

The Gambia

Country Overview

Politics

The Gambia is a presidential republic characterized by a strong executive branch and a unicameral legislative body. The judicial system references a combination of English common law, Islamic law, and customary law. The Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC) historically dominated the political landscape in The Gambia during the rule of President Yahya Jammeh, who became president through a 1994 military coup and held power until December 2016, when he lost a reelection bid to a coalition of opposition parties.¹ President Adama Barrow was democratically elected in 2016.² Barrow has held power since 2016 and his reelection in 2021 and surviving an alleged coup in 2022.³ The next election is expected to take place in 2026.⁴ The Gambia does not have presidential term limits.⁵

Former President Jammeh's regime suppressed rival groups' civil liberties, sowing ethnic tensions. Following Barrow's 2016 election, these tensions were surfacing.⁶ Reports indicated that employers favor workers from the same ethnic group and political parties use divisive tactics to ensure solidarity.⁷

Economy

The World Bank classifies The Gambia as a low-income country, with a 2021 total GDP of USD 2.04 billion and a per capita GDP of USD 772.2.⁸ The Gambia's GDP has grown over the past decade, with the country most recently recording a 4.3 percent increase in 2021 from 2020.⁹ The country currently faces a large fiscal deficit and domestic debt burden of 88 percent of GDP.¹⁰ The Gambia's poverty rate was 20.3 percent in 2022, an increase from the country's 2021 rate of 18.4 percent.¹¹ Despite increases in GDP, high inflation (at 11.6 percent in 2022) from global commodity shocks decreased household purchasing power, leading to higher levels of poverty.¹²

Approximately 75 percent of Gambians work in agriculture, where the most important commodity is groundnuts, which accounts for about 80 percent of Gambian agricultural revenue.¹³ Other important industries include fishing, hides, woodworking, beverage manufacturing, and tourism. Remittance payments composed 27.1 percent of The Gambia's



GDP in 2022.¹⁴ The Gambia's small size and lack of economic diversification make it particularly exposed to shocks in tourism, agriculture, and remittance payments.¹⁵

The Gambia's Investment and Export Promotion Agency (GEIPA) works to incentivize foreign investment, diversify the country's economy, and promote its exports.¹⁶ The Gambia's industry and service sectors, which compose the majority of Gambian GDP, have both grown in recent years.¹⁷ According to the U.S. Department of State, The Gambia's horticulture, groundnut, fishing, light manufacturing, and tourism industries all exhibit export potential.¹⁸

The Gambia is a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional political and economic union consisting of fifteen West African states. ECOWAS is aimed at promoting economic integration among member states.¹⁹

Social/Human Development

The Gambia has a population of 2.47 million, with an annual population growth rate of 2.23 percent.²⁰ The country's four largest ethnic groups are the Mandinka/Jahanka (33 percent), Fulani/Tukulur/Lorobo (18 percent), Wolof (13 percent), and Jola/Karoninka (11 percent).²¹ The vast majority (96.4 percent) of The Gambia's population identifies as Muslim.²²

The Gambia has reduced poverty from 50.7 percent in 2003 to 17.2 percent in 2020.²³ However, global supply shocks have threatened this trend in recent years. Weak GDP growth and rising prices driven by the war in Ukraine eroded many Gambians' ability to buy basic goods. The Gambia's literacy rates are notably low – just under 60 percent of the population above the age of 15 was literate in 2021.²⁴ Though the adult literacy rate remains low, it has generally trended in the positive direction, with an approximately 15 percent increase in literacy from 2012 levels. Despite overall increases, however, literacy among women is significantly lower than their male counterparts.²⁵

75 percent of the Gambian population works in agriculture.²⁶ The majority of this is subsistence farming which relies on rainfall and low levels of agricultural mechanization. At the same time, Gambia is experiencing rapid increases in urban populations. There are high rates of rural-urban migration. Around 64 percent of the population now lives in urban areas, an increase from 48 percent in 2000 and 53 percent in 2010.²⁷ Gambian cities, however, lack the necessary infrastructure to support increasing urban populations.²⁸

A significant number of Gambian emigrants are skilled workers, and over 20 percent of GDP comes from remittances.²⁹ Gambians increasingly seek to reach Spain and Italy via informal migration routes.³⁰



U.S. Department of State TIP Report Summary (2022)

U.S. Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 2³¹

The Gambia does not fully meet the requirements for eliminating human trafficking but is making efforts to do so. According to the 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, forced labor occurs in agriculture and street vending, as well as forced begging. Some Gambian children have been forced by corrupt Quranic teachers to beg or vend in the streets. For Gambians seeking to emigrate, traffickers pose as labor recruiters before exploiting Gambians in forced labor or sex trafficking.

