

Comoros

Country Overview

Politics

Comoros is a federal presidential republic of islands located off the southeastern coast of the African continent. Presidents are elected every five years, rotating between the three islands that make up the nation of Comoros. The current president, Azali Assoumani, was re-elected in March 2019, and elections are expected to take place again in 2024.¹ In 2022, President Assoumani launched an Inter-Comorian National Inclusive Dialogue to gather consensus on political reforms, revisions to the constitution, the Independent Electoral Commission, and general conditions for favorable and sustainable development.²

Economy

Comoros is classified by the World Bank as a lower-middle income economy.³ Comoros is undergoing an economic recovery, after the country's GDP experienced negative growth in the 1990s and remained relatively stagnant in the 2000s. With few natural resources, 49.94 percent of the population was reported to have been employed in the agriculture sector, which accounts for 36.7 percent of the GDP.⁴ Vanilla, cloves, essential oils such as ylang-ylang, coconuts, bananas, and cassava are the primary agricultural products produced in Comoros.⁵

Comoros's primary exports are agriculture products. The top imports of Comoros are foodstuffs, with rice and poultry-meat imports valued at \$32.3 million and \$24.3 million, respectively, in 2020.⁶

Threats to Comoros's economy include inadequate transportation links, a young and growing population, relatively low education levels, few natural resources, natural disasters, dependence on foreign assistance, political instability, and a heavy reliance on remittances.⁷ Life expectancy in 2019 was reported to be at approximately 64.3, with the mean years of schooling for children in Comoros at 5.1 years, though the expected years of schooling was at 11.2.

After the economic slowdowns following the COVID-19 pandemic, Comoros's slow recovery can be attributed in part due to the lower performing services sector, lower tourism, and sanctions on fertilizer for the agricultural sector, among others.⁸



Social/Human Development

There are five primary ethnic groups in Comoros, the Antalote, the Cafre, the Makoa, the Oimatsahsa, and the Sakalava. Arabic, French, and Shikomoro (a blend of Swahili and Arabic) are the country's official languages.⁹

Comoros's Human Development Index (HDI) score was reported to be 0.554, marking it as a country in the medium human development group. Comoros' development is still below the average for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. When Comoros' HDI score is discounted for inequality, it falls to 0.303.¹⁰

Though the population of Comoros is significantly lower than other Sub-Saharan countries, it is one of the most densely populated, with a reported 465 inhabitants per kilometer squared, and with 53 percent of the population being less than 20 years of age.¹¹

The maternal mortality rate of 195 per 100,000 births remains a prominent issue due to a lack of access to obstetric care and modern facilities in rural areas.¹²

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

U.S. Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 3

According to the *Trafficking in Persons Report*, trafficking risk may be found among children in export supply chains including agriculture and fishing. The CIA World Factbook reported that "Comoros does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking is not making significant efforts to do so."¹³

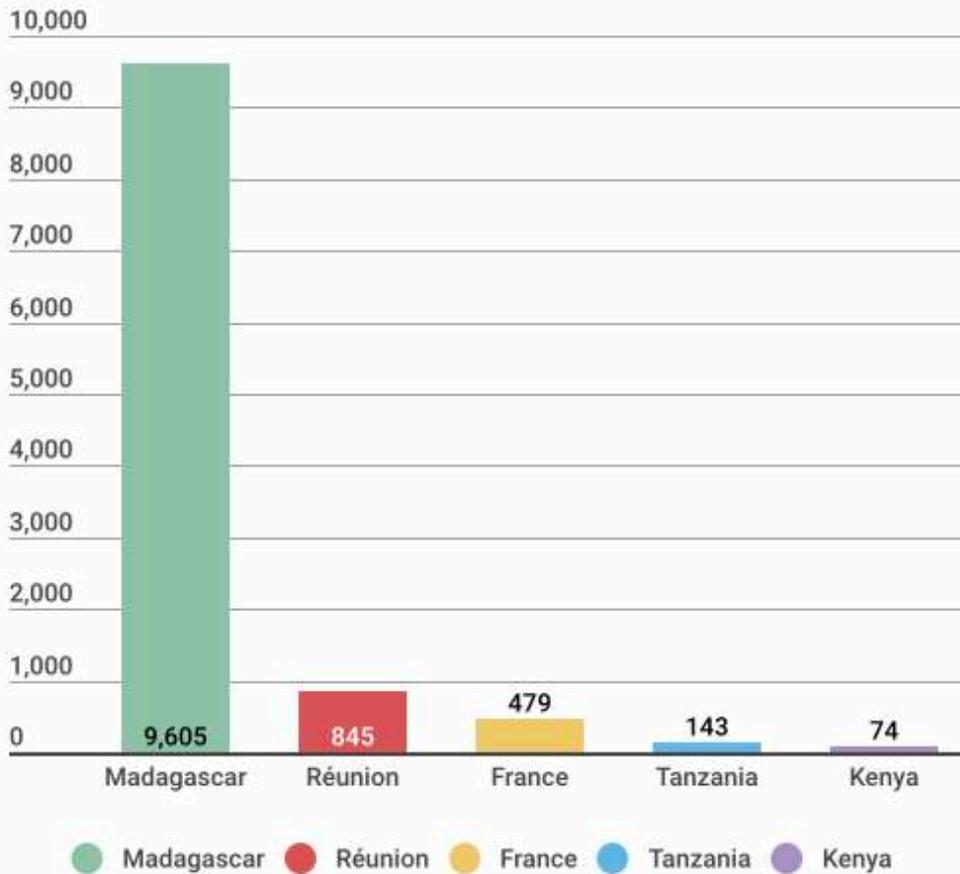
Read the full TIP Report at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/comoros/>.

