, Data. “Djibouti.” 2021, data.worldbank.org/country/djibouti. Accessed 8 July 2022.

⁷ The World Bank. “*Djibouti Overview.*” 2021, www.worldbank.org/en/country/djibouti/overview. Accessed 8 July 2022.

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⁸ BTI Project. “BTI Transformation Index: Djibouti Country Report 2022.” 2022, bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/DJI. Accessed 12 July 2022.

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- ¹² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Operational Data Portal: Refugee Situations. “Djibouti Refugee and asylum seeker as of April 2022 in English.” April 2022, data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/92638. Accessed 8 July 2022.
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- ¹³ Central Intelligence Agency. “The World Factbook. Djibouti.” 2022, www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/. Accessed 8 July 2022.
- ¹⁴ Migrants and Refugees. “Country Profiles: Djibouti.” 2021, migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/djibouti/. Accessed 8 July 2022.
- ¹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. “The World Factbook. Djibouti.” 2022, www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/. Accessed 8 July 2022.
- ¹⁶ U.S. Department of State. “2021 Trafficking in Persons Report; Djibouti.” 2021, www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/djibouti/. Accessed 8 July 2022.
- ¹⁷ U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021: Djibouti*. 2021, www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/djibouti/. Accessed 8 July 2022.
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- ²⁸ 50 for Freedom. “Djibouti is determined to fight modern slavery.” 4 June 2018, 50forfreedom.org/blog/news/djibouti-is-determined-to-fight-modern-slavery/. Accessed 12 July 2022.



- ²⁹ U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021: Djibouti*. 2021, www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/djibouti/. Accessed 12 July 2022.
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