The Gambia made 14 arrests related to human trafficking in 2022 but did not release specifics about the cases. Government agencies countering trafficking continue to lack adequate resources and training and conflate human trafficking with migrant smuggling, focusing on the movement of persons rather than forced labor conditions.³²

Read the full TIP report at:

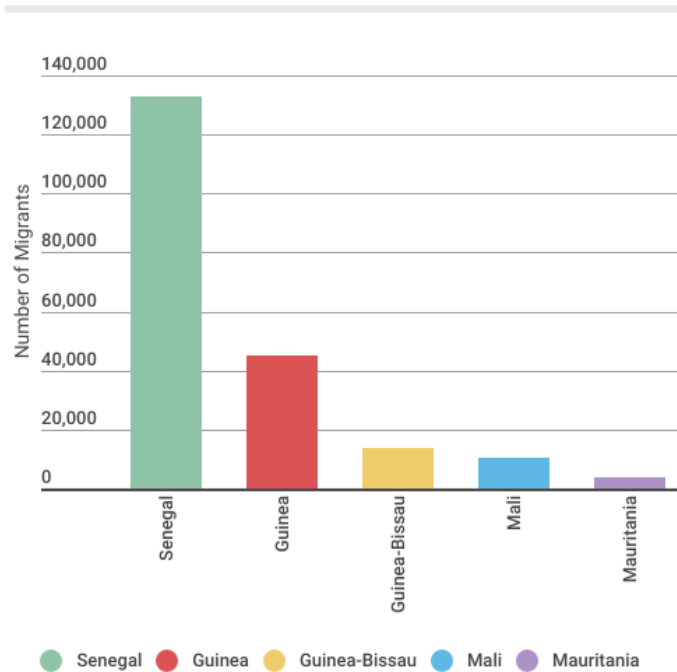
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/gambia/>

Migrants and Other Vulnerable Populations

The Gambia experienced a net negative migration rate in 2023, with -0.4 migrants per thousand people.³³ The Gambia recorded 215,659 migrants in 2022.³⁴ The main source countries for immigration to The Gambia are Senegal, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, and Mauritania, with the vast majority coming from Senegal.³⁵ Around 10 percent of The Gambia's population are migrants.³⁶ There were an estimated 4,433 refugees in The Gambia in 2022.³⁷ A large proportion of Gambian workers are vulnerable to exploitation because they work in the informal sector, not subject to labor protection laws. About 80 percent of Gambian workers are employed in the informal sector.³⁸



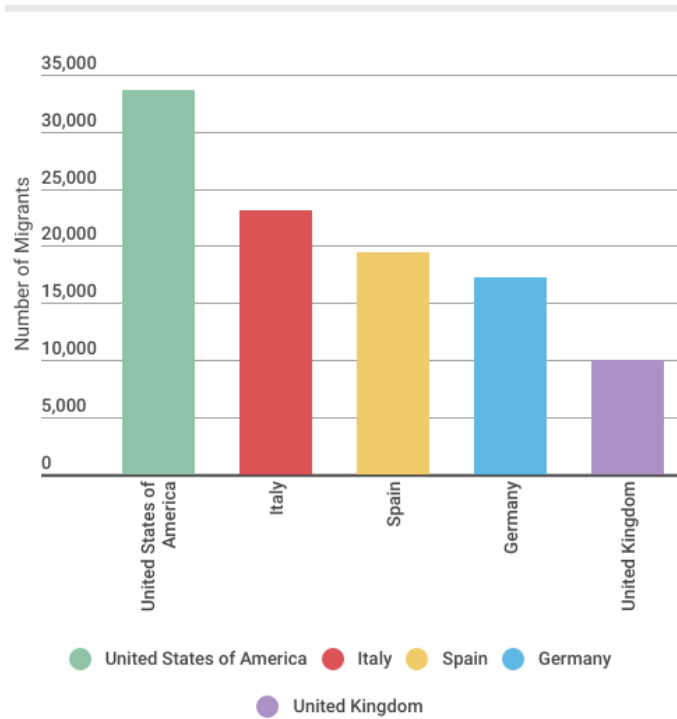
Migrants to The Gambia (2020)