Migrants and Other Vulnerable Populations

Comoros has a negative net migration rate.¹⁴ The highest number of migrants entering Comoros are from countries including Madagascar, France, Réunion, Tanzania, and Kenya.¹⁵



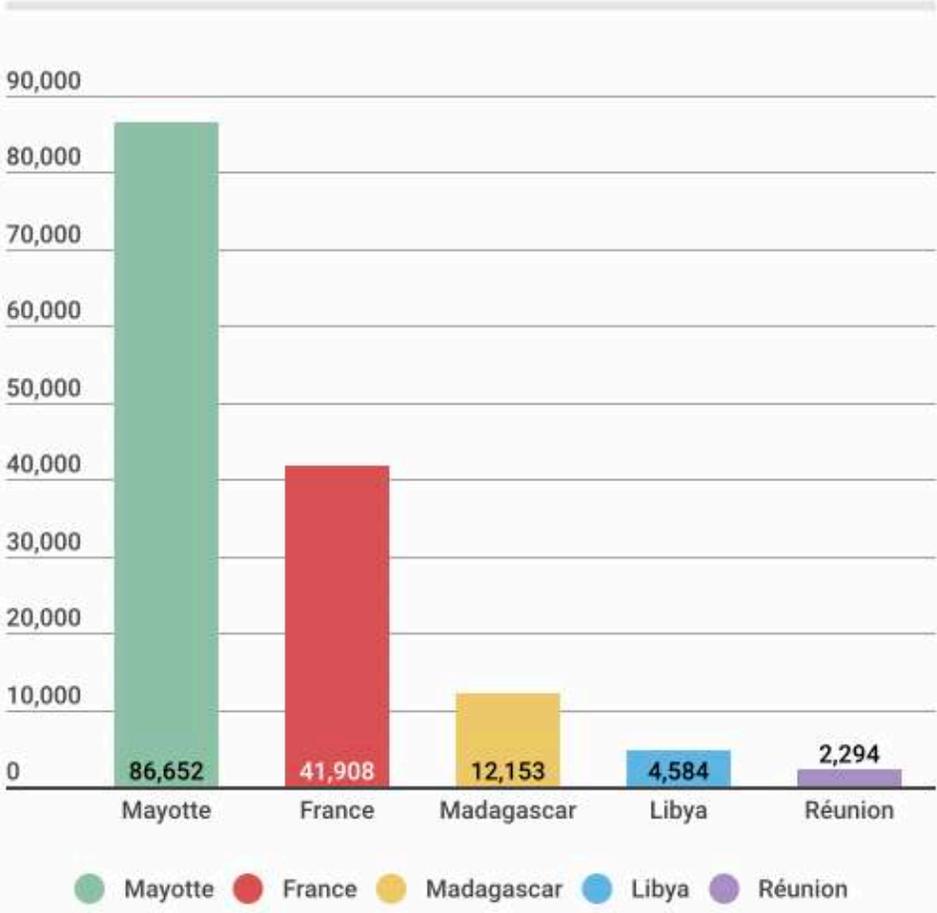
Migrants to Comoros



The top destination countries for migrants from Comoros include Mayotte, France, Madagascar, Libya, and Réunion.¹⁶



Migrants from Comoros



Exports and Trade

Comoros's top exports in 2021 were coffee, tea, maté, spices, essential oils, ships, floating structures, machinery, mechanical appliances, and aluminum.¹⁷



