

COUNTRY PROFILE Madagascar

The largest island in the Indian Ocean, Madagascar is an ethnically diverse country with a language and culture owing more to Indonesia than to Africa despite its geographical position. The former French colony has had a succession of non-democratic power changes since independence; the most recent, in 2009, brought international condemnation. The majority of the population who are subsistence farmers and/or informally employed lack protection from labour laws and suffer economic uncertainty.

SUMMARY FACTS

Population: 19.62 million (UNICEF 2009), UK: 61.56 million
Capital: Antananarivo
Area: 587,041 sq km (226, 658 sq miles), UK: 243,610 sq km (94,060 sq miles)
Major languages: Malagasy, English, French
Major religions: Traditional beliefs, Christianity
Life expectancy at birth: 61 years (UN 2009), UK: 80 years
Under-five mortality rate: 58 per 1,000 live births (UNICEF 2009), UK: 6 per 1,000 live births
HIV prevalence: 0.2% aged 15-49 (UN AIDS, 2009), UK: 0.2% aged 15-49
Adult Literacy Rate: 71% ages 15 and older (UN, 2008), UK: >99%
Human Development Index Ranking (UN HDI 2010): 135/169 HDI Value: 0.435
GDP per capita (PPP): \$989 (World Bank, 2010), UK: \$35,844 US\$47,084
Monetary unit: Ariary = 5 iraimbilanja
Main exports: Vanilla, coffee, seafood, cloves, petroleum products, chromium, fabrics
CO2 emissions share of world total: < 0.1%, UK: >2%
Population without access to an improved water source: 59% (UN, 2008), UK: 0%
Population using improved sanitation: 11% (UN, 2008), UK 100%
Government: High Transitional Authority (HAT)
President: Andry Rajoelina
Year Women received right to vote: 1959, UK: 1918, 1928 (equal rights)



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Sources: UN HDI 2010, UN Statistics, UNICEF, World Bank

History

The archaeological records suggest that Madagascar remained uninhabited by humans until around 2,000 years ago, when Indo-Malayan settlers began arriving on the coast. For the next 1,000 years immigration to the island continued and included an influx of Africans and Arabians. The first known sighting of the island by Europeans was in **1500** when Portuguese explorer Diogo Dias sailed along its coast. Arab traders knew the island as Komara ('the moon island'), but it came to be known as Madagascar by Europeans. They mistakenly thought it to be the place, described second-hand by Marco Polo, called Madeigascar (Polo said that it was a land abounding in lions, elephants and giraffes: a description excluding Madagascar, where there were neither lions, nor elephants, nor giraffes: scholars believe that Polo's Madeigascar was located on the African mainland, probably in modern-day Somalia).

Little attention was paid to the island by Europeans until over a century later, when Portuguese missionaries tried to bring Christianity to the Malagasy, and both the French and British attempted to establish fortified settlements there. The French maintained a garrison at Fort-Dauphin for 30 years from **1643** but following its evacuation due to a conflict with the local inhabitants.

At this time competing Malagasy tribes were establishing kingdoms across the island, the most significant of which were the Sakalava in the north and west, and the Merina on the central plateau. Sakalava dominance declined in the **18th century** and the Merina, under king Andrianampoinimerina, firmly established themselves as the dominant kingdom in Madagascar.

Upon Andrianampoinimerina's death in **1810**, his son Radama I ascended to the Merina throne. In **1817** Radama signed a treaty with the British governor of Mauritius. Under the terms of the treaty, the Merina would give up the practise of slavery and in recompense would be provided with military and financial support to help them expand their kingdom. This Radama did, and he expanded his kingdom until he had gained control of around two thirds of the island. Missionaries from the London Missionary Society were allowed into the King's court, and many converted to the imported religion.

Radama I's European-friendly policies came to an end after his death in **1828**. The new monarch, Queen Ranavalona, expelled most of the Europeans and violently repressed converts to Christianity, before formally banning the religion in **1835**. For the following half century, a succession of Merina monarchs alternated between pro- and anti-European policies. French troops invaded the north-west of the island in **1883** and a treaty was signed in **1885** that gave the French control over Malagasy foreign policy. The British recognised Madagascar as a French protectorate in **1890**, giving the French the freedom to pursue full control over Madagascar.

The French again invaded the Merina kingdom in **1894** and the royal capital Antananarivo fell in **September 1895**. The island was officially annexed by France in **1896**. After World War II Madagascar, like all other French colonies, became an overseas territory within the French Union and all Malagasy received French citizenship (although not all received the franchise). A Territorial Assembly was formed at Antananarivo, which was composed of members who were indirectly elected by provincial assemblies. The majority of seats were gained by members of the Malagasy nationalist movement, but they denounced the system, which allowed European French citizens a disproportionate number of seats.