The top destination countries for migrants from The Gambia were the United States, Spain, the United Kingdom, Senegal, and Sweden.³⁹ Many Gambians migrate without documentation to Europe via Italy and Spain.⁴⁰ Between 2017 and 2020, China imported over 300,000 tons of illicit timber from The Gambia.⁴¹



Migrants from The Gambia (2020)



The Gambia recorded 1,108 asylum seekers and no internally displaced persons in 2022.⁴²

Exports and Trade

Gambia's top exports in 2022 were nuts (namely cashews and peanuts), lumber, refined petroleum, shellfish, and scrap iron.⁴³ Timber, particularly rosewood, is also a critical export, although this was not captured by formal trade data due to smuggling.⁴⁴



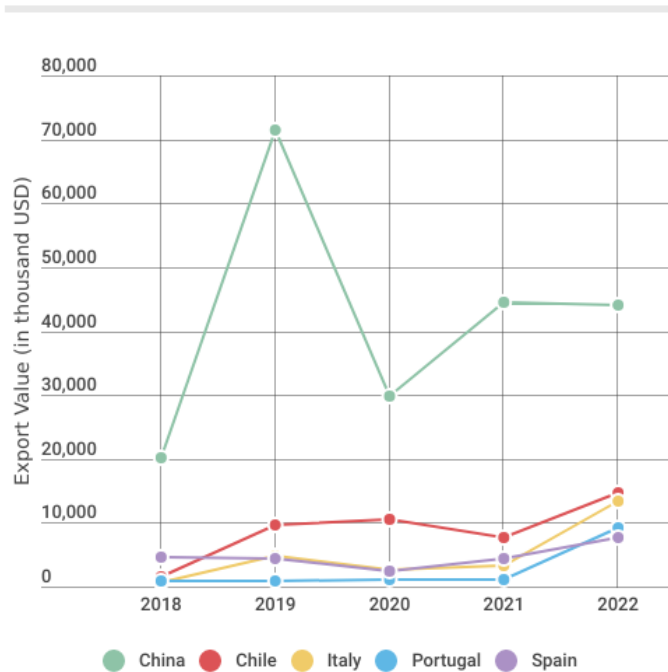
The Gambia Top Commodity Exports 2022 (USD Thousands)



The top importers of goods from The Gambia in 2022 were Senegal, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, India, and China, respectively.⁴⁵



Gambian Export Partners (2022)



Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors Analysis

Legal/Policy Risk Factors

Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers' Rights

Freedom of Association

Workers in The Gambia can unionize, strike, and collectively bargain. However, civil servants, domestic workers, police officers, and military personnel are barred from these legal workplace protections. Retribution against workers that legally strike is prohibited, however workers' ability to fully exercise their rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining is limited by several stipulations in the law. For example, the labor minister is permitted to exclude any other category of workers from protections provided by the 2007 Labor Act (which provides the rights for unionization, collective bargaining, and striking).⁴⁶ Only registered unions are legally recognized, but the minimum number of members required to register is higher than the number of employees at many workplaces.⁴⁷ The Gambian government does not adequately enforce labor protections despite repeated accounts of violations.⁴⁸ In response to COVID, the government reassigned several workplace protection units to enforce public health measures.⁴⁹ Despite challenges, several labor unions operate without any government obstruction.⁵⁰



Working Conditions

The Gambia's minimum wage is GMD 50 (USD 1.25) per day, but minimum wage laws only apply to the formal sector, which constitutes approximately 20 percent of the workforce.⁵¹ The legal workweek is 48 hours within no more than six consecutive days, but there is no law that prohibits excessive compulsory overtime. Most government employees do not receive overtime pay. The law also does not protect workers who remove themselves from dangerous conditions from termination, and authorities do not effectively protect workers from such conditions.⁵²