Top Commodity Exports (USD/Thousands)

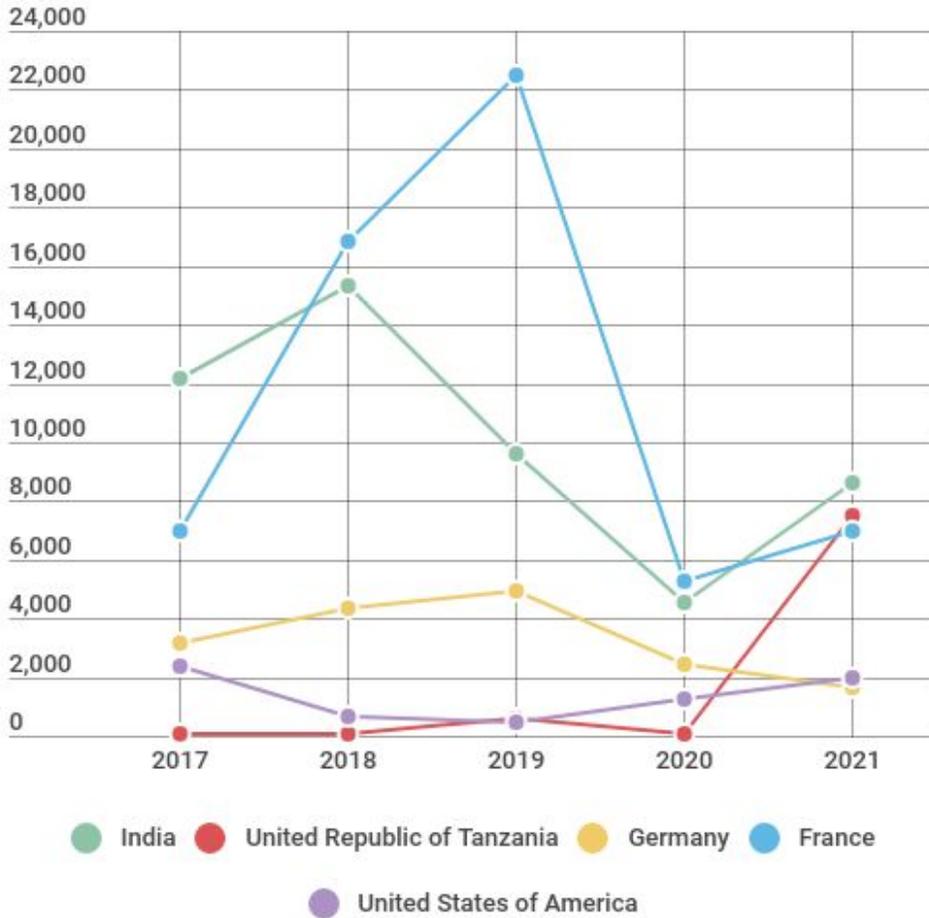
2021



The top importers of all goods from Comoros were India, Tanzania, France, the United States of America, and Germany.¹⁸



Comoros Export Partners (USD/Thousands)



Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors Analysis

Legal/Policy Risk Factors

Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers' Rights

Freedom of Association

The Comorian constitution provides for and protects freedom of association, and the government has generally respected these rights. The law also allows workers the right to form and join independent unions to resolve labor disputes without prior authorization. Unions have



the right to collectively bargain and conduct activities without government interference. However, the law does not prohibit anti-union discrimination by employers during hiring or retribution against strikers.¹⁹ While there are no cases of retribution or retaliation against workers when workers exercised their right to organize and bargain, the most common issues were that salaries were not paid on time, as well as abusive dismissal practices without proper notice according to the labor contract.²⁰

Working Conditions

The law sets a guideline for a minimum wage of KMF 55,000 (approximately USD \$118.38) per month, but this is not a legal requirement.²¹ The law provides for a 40-hour workweek for non-agricultural work. For agricultural work, the maximum hours worked per year may not exceed 2,400 (approximately 46 hours a week). Occupational safety and health hazard requirements are codified in the law, but the U.S. Department of State has reported that these codes are seldom enforced, with self-employed fishing being reported as the most dangerous.²² There is an additional law that permits auditors and inspectors to remove workers from hazardous conditions, however, this is also not enforced as labor inspectors were reported to not be regularly visiting work sites.²³ The informal sector represented around 65 percent of all employed in 2021, and these workers are not covered under any wage, health, safety, or working-hours protections.²⁴