Insurrection followed in **1947**, when the Democratic Movement for Malagasy Renewal (MDRM) rose up against France. For a time the French lost control of the east coast and the suppression of the rebellion took more than a year. Subsequent

repression disrupted the nationalist movement, but a period of institutional reform by the French that began in **1956** led to a referendum in **1958** giving Madagascar the choice between an immediate severing of all links with France, or internal autonomy within the new French Community. The Malagasy voted for the latter, and the autonomous Malagasy Republic was proclaimed on **14 October 1958**. Just two years later the Republic was a sovereign state, gaining full independence on **26 June 1960**. Later that year the country was elected to UN membership.

The president of the provisional government, Philibert Tsiranana of the Social Democratic Party, was confirmed as the new President of the Republic in **1960**. Tsiranana followed pro-western policies, and made use of the Cold War atmosphere to gain the support of the US. In **May 1972**, shortly after Tsiranana was 're-elected', riots occurred throughout the country. A nationalist left-wing coalition of students, teachers, labourers and the unemployed led the protests, and Tsiranana's government fell on **18 May 1972**.

Tsiranana resigned, and the leftist Major General Gabriel Ramanantsoa was asked to form a "government of national unity" composed of 11 ministers (five of whom were military). Ramanantsoa's policies were radically divergent from Tsiranana's: he courted the Soviet Union for aid, raised the minimum wage, provided strike pay, broke diplomatic ties with apartheid South Africa, nationalised French companies and expelled the French military from the country. However, unrest in the country continued and in **February 1975** Ramanantsoa resigned. His successor was Colonel Richard Ratsimandrava, who held power for just six days before being assassinated in an attempted coup that brought the country to the brink of civil war.

A military Directorate was formed, but then replaced just months later by another all-military institution, the Supreme Council of the Revolution, headed by the former foreign affairs minister Didier Ratsiraka. In **December 1975** a new constitution was approved by 96 per cent of voters in a referendum, the Malagasy Republic was renamed the Democratic Republic of Madagascar, and Ratsiraka was installed as president.

For the next 11 years Ratsiraka continued the socialist policies of Ramanantsoa but by the **mid 1980s** economic difficulties forced Ratsiraka to abruptly change his policies. Laws were passed that provided for the transformation of Madagascar into a free-market economy, which western nations responded to enthusiastically. Growing popular discontent with Ratsiraka's regime did little to prevent his re-election in **1982** and **1989**, as during this period only limited political opposition was tolerated, and no media criticism of the president was permitted.

Social unrest grew towards the end of the **1980s**, and limited reforms allowing for political expression and press freedom led to Ratsiraka coming under intense pressure to democratise Madagascar. After government troops fired on a demonstration by the opposition group Forces Vives (FV) – 'Active' or 'Live' Forces – in **1991**, killing over 30, Ratsiraka was forced to agree to demands for negotiation with the opposition. The resulting "Panorama Convention" stripped Ratsiraka of presidential powers and set an 18 month timetable for transition to democracy.

A widely representative National Forum drafted a new constitution that, despite an abortive coup attempt by a FV splinter group in **July 1992**, was approved on **19 August 1992** via a national referendum. Although supporters of Ratsiraka tried to interfere with the vote, the new constitution was supported by 72 per cent of voters. In the second round of the presidential election that followed, FV leader Albert Zafy gained a majority and became president. In National Assembly elections that took place in **June 1993** a coalition headed by FV gained a majority of seats and were able to form a government.

Under Zafy Madagascar's economic situation failed to improve, and in **1996** the National Assembly voted to impeach him. He stood down and contested fresh presidential elections at the end of the year in which former President Didier Ratsiraka defeated Zafy in the second round by the narrowest of margins. The election was deemed generally legitimate by international observers and Ratsiraka was inaugurated on **10 February 1997**, becoming only the second African head of state to have lost and then reclaimed the presidency via competitive elections (the other being Mathieu Kérékou of Benin). National Assembly elections were held in **May 1997** and a coalition headed by Ratsiraka's party, Avant-garde of the Malagasy Revolution (AREMA), won a majority. The economy continued to struggle, not helped by cyclones in **March 2000** that made thousands of Malagasy homeless.