Discrimination

The Gambian constitution prohibits workplace discrimination based on race, color, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, disability, sex, property, birth, or other status. Although employment discrimination is not reported to be commonplace, societal gender, caste, and religious-based discrimination affects the workplace. Women generally work low-wage jobs, such as food vending or farming, or do not work.⁵³ The Gambia's wage gap is 65 percent. Discrimination also remains a problem in much of the country as many employers use family lineage as a factor when hiring.⁵⁴

Although the Barrow government maintains that The Gambia is a secular society with free religion, non-Sunni Muslims face discrimination in practice.⁵⁵ Some political leaders also denounce Gambian Christians, who compose less than five percent of The Gambia's population. This discrimination seeps into the workplace in the form of discriminatory hiring practices and programs. For instance, many workplaces reduce hours for Ramadan fasting but not for Christian fasting holidays.⁵⁶

Forced Labor

The Gambian constitution and its legal code prohibit forced labor. In 2022, the government investigated 14 instances of forced labor. Penalties for violating forced labor laws are commensurate with other serious crimes and can lead to fines as large as USD 10,000 and life imprisonment.⁵⁷ Fewer forced labor cases were brought to court in 2022 than in 2021. The most common forms were street vending, forced begging, and domestic work.⁵⁸

Child Labor

Gambian law prohibits "economic exploitation" of children under 16 and prohibits children under 18 from engaging in hazardous or exploitative labor. Nonetheless, child labor is prevalent and commonly occurs in agriculture.⁵⁹ The government, however, made little effort to combat child labor and it remained prevalent and largely unregulated in informal sectors.⁶⁰

The Gambia provides public education and requires children under 16 to go to school.⁶¹

Civil Society Organizations

Although some civil society organizations work on human rights issues in The Gambia, there is



evidence that the government harasses activists who criticize the government. The National Advisory Council can suspend the activities of an NGO at any given moment.⁶² However, NGOs have operated with less interference in recent years, with some groups successfully challenging the government on a variety of policy issues.⁶³

Immigration Policies Limiting the Employment Options or Movement of Migrants

Foreign workers in The Gambia are required to pay an annual registration fee of approximately USD 54 and an additional work permit fee of about USD 11.⁶⁴ There is also a federally mandated quota that stipulates that no more than 20 percent of a company’s staff may be non-Gambians.⁶⁵ Companies are required to pay an annual payroll tax of USD 256.40 for Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) citizens and USD 1,025.64 for all other foreign employees.⁶⁶

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	In force
ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor	In force
ILO 97 Migration for Employment	Not in Effect

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Political Risk Factors

Political Instability or Conflict

The Gambia scored 83.9 on the 2023 Fragile States Index (FSI), placing it in the “warning” category and ranking the country 67th least stable out of 178.⁶⁸ Gambia has improved its rating every year since 2017. The FSI scale ranges from 0 (indicating a “sustainable” political system), to 120 (indicating a political system on “high alert”).⁶⁹ The primary source of political instability in the country surrounds demographic pressures.⁷⁰



Level of Corruption

The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2022 scored The Gambia 34 out of 100, where 0 signals “Highly Corrupt” and 100 signals “Very Clean.”⁷¹ The Gambia ranked 110 out of 180 countries on the index.⁷² U.S. firms have cited corruption as a problem when working in The Gambia.⁷³ The Gambia has no anti-corruption commission, and anticorruption bills have yet to pass the National Assembly. Only half of Gambians believe they can report corruption without fear of retribution.⁷⁴

Level of Crime and Violence

The U.S. Department of State gave The Gambia a crime risk of medium in a 2023 report, with the major drivers of crime cited as a poor economy and food insecurity.⁷⁵ Crime is particularly high in The Gambia’s capital, Banjul, where agents referred to as *bumsters* offer services ranging from tour guidance to sexual partnership operate en masse.⁷⁶ Violence occasionally breaks out along Gambia’s border with Senegal.⁷⁷

State Persecution

The Gambia’s constitution provides the rights of movement, assembly, and religion, and the government generally respects these rights.⁷⁸ However, these laws do not apply to adoption, marriage, divorce, and burial.⁷⁹ Women remain a small minority in government and face sexual harassment in many service career fields. Anti-discrimination laws also do not apply to the LGBTQ community. Same-sex relationships are criminalized.⁸⁰

There were multiple instances from 2015, during the Jammeh regime, of politically motivated detentions, forced disappearances, torture, and killings at the hands of state security forces.⁸¹ However, in recent years the government has prosecuted groups associated with Jammeh who engaged in these activities as part of an ongoing truth and reconciliation mission.⁸² Some organizations allege that Gambian prisons are still unfit for humans.

