

# Country Report: Madagascar

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### Summary

Welcome to Madagascar; the Red Island, the Rainbow Island, the Eighth Continent, there are many names for the world's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest island! While in-country, this report will serve as a guide to help navigate the country. This compendium includes an organization of the contents (above) introduction to Madagascar, background information on Sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar, maps, a high-level overview of Madagascar, political context, economic briefing, culture, social context and development challenges, strengths and weaknesses, and a section covering the environment. Overall, this report is to help brief you on Madagascar and orient yourself to the country quickly for the in-country assignment.

## Introduction

Madagascar is situated and strategically located in the south western area of the Indian Ocean east of the coast of Africa about 400 km off the coast of Mozambique. The island is recognized as one of the world's top ten hotspots for biodiversity. Madagascar is inhabited by various ethnic groups of Malayo-Indonesian, mixed African and Malayo-Indonesian, and Arab ancestry. Five centuries before the Europeans discovered the island Malayo-Indonesian seafarers arrived in roughly the first century A.D., the Arabs followed in the 6th century to establish trading posts. Since the 16th century French and British influence left its mark. In October 1958 the Malagasy Republic was proclaimed as an autonomous state within the French Community and gained full independence in June 1960. Like many former colonial countries Madagascar went through various political states like uprisings, provisional governments, single-party rule, socialist economic policies, and threat of secession (Collins, 2014). Today, the government system is a republic; the chief of state is the president, and the head of government is the prime minister. Madagascar transitioned from socialist economic policies to a market economy with policies of privatization and liberalization. Madagascar is a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Despite having considerable natural resources, Madagascar has among the highest poverty rates in the world. Today the country is on a slow and steady economic and political growth path from an extremely low level.

## Background: Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa, geographically and ethno-cultural, is the area of the continent of Africa that lies south of the Sahara. According to the UN, it consists of all African countries and territories that are fully or partially south of the Sahara (United Nations, 2021). It contrasts with North Africa, which is frequently grouped within the MENA ("Middle East and North Africa") region, and most of whose states are members of the Arab League (largely overlapping with the term "Arab world"). The states of Somalia, Djibouti, Comoros, and the Arab-majority Mauritania (and sometimes Sudan) are, however, geographically considered part of sub-Saharan Africa, although they are members of the Arab League as well. The 53 countries considered to be in

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Sub-Saharan Africa are Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

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## Maps: Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Madagascar



(Nations Online Project, 2021)



## Overview of Madagascar

The official name of Madagascar is Repoblikan'i Madagasikara Republique de Madagascar. The short form is Madagascar, while the international long form is Republic of Madagascar. Formerly, Madagascar was known as Malagasy Republic. ISO Country Code for the country is mg. The ISO country codes are internationally recognized codes that designate every country and most of the dependent areas a two-letter combination or a three-letter combination; it is like an acronym that stands for a country or a state. The country code is in use for example for the two-letter suffixes such as. The local time is East African Time (UTC +3h), with the country calling code as (+261). The capital city is Antananarivo (Tananarive). Other major cities are Antsirabé, Mahajanga, and Toamasina. Madagascar is a Republic government. The president is Andry Rajoelina. Madagascar gained independence from France on 26 June 1960. They formed their Constitution on 19 August 1992 by national referendum. The climate of Madagascar is tropical along the coast, and temperate inland. The location of Madagascar is in Southern Africa, with an area of 587,040 km<sup>2</sup> (226,658 sq mil.) about the size of Texas or France. The terrain is mountainous central plateau and coastal plains. Madagascar is surrounded by four islands: The Comoros is a volcanic archipelago off Africa's east coast, in the warm Indian Ocean waters of the Mozambique Channel. Mayotte is an archipelago in the Indian Ocean between Madagascar and the coast of Mozambique. It's a department and region of France, though traditional Mayotte culture is most closely related to that of the neighboring Comoros islands. The Mayotte archipelago is surrounded by a coral barrier reef, which shelters a lagoon and marine reserve that are popular diving destinations. Réunion Island, a French department in the Indian Ocean, is known for its volcanic, rain forested interior, coral reefs, and beaches. Mauritius, an Indian Ocean island nation, is known for its beaches, lagoons, and reefs. The people of Madagascar have a nationality of Malagasy. The island population is 26.97 million (World Bank, 2019), having ethnic groups of 18 separate tribal groups of Malayo-Indonesian, mixed African and Malayo-Indonesian, and Arab ancestry, French, Indian, Creole, Comoran. The religions range from Indigenous beliefs (52%), Christian (41%), Muslim (7%). The languages spoken on the island are Malagasy (of Malayo-Polynesian origin), French, and English with literacy proficiency at about 70%. The island is abundant with natural resources. These resources include graphite, chromite, coal, salt, bauxite, quartz, tar sand, semi precious stones,

