Benin

Country Overview

Politics

Benin is a constitutional parliamentary democracy in western Africa. Benin is considered one of the most stable democracies in sub-Saharan Africa, having held several elections judged to be free and fair since the country’s transition to democracy in 1991. Tensions arose in 2015, but subsided when former President Boni Yayi declared that he would not amend the constitution and seek a third term for president. In March 2016, President Patrice Talon was elected.

Economy

Benin is classified by the World Bank as a low-income country. Benin’s economy is characterized by a high degree of informality, the informal sector accounting for 65 percent of economic activity and employing 90 percent of the labor force. The country’s main commodity exports are cotton, cashews, and shea butter. Benin is currently undergoing the country’s largest planned infrastructure venture in recent history, which involves a series of public-private partnerships suitable for foreign investment. There are several proposed projects, including construction of international airports, a new deep water seaport, inland ports, rail networks, and roads supporting major transit routes. The Government of Benin is seeking to attract investment in several sectors, including agribusiness, energy and mining. Benin’s economy relies heavily on informal re-export and transit trade with Nigeria, which accounts for nearly 20 percent of GDP. The country’s economy is therefore vulnerable to trade shocks in Nigeria.

Social/Human Development

Although Benin has experienced stable GDP growth over the past two decades, poverty remains widespread, with a national poverty rate of 40.1 percent in 2015. In terms of human development, Benin is placed in the low human development category with a score of 0.485. Nearly 65 percent of Benin’s population is under the age of 25.

Poverty, in tandem with unemployment, increased living costs, and limited access to resources has led to the migration of Beninese to other West African countries including Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire. However, Benin also continues to draw migrants from other West African countries due in part to its relative political stability.

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

According to the Trafficking in Persons Report, trafficking risk may be found among children from Benin and neighboring countries in potentially exported supply chains including commercial agriculture (particularly in the cotton sector), artisanal mining, and construction.

Read the full TIP Report at: https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2017/271147.htm

Migrant and Other Vulnerable Populations

Benin has a negative net migration. The most common destination for migrants from Benin was Niger, followed by Togo and Nigeria. Other common destination countries included Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Congo, France, Mali and Chad.
Immigrants make up 2.3 percent of Benin’s total population of 10.9 million people. The largest source country for migrants was, by far, Nigeria. There were an estimated 1,035 persons of concern in Benin at the end of 2015, including 809 refugees and 226 asylum seekers. UNHCR reported that there were 1,000 stateless persons in a region bordering Nigeria.
Migrants to Benin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>75775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>48118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>13742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>10211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exports and Trade

Benin’s top exports in 2016 were cotton, edible fruits and nuts (primarily cashews), animal/vegetable fats (shea butter), iron and steel, and precious or semi-precious stones (gold).20

Top Commodity Exports (USD/Thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th>USD Thousands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electrical Machinery</td>
<td>18,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>186,693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron/Steel</td>
<td>20,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal or Vegetable Fats</td>
<td>25,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits and nuts</td>
<td>55,131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top importers for all goods from Benin were India, Malaysia, Bangladesh, China, Nigeria and Niger.21
Benin was the 183 largest supplier of goods to the United States in 2013. The largest exported product to the U.S. was edible fruit and nuts.22
Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors Analysis

Legal/Policy Risk Factors

Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers’ Rights

Freedom of Association

In Benin, the law provides for the right of workers, except for certain civil servants and public employees, to form and join independent unions. New unions are required to register with the Ministry of Interior, and the process takes three months. The law does not establish clear grounds on which registration of a trade union may be denied or approved.23 Approximately 75 percent of salaried employees belong to trade unions, although this may represent a minority of the total workforce as most economic activity is organized in the informal sector.24

The law provides for the right of workers to bargain collectively and to strike. Strikes require notification. Seafarers are not permitted to strike.25 The law prohibits anti-union discrimination and provides for the reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. The U.S. Department of State noted that civil servants, public employees, domestic workers, agricultural workers, migrant workers and those in export processing zones are excluded from relevant legal protections.26

Working Conditions

The government sets minimum wage scales for a number of occupations. In 2014, the government increased the minimum wage to CFA 40,000 (USD 68) per month from CFA 30,000 (USD 51) per month. The labor code establishes a workweek between 40 and 46 hours with at least one 24-hour rest period per week, although domestic and agricultural workers often work 70 hours or more per week. The law does not protect workers from jeopardy when they choose to remove themselves from unsafe working conditions.27

Discrimination

The constitution of Benin prohibits discrimination with respect to employment and occupation in several areas, but excludes discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases.28 Prohibitions of discrimination do not apply to the informal sector, which employs 90 percent of people.29
Forced Labor

The Government of Benin prohibits forced or compulsory labor, except for imprisonment with compulsory labor. 30

Child Labor

The law prohibits the employment or apprenticeship of children under the age of 14. Children between the ages of 12 and 14 may perform domestic work and temporary, seasonal work if it does not interfere with compulsory education.31 Education is compulsory for all children between the ages of six and 11 years of age. 32

Civil Society Organizations

According to Freedom House, NGOs and human rights groups operated freely in 2015.33 However, in 2016, the High Authority of Audiovisual Communication made a decision to arbitrarily close seven private media outlets.34