Socio-Economic Risk Factors

Level of National Economic Development

The Gambia scored in the low human development category, according to the 2022 UN Human Development Index (HDI), with a rank of 174 out of 189 countries and a HDI score of 0.500.⁸³ This puts The Gambia at slightly lower human development than other West African countries.

Level and Extent of Poverty

The Gambia has a high level of poverty, with 41.7 percent of the population living in multidimensional poverty according to the United Nations’ 2022 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index.⁸⁴



The Gambia's economy lacks diversity, leading to financial insecurity. Two-thirds of the population is agrarian, but more than half of the arable land in the country has already been cultivated. The Gambian economy relies heavily on the tourist industry and remittance payments.⁸⁵

Degree of Gender Inequality

The Gambian constitution guarantees gender equality in the economic, political, and social spheres. However, the constitutional prohibitions of gender-based discrimination do not apply to adoption, marriage, divorce, burial, or devolution of property on death.⁸⁶

De facto gender inequality persists. Women are under-represented in Gambian service fields. The Gambia's literacy rate is significantly lower for women than men.⁸⁷ A quarter of Gambian women marry before age 18. One in ten women reported being the subject of physical or sexual violence. Data availability remains a barrier to addressing problems related to gender inequality.⁸⁸

Environmental Factors

The Gambia has experienced a pronounced drop in precipitation rates, with 30 percent less rainfall over the past 30 years.⁸⁹ This climate change notably impacts subsistence agriculture, the primary source of livelihood for a significant portion of The Gambian population. The country currently faces deforestation, desertification, and water pollution, all stemming from unsustainable agricultural practices.⁹⁰ As a result, Gambians are susceptible to flooding along rivers and coasts as well as water-borne diseases. Natural disasters, including droughts and storms, have also been on the rise in recent years.⁹¹

Landlessness and Dispossession

The Gambia lacks comprehensive property laws. Customary law largely underscores women's land access, and rural areas operate on a land tenure system. This results in women being able to access land but not own it. The credit system is another point of difficulty for women seeking land ownership; they disproportionately lack the collateral necessary to secure lines of credit from funding agencies. Women's limited ability to own agricultural ventures, land, and agrarian equipment impedes their equitable participation in income-driving activities and may increase their economic vulnerability.⁹² Gambia's former and current president have been accused of widespread land grabs targeting rural communities to build hundreds of privately owned farms.⁹³

Use of Export Processing Zones (EPZs)

The Gambia has active Export Processing Zones (EPZs). These offer investors who export at least 30 percent of their production exemptions from the payment of a variety of different taxes. These incentives are valid for a maximum of ten years.⁹⁴



Promotion of Emigration/Remittance Economy

The Gambian economy received approximately USD 777 million in 2022,⁹⁵ and remittance inflows account for 26.8 percent of the country's GDP.⁹⁶

Documented Trafficking and Trafficking Risk in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Despite several reports and investigations of human trafficking, there have been no human trafficking convictions in The Gambia in recent years.⁹⁷ International organizations allege that this is because of inadequate enforcement.

Ground Nuts/Peanuts

Ground Nuts (Peanuts) Overview

Nearly 80 percent of The Gambia's agricultural workforce works in the groundnut sector and they contribute over 20 percent of GDP.⁹⁸ They grow on over 550,000 hectares. Most groundnuts are exported unprocessed. The climate in The Gambia is suitable for groundnut production, with more intensive activity in North Bank and Upper River regions.⁹⁹

Documented TIP/TIP Risk in Ground Nuts (Peanuts)

There is little information specifically on labor risk in groundnut production in The Gambia. There is anecdotal evidence that children are involved in agriculture, potentially including groundnut production. Child labor often occurs at the familial level in local farms.¹⁰⁰



Endnotes

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