Crisis ensued following presidential elections in **December 2001** when opposition candidate (and mayor of Antananarivo) Marc Ravalomanana claimed to have won an outright victory over Ratsiraka in the first round of voting. Ratsiraka did not resign but Ravalomanana declared himself President in **February 2002** after refusing to take part in a run-off. In response to Ravalomanana's seizure of the presidency, Ratsiraka and his supporters cut Antananarivo off from the main port city by blowing up key bridges. This severely damaged the economy and prevented basic foodstuffs from reaching the capital, and the ensuing violence resulted in more than 70 deaths. The High Constitutional Court announced that Ravalomanana did indeed win the election outright, and he was recognised by the US in **June 2002**. But sporadic violence continued until **July** when international approbation forced Ratsiraka and his prominent supporters to go into exile in France.

After the crisis was over, Ravalomanana's newly formed I Love Madagascar (TIM) party won a large majority in the **December** National Assembly election. Ravalomanana secured a second term after tense presidential elections in **December 2006** and a constitutional referendum in **April 2007** increased the powers of the President. National Assembly elections in **September 2007** were again convincingly won by TIM, who gained a slightly larger majority than in **2002**.

In **December 2008** Madagascar's donor partners suspended aid to the country, citing concerns over a lack of budgetary transparency and possible conflicts of interest relating to Ravalomanana's personal business assets. Also in **December 2008**, the President closed an opposition television station run by former nightclub DJ Andry Rajoelina, which triggered months of violent protests in the capital. Over 100 people were killed when protesters destroyed property, marched on government sites and were fired upon by the police. The charismatic Rajoelina, who had recently been elected mayor of Antananarivo, called on Ravalomanana to resign and declared himself President. Ravalomanana agreed to step down in **March 2009** and handed over power to the army, who in turn conferred the Presidency upon Rajoelina.

Rajoelina declared himself "President of the High Transitional Authority", suspended parliament and established administrative bodies to govern the country. The international community largely deemed the new junta to be illegitimate, and Madagascar's membership of both the African Union (AU) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) was suspended. In **August 2009** internationally mediated negotiations resulted in the proposal of a power-sharing agreement that would culminate in democratic elections at the end of **2010**; however Rajoelina withdrew from the agreement after a failure to agree on the line-up of the power-sharing government. In **May 2010** Rajoelina set provisional dates for a constitutional referendum (**August 2010**), parliamentary elections (**September 2010**) and a presidential election (**November 2010**), however the proposed constitutional referendum has already been postponed due to the lack of a draft constitution. Further negotiations took place in **June** and were mediated by a SADC delegation

headed by the former President of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano. On **14 August** the SADC-brokered negotiations resulted in a deal that was signed by Rajoelina and numerous minor opposition parties. The agreement set revised dates for the constitutional referendum (**17 November 2010**), the parliamentary elections (**16 March 2011**) and the presidential ballot (**4 May 2011**). Although some small opposition parties agreed to the deal, Ravalomanana's, Ratsiraka's and Zafy's parties all rejected the deal, leaving the political crisis unresolved. At present, Rajoelina is insisting on his own roadmap, which could see Presidential elections occurring in late 2011 or in 2012. The Constitutional referendum which emerged was passed and was seen as consolidating Rajoelina's position, lowering the age from 40 to 35 and introducing a residency requirement to contest a Presidential election (having to reside in Madagascar for six months prior to any election- effectively ruling out Ravalomanana).

Population

The Malagasy are descended from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds: most are of mixed Asian and African origin, but there are also small French, Arab and even Comoran populations. Although today ethnic identification isn't as strong as in some southern African countries, there are as many as 18 distinct groups. While most ethnic identities are declining in popular importance, the political cleavage between those who live in the central highlands and the cōtiers – those who live in the coastal areas – has grown in significance. The highlanders are predominantly of Indo-Malayan descent and have typically been politically and economically advantaged over the cōtiers. The cōtiers are more clearly identified as of African origin. Interestingly there is little linguistic division and the vast majority of both highlanders and cōtiers share Malagasy, which has Indo-Malayan origins, as their first language. Some of the more educated Malagasy speak French, and English is becoming increasingly popular.

Traditional religious beliefs remain dominant in Madagascar, with more than half the population adhering to forms of belief that generally centre on the veneration of ancestors. Around 41 per cent of the population consider themselves Christian although many of these fuse Christian belief with traditional rites such as 'famadihana', or "turning over the dead", which involves exhuming remains from the family tomb, rewrapping them in new shrouds and returning them to the tomb following festivals in honour of the dead. Adherents of Islam account for a further 7 per cent of the population.