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventions</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ILO 29 Forced Labor</td>
<td>In force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO 87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize</td>
<td>In force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO 98 Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining</td>
<td>In force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO 100 Equal Remuneration</td>
<td>In force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor</td>
<td>In force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO 111 Discrimination</td>
<td>In force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO 138 Minimum Age</td>
<td>In force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies</td>
<td>Not ratified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor</td>
<td>In force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO 97 Migration for Employment</td>
<td>Not ratified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Use of Export Processing Zones (EPZs)**

The U.S. Department of State reported that there is a Foreign Trade Zone near the Benin-Nigeria border where foreign-owned firms have the same investment opportunities as host country entities and that companies must export at least 65 percent of their annual production to qualify for benefits like tax-free status and duty-free importation of equipment and production inputs.\(^{36}\) Additionally, it was reported that workers in export processing zones are excluded from relevant legal protections.\(^{37}\)

**Political Risk Factors**

**Political Instability or Conflict**

Benin scored a 77.6 in the 2017 Fragile States Index, placing it in the “Warning” category, and ranked 73 out of 178 countries.\(^{38}\) Freedom House characterized Benin as one of the most stable democracies in sub-Saharan Africa.\(^{39}\)

**Level of Crime and Violence**

The World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report ranked Benin at 82 out of 138 and 103 out of 138 for business costs of crime and violence and organized crime respectively.\(^{40}\)

**Level of Corruption**

The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index scores Benin as a 36 out of 100, where a 0 signals “Highly Corrupt” and 100 signals “Very Clean.” Benin is ranked 95 out of 176 on that index.\(^{41}\) According to the U.S. Department of State, officials engaged in corruption with impunity and corruption among the police force was widespread. The judicial system is reportedly susceptible to corruption at all levels.\(^{42}\)

**Socio-Economic Risk Factors**

**Level of National Economic Development**

Benin scored low in the human development category, according to the UN Human Development Index, with a rank of 167 out of 188 countries and a score of 0.485.\(^{43}\)
Level and Extent of Poverty

Benin has a relatively high level of poverty, with 64.2 percent of the population determined to be living in “multi-dimensional poverty” according to the UN. When adjusted for inequality, the HDI falls to 0.304, a loss of 37.4 percent due to inequality. Benin’s gross national income (GNI) per capita has been rising steadily over the past 15 years, but has dropped from a high of over USD 930 in 2014 to USD 820 in 2016.

Degree of Gender Inequality

The UNDP Gender Equality Index ranked Benin 167 out of 188 countries for gender inequality in 2015. In 2016, the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report ranked Benin 127 out of 144. Eighteen percent of girls are literate, compared to 50 percent of boys.

According to the constitution, women and men have equal right to own and administer non-land assets. However, customary practices are an obstacle to the fulfillment of this right. Inheritance is the primary means of accessing land in Benin and under customary law, only men have the right to inherit land. In order to combat the inequality that women face regarding access to resources and assets, the Government of Benin has implemented Personal and Family codes under articles 1029 and 1030 which state that customary laws “cease to have force of law.” Despite these measures, only 13 percent of all land acquired with tenure belongs to women.

Women are limited in their capacity to gain access to financial services because obtaining a loan is contingent upon owning land.

Women reportedly faced discrimination in employment.

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Cotton

Cotton Overview

Cotton plays a central role in Benin’s economy, contributing about 12 percent of GDP. Benin was one of the first West African countries to reform its cotton sector in the 1990s, which overlapped with a decline in sectoral performance. Although the sector had been privatized, the government took temporary control of the sector in 2012, before handing control back to a private association. Long-term issues identified in the sector include lack of ginning capacity and poor infrastructure. As in the rest of West Africa, nearly all cotton farmers in Benin are smallholder farmers.
Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Cotton

The U.S. Department of State has noted trafficking on cotton farms.\textsuperscript{57} The U.S. Department of Labor notes forced labor and child labor in the production of cotton.\textsuperscript{58} Due to the smallholder nature of cotton farming in Benin, child work on family farms is relatively common. Benin reportedly has low rates of school attendance in cotton growing regions.\textsuperscript{59} A 2006 study found that recruiters visited villages in Burkina Faso promising boys cash or goods (such as bicycles or clothing) for following them to employment in cotton producing regions (some domestically within Burkina Faso and others in Benin). Some of these recruiters were farmers looking for labor on their own (or neighbors’) farms, but others were independent recruiters. Some children working for farmers may not be paid until the end of the harvest cycle, which acts to bind them to their jobs, even if they want to go home. Payment may be deferred even longer, potentially beyond the first year, and the end wages are often much less than promised.\textsuperscript{60}

Cashews

Cashews Overview

190,000 hectares are used for cashew production and the sector is growing rapidly. The bulk of exports are raw, unprocessed cashews.\textsuperscript{61} There are an estimated 200,000 cashew farmers in the country. Most cashew farms are under 1.5 hectares, although some are as large as five hectares. Only five percent of cashew plantations are owned by women.\textsuperscript{62}

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Cashews

Little information is available on labor in cashew production, but the U.S. Department of State has noted trafficking in commercial agriculture in Benin more broadly.\textsuperscript{63}
This report was funded by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.

Endnotes