Discrimination

The Comorian constitution provides for equality regardless of sex, origin, race, or religion. Labor law forbids employment discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national ancestry, social origin, or actual or presumed state of health. Laws provide equality of persons based on race, however, there is no official recognition of minorities or protection against violence on race or ethnicity.²⁵

Forced Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced labor, but the U.S. Department of State reports that the government has not met the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and has failed to make significant efforts to do so.²⁶ There is, however, compulsory service mandated for military, community, and emergency service during accidents and fires. During times of national emergencies, individuals may be mandated to provide disaster relief.²⁷

Child Labor

The law sets the minimum age for work at 15 years, and the minimum age for hazardous work at 18 years. Children from families who are sent away to find employment were reported to be the most vulnerable for risk of forced domestic servitude.²⁸ Labor inspectors have the right to require the medical examination of a child to determine if the work assigned to them is beyond their physical capacity and may remove the child from the employment situation if it is deemed beyond their capacity. Despite these stipulations, the government reportedly did not adequately enforce child labor laws.²⁹ Children working in agriculture to produce subsistence



crops were also reported to be vulnerable to forced labor conditions, particularly in small, family-based agriculture. Labor laws are especially weak in protecting children in the informal sector, for the same protections are not applied to children not in contractual employment.³⁰

Civil Society Organizations

The U.S. Department of State has reported that human rights groups normally functioned without any restrictions from the government, and officials often cooperated with civil society organizations. It was also reported that domestic NGOs often supplanted government ministries on human rights issues.³¹ Civil society organizations and NGOs are particularly active in addressing cases of child abuse, such as the NGO Listening and Counseling service, which provides counseling and intervention services.³²

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

Conventions	Status
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	In force

Promotion of Emigration/Remittance Economy

Remittances in Comoros represent a larger share of GDP than exports of goods and services.³³ In 2022, the World Bank reported that remittance inflows to Comoros represented a 19 percent share of the GDP.³⁴ However, there was a reduction in diaspora remittances to Comoros following the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a fiscal deficit of 4.9 percent reduction in GDP.³⁵



Political Risk Factors

Political Instability or Conflict

Comoros scored an 82.5 in the 2021 Fragile State Index, ranking 47th out of 179 countries. Comoros is listed as a “High Warning” country, and its score has worsened since the last report.³⁶ Comoros’s percentile rank for political stability was 33.96 on the World Bank’s 2021 Worldwide Governance Indicators Report, which captures the perception of the government becoming destabilized by unconstitutional means.³⁷ The same report also states that Comoros’ Control of Corruption score was 18.27, which notes the perceptions of how public power is abused for private interest.³⁸

Level of Corruption

The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index scores Comoros at 20 out of 100, where 0 signals “Highly Corrupt” and 100 signals “Very Clean.” Comoros is ranked 164 out of 180 on that index, with a one-point decrease since 2020.³⁹ The U.S. Department of State reported that resident diplomatic, United Nations, and humanitarian agency workers reported petty corruption as commonplace. Impunity remains a problem in higher ranking offices, as well as security forces, where a strong reluctance to follow through on charges and investigations of corruption and abuses.⁴⁰

Level of Crime and Violence

The U.S. Department of State reports that the crime level in Grand Comore, Moheli, and Anjouan is relatively low. The most common illegal activity is petty crime, including pickpocketing.⁴¹ Civil unrest, however, was at a moderate risk for escalating into violence following the 2019 elections.⁴² Sexual violence and harassment both in and outside the workplace are widespread, but are seldom formally reported to authorities, or followed through with investigations.⁴³

State Persecution

Comoros’ Freedom House score for political rights is 16 out of 40, and 26 out of 60 for civil liberties, marking its status as a Partly Free country. For example, a 2018 political referendum was controversial, and opponents were reported to be persecuted by President Azali Assoumani. Journalists continue to face harassment, arbitrary violence, and persecution. The finance minister, Kamalidine Souef, publicly threatened journalists who claimed the 2019 election was not free or fair.⁴⁴

Socio-Economic Risk Factors

Level of National Economic Development

Comoros’s Human Development Index (HDI) score was reported to be 0.554, marking it as a country in the medium human development group. Comoros’ development is below the



average for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. When Comoros' HDI score is discounted for inequality, it falls to 0.303.⁴⁵

