



# Gabon

## Gabonese Republic

Africa

### Geography

**Area** 267,667 sq km. Coastal, Central African state on the equator, two-thirds being dense tropical rainforest and 10% being nature reserves.

Population	Ann Gr	Density
2010	1,501,266	1.86%
2020	1,779,155	1.66%
2030	2,044,308	1.31%

**Capital** Libreville 633,000. **Urbanites** 86%. **Pop under 15 yrs** 36%. **Life expectancy** 60.1 yrs.

### Peoples

**Bantu** 94.1%. Major groupings:

**Central-Congo**(8) 51.5%, in the northern half of Gabon. Fang 41.41%; Mbede 3.7%; Kota 2.7%; Wumbvu 1.5%.

**Northwest**(30) 41.8%, in Gabon's southwest. Punu 9.7%; Njebi 8.4%; Myene 3.7%; Eshira 3.1%; Western Teke 2.7%; Sangu 1.6%; Mitsogo 1.6%; Lumbu 1.5%.

**Other African** 5.2%. Baka/Pygmy native people as well as immigrants from neighbouring countries and West Africa, drawn by economic opportunities. Some place this number over 10%, but reliable statistics do not yet exist.

**Other** 0.7%. European, Arab.

**Literacy** 84%. **Official Language** French. **All languages** 43 **Indigenous languages** 42. **Languages with Scriptures** 3Bi 4NT 10por.

### Economy

One of Africa's wealthier countries; rich in natural resources, Gabon imports food and exports oil, wood and minerals. The majority are still involved with agricultural work and do not directly benefit from most of the wealth. The inexorable depletion of oil reserves, mineral deposits and old-growth timber make wise investment in the present all the more vital.

**HDI Rank** 103<sup>rd</sup>/182. **Public debt** 24.7% of GDP. **Income/person** \$12,500 (25% of USA).

### Politics

The president, with four decades of stable rule under his belt, was the world's longest-ruling politician. He installed a multiparty democracy, but the last several elections have suffered allegations of vote rigging to favour the incumbent party. In 2009, the president passed away and his adopted son (who had been Minister of Defense for 10 years) won the Presidential election.

### Religion

Freedom of religion. The Catholic Church has been dominant, but its influence is waning. Traditional beliefs remain strong, with many syncretistic groups. The former president became Muslim in 1973, his son and successor is likewise, and apparently more devout. Islam is rapidly growing in Gabon.

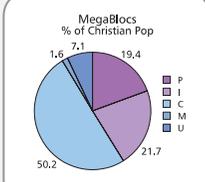
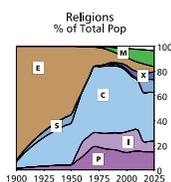
Religions	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Christian	79.35	1,191,255	1.4%
Muslim	10.40	156,132	4.6%
Ethnoreligionist	7.76	116,498	2.1%
Non-religious	2.40	36,030	4.6%
Baha'i	0.09	1,351	1.9%

Animism's influence in both Christianity and Islam extends far beyond its statistical presence.

Christians	Denoms	Pop %	Affiliates	Ann Gr
Protestant	14	15.67	235,000	2.2%
Independent	22	17.55	264,000	1.5%
Catholic	1	40.63	610,000	-0.2%
Marginal	6	1.33	20,000	1.8%
Unaffiliated		5.77	87,000	4.4%
Doubly affiliated		-1.60	-24,000	0.0%

Churches	MegaBloc	Congs	Members	Affiliates
Catholic Church	C	36	401,316	610,000
Evangelical Ch of G	P	143	52,333	157,000
Eglise de Banzie	I	1,438	90,625	145,000
Bethany	I	53	10,511	35,000
CMA (EACMG)	P	357	25,000	35,000
Pentecostal Ch of AoG	P	66	8,600	21,500
Nazareth	I	26	4,696	10,800
Jehovah's Witnesses	M	37	3,900	10,400
Seventh-day Adventist	P	67	3,700	8,100
Other denominations[34]		394	43,751	71,811
<b>Total Christians[43]</b>		<b>2,617</b>	<b>644,432</b>	<b>1,104,611</b>

TransBloc	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
<b>Evangelicals</b>			
Evangelicals	12.7	190,552	2.8%
<b>Renewalists</b>			
Charismatics	12.5	187,351	3.1%
Pentecostals	6.7	101,302	3.0%



# Answers to Prayer

- 1 Evangelical growth in Gabon has been steady** and sustained. Through the **CMA**, the Pentecostals and newer indigenous African churches, evangelicals increased from 2.3% in 1960 to 12.7% in 2010. The Church is also maturing, as indicated by increasing numbers of prayer events – yearlong prayer chains, all night prayer gatherings, weekend prayer retreats and such.
- 2 Peoples of the interior** – long unreached and even previously out of bounds for evangelical missionaries – are opening to the gospel. Research in the late 1990s identified the unengaged and least-reached peoples, and Christians are beginning to plant churches among them. Included in these are the Baka people, Gabon’s earliest inhabitants, who are proving quite responsive to outreach.