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mica, fish, and hydropower. Other natural agriculture products include coffee, vanilla, sugarcane, cloves, coca, rice, cassava (also known as tapioca), beans, bananas, peanuts, and livestock animals. Resources such as coffee, vanilla, shellfish, sugar, cotton cloth, clothing, chromite, petroleum products are common export commodities. Madagascar partners with France 15.2%, US 12.7%, China 7.1%, South Africa 5.9%, Japan 5.5%, Netherlands 5.4%, Germany 5.1%, Belgium 5%, India 4.4% (2015) on the export of these resources. For import trades, Madagascar partners with China 24.8%, France 10.3%, Bahrain 5.6%, India 5.5%, Kuwait 4.5%, Mauritius 4.5%, South Africa 4.3% (2015) on commodities such as capital goods, petroleum, and consumer goods. Madagascar supports and actively participates in industries such as meat processing, soap, breweries, tanneries, sugar, textiles, glassware, cement, automobile assembly, paper, petroleum, and tourism. Ariary and Malagasy Franc (FMG) is the current currency in Madagascar.

### Political Context

Presidential elections were held peacefully in January 2019, marking the first political alternation of power in Madagascar. President Rajoelina won 55.6% of the votes and leads the country alongside his Prime Minister, Christian Ntsay, and 24 ministers. Some ministries were combined to improve the efficiency of public administration. The Malagasy government is finalizing its new 2019-2024 Emergency Plan (WFP, 2019) aimed at stimulating the economy, addressing food issues, and reducing poverty. Legislative elections held on May 27, 2019 delivered a massive victory to President Andry Rajoelina's support platform, with 84 of the National Assembly's 151 seats. Commune-level elections, held on November 27, 2019, to elect 1,695 mayors followed suit and President Andry Rajoelina's platform gained seats in many cities.

### Economy

Prior to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, Madagascar was on a rising growth path. Following an extended period of political instability and economic stagnation, growth accelerated over the last five years to reach an estimated 4.8% in 2019, its fastest pace in over a decade. The return to constitutional order and peaceful political transition in the last elections was influential to this economic revival, as it contributed to restore investor confidence, reopen

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access to key export markets, reinstate flows of concessional financing, and encourage structural reforms. These positive trends were also reflected in improved labor market conditions and declining poverty rates, although around 75% of the population was still estimated to live below the international poverty line of \$1.90 in 2019, significantly higher than the regional average of 41%. The unfavorable economic, social, and fiscal impact of the COVID-19 crisis will be considerable in 2020. Global trade and travel disruptions as well as domestic containment measures are expected to result in a deceleration in economic activity in 2020, with gross domestic product (GDP) growth predicted to lower to 1.2%, compared to an estimated growth rate of 5.2% just prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Vulnerable populations in urban areas are particularly exposed to economic hardship and poverty traps in these conditions. A decline in tax revenues and COVID-19-related spending will widen the fiscal scarcity and create an unexpected surge in financing needs. These developments emphasize the importance of implementing robust emergency measures to save lives, protect vulnerable populations, and safeguard jobs in the short term as well as accelerate reforms to stimulate investment for long-term recovery, strengthen resilience to future shocks, and maintain public debt at a sustainable course.