Level and Extent of Poverty

Comoros has a relatively high level of poverty, with 37.3 percent of the population determined by the UN to be living in multidimensional poverty, and 22.3 percent classified as being vulnerable to multidimensional poverty.⁴⁶ The overall poverty rate was estimated to be 39.8 percent as of 2021, which is a very small decrease from 40.4 percent in 2020.⁴⁷ Though the rural areas are responsible for the agriculture sector, which represents 50 percent of Comoros' GDP, rural regions are among the poorest, 50 percent of the population there are living with food insecurity. As of 2018, only 58.82 percent of children older than 15 were literate in Comoros, lower than the 86.3 percent global average.⁴⁸ Those that live below the poverty line in Comoros make less than 35,341 Comorian francs, or \$76.06 USD, per month.⁴⁹

Degree of Gender Inequality

Discrimination based on gender is prohibited by the Comorian constitution. Rape is illegal, including spousal rape. The U.S. Department of State has reported that the government enforces the laws if rape victims filed charges. The law also prohibits domestic violence, but courts do not often fine or order imprisonment for convicted perpetrators.⁵⁰

The U.S. Department of State reports that inheritance and property laws favor women due to the local cultures of Grande Comore and Moheli being matrilineal.⁵¹ The Gender Development Index for Comoros reported in 2019 that the female HDI value contributed was 0.519, which was less than the 0.583 for the male population.

The GNI per capita for females in Comoros was 2,300 Comorian Francs (USD \$4.95), whereas for males is 3,885 Comorian Francs (USD \$8.36).⁵² Additionally, there was only a 28.23 percent employment to population ratio of females in Comoros, compared to the regional average of 51.53 percent.⁵³



Environmental Factors

Comoros experiences cyclones each year from December to April, as well as active volcanoes on Grande Comore.⁵⁴ In 2005, Mount Karthala erupted on Grand Comore and forced thousands of people to evacuate. Soil degradation, erosion, and deforestation are other issues that threaten Comorian food stability.⁵⁵

High population density puts a great strain on land and other natural resources, with 54.2 percent of the population living in environmentally at-risk areas.⁵⁶ Between 1995 and 2004, approximately 80 percent of the forest cover in the country was cut, which contributed to soil erosion, and water scarcity.⁵⁷

Risk in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Fishing

Fishing Overview

Over 140,000 Comorians earn their living from the country's fishing sector, which accounts for 36.7 percent of the country's GDP.⁵⁸

The Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing Index ranks Comoros 33 out of 152 countries, with a score of 2.45, with one being the best, and five being the worst.⁵⁹ While this is a relatively positive score, it does not mean that Comoros is invulnerable to risks in the fishing industry. For example, the size of Comoros' Exclusive Economic Zone has a score of three. It scored of five for agreements for maritime boundaries and authorization for foreign vessels, signaling a higher coastal vulnerability. Furthermore, it scored five for the trade balance of fisheries products and for gross national income per capita, indicating a weakness in Comoros' regulations and response to address the vulnerabilities in ports and in the fishing sector.⁶⁰



Documented TIP Risk in Fishing

The U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Labor have both reported on the presence of child labor in the Comorian seafood sector in the catching and processing of fish, which is recognized as the most hazardous product sector of work for both adults and children.⁶¹ The European Union criticized Comoros for deciding to partially outsource its fishing fleet to an offshore private company and encouraged the country to improve its practices against illegal fishing.⁶²

Children are especially vulnerable in the fishing sector, as children who were abandoned or left to seek work have been reported to experience forced labor.⁶³

The largest number of fishing workers employed by human-smuggling networks in Comoros originate from Mayotte because of the proximity to Comoros, and the lack of a clear international boundary.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the fishing sector is increasingly risky for illegal activity and trafficking due to the higher presence of drugs, such as heroin, being smuggled and seized through Comoros' strategic location in the Mozambican channel.⁶⁵

Vanilla

Vanilla Overview

Vanilla is one of the most expensive and labor-intensive crops to produce, with profits by smaller farmers being determined by the number of family members working for harvest.⁶⁶ Comoros has been reported to act as a transit point for the illicit trade of vanilla to compete with Madagascar. While there is no connection to organized crime, illegal and unregulated deforestation is associated with vanilla production.⁶⁷

Documented TIP Risk in Vanilla

According to the U.S. Department of State, children are engaged in forced labor in agricultural work on Anjouan.⁶⁸ Human trafficking is reported to be facilitated by state actors and international syndicates to move people between the islands, with Tanzanian agents being primarily responsible for drug trafficking, and Madagascar enabling the smuggling of vanilla. Trafficking of children is especially prevalent when agents take advantage of families who either send children to find work on different islands or when families seek to move to Grande Comore.⁶⁹



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