## Challenges for Prayer

- 1 Despite Gabon being wealthy in resources**, many Gabonese continue to dwell in poverty. This is largely due to decades of neglecting the nation’s infrastructure and to prevalent corruption that prevents the country’s wealth from trickling down to all. Women and children are vulnerable to poverty through lack of education and social mores; exploitation and trafficking of children are particularly evil situations. Pray for righteousness to prevail over those seeking to gain profit at the expense of others.
- 2 Spiritist beliefs and practices** (such as Bwiti syncretism) are widely observed and deeply pervasive in much of Catholicism, other Christian groups and Islam. This continues to cause many to fall back on fetishes, hallucinogenic drugs, ancestral spirits and dependence on the medicine men who have held them in bondage for generations. Secret societies are common; many government elite, police officers and members of the army participate in often-bloody nighttime rituals including witchcraft and black magic. Christians who refuse to participate in these “harmless clubs” can be refused academic or professional advancement.
- 3 Muslim numbers continue to grow**, initially by immigration of Hausa, Fulani and other West African Muslims, and more recently by conversions among Gabonese men. The former president’s conversion to Islam played a huge role in this, and his son/successor is likely to continue favouring Islamic evangelism, which often involves financial inducements. West African Muslim immigrants, who make up much of the merchant class, and the Arab influence in the oil industry have shaped the country. Despite plans to do so, the Church has not yet effectively started evangelizing Muslims.
- 4 The Catholic Church** wielded great influence in the colonial era but has seen its power steadily wane since then. The majority of the population were baptized Catholic, but a large number still follow the old animist ways. The Catholic Church’s growth peaked decades ago, with steady losses in recent years to Islam, other churches and sects. Pray that the many nominal Christians may see and embrace the pure gospel. Some charismatic prayer cells are multiplying and growing.
- 5 The first major Protestant denomination** was the fruit of French missionary work. But the legacy of liberal theology is a stagnant, nominal, daughter Church, with leadership more concerned with social issues than with evangelism. Ask God’s Spirit to revive this Church and make it again a force for evangelism.
- 6 The evangelical Church sees encouraging progress** but faces challenges on many levels:
  - a) The need remains for solid, indigenous church leaders.** Prosperity teaching and spurious philosophy potentially plague Gabon as much as any other African country. Gabonese Christians require teaching and pastoring in order to mature, but the first step is to train national pastors and leaders for this. Opportunities for trainers and openings for students exist in the five Bible schools in Libreville.
  - b) Evangelical churches are committed to evangelizing the whole country.** The vision is that by 2025 evangelicals will be 20% of the country’s population, and every Gabonese person will have had the chance to hear the gospel. The **CMA**-planted churches have a World Missions

Centre and a Prayer Chapel for the nations and are beginning to send workers to other countries. Bethany churches have been sending missionaries for years. Pray for all evangelical churches to catch the same vision that the leaders share.

- c) **Prosperity teaching** is a foreign element that has made rapid inroads into the Gabonese Church. In a poverty-stricken country, such promises of health and wealth are met with great hope, but generally only the pastor sees any prosperity. Pray for responsible teaching that gives Gabonese believers true hope and enables them to find responsible and biblical ways out of poverty.
- d) **Missionary sending** is a new concept for Gabonese churches, but is beginning to grow. The Gabonese **CMA** has sent and is supporting three families as foreign missionaries to other African countries. Pray that these firstfruits of sending might herald a greater harvest.

## 7 Less-reached peoples:

- a) **The east region** was long closed to evangelicals, and the northeast was the least evangelized and least developed. Born-again Christians are very few among the many pockets of peoples – notably Yongho, Wandji, Sanghu, Tsogo, Duma, Ngom, Kaningi, Bubi and Minduumo. But these areas, now open, are seeing churches planted and people reached, although much work remains.
- b) **The Fang** are the dominant people (41% of the population) and largely Protestant or Catholic. They are a profoundly religious people, but most of their fervency is dissipated in syncretistic ancestral worship.
- c) **The Baka/Babinga**, often called Pygmies, live in the virgin forest. They have been exploited and mistreated by other peoples, despite their unique culture and gentle nature. The **CMA** and Deeper Life work among them and see much responsiveness and many conversions. There are at least 10 Baka congregations, with a number of other Baka joining churches of other ethnic groups.

## 8 Support ministries:

- a) **Bible translation** may be needed in 22 languages. **CMA** works on the Yinzebi OT, but generally the Gabonese prefer to use the French translation of the Bible.
- b) **The JESUS film** in French is shown widely and is available in five other languages. It has been a key tool for opening ministry to unreached peoples, and it continues to be received enthusiastically.
- c) **GRN** has recordings in 25 languages and dialects.
- d) **Both national radio and TV** are wide-open avenues for evangelism and Bible teaching, but are neglected. *Radio Evangile Gabon* is one of five Christian FM stations that reach Libreville; ways are being sought to extend coverage to the interior. There is also a Christian TV station on air.
- e) **Bongolo Hospital** is a strategic ministry. In addition to the basic medical services offered, HIV/AIDS treatment is an increasing emphasis. Over 1,700 people every year are coming to Christ through the hospital's work. Air Cavalry supports the hospital through aviation ministry. Pray for continued grace and that all who visit would receive healing of body and soul.