### Culture, Social Context, and Development Challenges

The culture of Madagascar is rooted in diverse tribal heritages and customs, with ancestor respect and traditional festivals at its heart. Although Islam and Christianity are the dominant religions, most villages defer to a soothsayer and healer to predict the future and cure illness. Madagascar's human capital index ranking is among the lowest in the world and has the world's fourth highest rate of chronic malnutrition, with almost one child in two under five years of age suffering from stunting. An estimated 1.4 million children dropped out of primary school in 2012. Living conditions remain difficult for much of the population, with a low rate, 13%, of access to electricity.

### Strengths/Vulnerabilities of Madagascar

Strengths for Madagascar include significant mineral reserves, precious stones, nickel, and cobalt, petroleum reserves and agricultural potential. They are the world's leading producer

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of vanilla. These reserves make Madagascar a good trade partner to certain parts of the world. Tourism (beaches, biodiversity, scuba diving, etc.) is a huge potential for Madagascar, however it is underdeveloped compared to other countries and general society standards. Support from international multilateral and bilateral donors (United States and France) allow Madagascar to thrive. Reliant on agricultural and mining products (petroleum oil), make Madagascar vulnerable to terms of trade fluctuations. Another vulnerability the island has are the climatic hazards and natural disasters. In 2019, the island was ranked 29th most affected by climate risk by the Global Climate Change Index, which is an improvement compared to the 2018 ranking of seven. Madagascar has one of the worst poverty rates in the world, making this a weakness for the island. Seven five percent of the population lives below the extreme poverty line of USD 1.90 per day, making the island dependent on foreign aid (WFP, 2019) This is not a sustainable solution for future generation populations. Inadequate road, water, and electricity networks make the island less suitable for the citizens of the island, with only thirteen percent of people having access to electricity. The last vulnerable aspect would be the chronic political instability. There have been crises in 1972, 1991, 2002 and 2009.

### Environment: Biodiversity and Wildlife

The main habitats of Madagascar are ocean and forest. With a marine zone of over 1 million square kilometers, Madagascar supports greater total marine biodiversity than any other Indian Ocean country. This island nation is among the top 15 countries harboring the largest area of coral reefs and mangroves in the world (Wild Madagascar, 2021). Its marine areas house 159 species of fish – 66% of them are endemic to the country. Fifty percent of Malagasy population, including over 100,000 fishers, live near the coast and rely on marine and coastal ecosystems for food, revenue, and livelihoods. Threats to marine and coastal ecosystems have increased intensely in recent years. Substantial fishing pressure and illegal fishing, depletion of mangrove forests, sedimentation from terrestrial runoff, and petroleum industry exploration and production are among the most pressing threats. Current threats are likely to be compounded by demographic pressures, with a projected doubling of the population in the coming 25 years, and climate change, which will result in increasingly intense and frequent extreme weather events,

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among other impacts. If unchecked, the high levels of current and projected threats will lead to the decline of coastal resources, create long-term social and economic hardship for some of the poorest coastal communities in the world, and will result in forgotten development opportunities. As of 2012 it has over 200 extant mammal species, including over 100 species of lemurs, about 300 species of birds, more than 260 species of reptiles, and at least 266 species of amphibians. The island also has a rich invertebrate fauna including earthworms, insects, spiders, etc. (Database of Malagasy animal names, 2021).

## Conclusion

This report was created to gain understanding on Sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar in a quick and efficient manner for an in-country assignment. This report covered several concepts ranging from background information to culture to environment. Overall, this report included sections such as an introduction to Madagascar, background information on Sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar, maps focusing on Africa as a whole and Madagascar, an elevated overview of Madagascar, political briefing, economic update, overview of culture, social context and development challenges, strengths and weaknesses regarding the country, and the last section covering the environment; wildlife and biodiversity specifically.

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