Politics

In a 2007 referendum, Malagasy voters approved a revised constitution, which remains the de jure constitution of Madagascar, despite its de facto suspension by the High Transitional Authority following the 2009 coup d'état. The constitution sets out a legislature consisting of a bicameral parliament. The lower house is the National Assembly, which consists of 127 members elected for a four year term by constituencies. The upper house is a Senate with 33 members, of whom 22 are elected by the six provinces and 11 are appointed by the President. A Prime Minister, appointed by the President, heads a council of ministers and carries out the daily duties of government. HAT President Andry Rajoelina appointed army Colonel Vital Albert Camille as Prime Minister in December 2009 shortly after the previous incumbent, a Ratsiraka supporter, was dismissed.

Following the 2009 coup, Madagascar was suspended from participating in AU and SADC activities until constitutional order is restored. Several bilateral donors to Madagascar, including the US, have suspended assistance programs to the Government of Madagascar until further notice.

Economy

After more than a decade of socialist economic policies, Madagascar underwent structural reforms in the late 1980s due to internal unrest and external pressure from international financial institutions. Growth did not immediately follow, however, as the economy stagnated until 1996. Solid economic growth occurred from 1997 until the political crisis following the presidential election in December 2001. The unrest in the country virtually halted economic activity for the first six months of 2002, and real GDP figures showed negative growth at -12.7 per cent. The economy rebounded following the resolution of the crisis, and positive growth occurred for six consecutive years.

When the fresh political crisis hit the country in 2009 the economy unsurprisingly suffered. The crisis combined with the global financial crisis to send the growth rate down from 7.1 per cent in 2008 to -4.5 per cent in 2009. Key growth drivers in the country, particularly tourism and construction, are particularly sensitive to political crisis and have suffered due to the recent events. Agricultural growth has also slowed due to a loss of funding for the country's proposed 'green revolution'. The only sector that appears to have been spared is the mining industry. Many private firms suffered looting at the start of the crisis, and the ensuing insecurity has inhibited business activity. Furthermore, external market outlets have been reduced because of condemnation by the international community.

Madagascar is largely dependent on external aid resources to finance development, and this is partly due to low levels of resource mobilisation. Its tax rate is one of the lowest in Africa, and corruption and fraud reduce the revenue stream. To address the problems the Ravalomanana Government embarked on extensive tax reforms and a stepping up of the fight against corruption in 2007; however the political crisis has interrupted these efforts. Most international donors have suspended aid to the country indefinitely in response to the political crisis, which may have severe repercussions for development and public services.

Civil society and trade unions

Whilst freedom of association has generally been respected in Madagascar and hundreds of nongovernmental organizations are active in the country, freedom of assembly was severely affected by the unrest in early 2009 and following the change in power, Rajoelina's Government has sharply restricted opposition protests.

Civil society organisations focusing on environmental degradation are particularly active in the country, which is home to numerous unique and endangered animal species. CSOs aim to eradicate poverty through using environmentally sustainable methods that protect Madagascar biodiversity.

The levels of people using improved sanitation and having access to clean water are unusually low in Madagascar, and consequently organisations including WaterAid work extensively in the country. They generally seek to provide integrated hygiene, sanitation and safe water initiatives, often in partnership with the state or each other.

A criticism of Madagascan civil society from some quarters is that the CSO movement in the country has been weakened by political bias. The President of the National Union of Human Rights echoed these sentiments to humanitarian news service IRIN by saying that; "civil society is not independent, and successive governments have worked only with those groups that support them".

The constitution and Labour code guarantee the right of most employees, public and private, to join a trade union in Madagascar. Seafarers and workers in essential services are officially denied these rights, and the inclusion of radio and television

broadcasters as well as bank workers in the Government's definition of essential workers exceeds the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition.

The rights of workers to join unions and strike are largely respected. Many strikes occurred during the Ravalomanana administration, and these have continued under Rajoelina's regime. However, the legal requirement upon unions to provide lists of all their members exposes individual workers to the possibility of anti-union discrimination. In recent years, the few reported cases of discrimination against union members have occurred in regions where the union presence was low.

More than 80 per cent of workers in the country are engaged in subsistence agriculture, fishing or forestry, and the predominance of informal sector workers means that trade union membership is fairly low, and most workers are excluded from labour laws concerning the right to strike.

In March 2009 the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) called for a democratic solution to the political crisis, and insisted that the trade unions be fully involved in negotiations. There are currently four ITUC affiliated organisations in Madagascar: the International Federation and Union of Malagasy Employees (FISEMA), the Confederation of Malagasy Workers (FMM), the United Autonomous Unions of Madagascar (USAM) and the Christian Confederation of Malagasy Trade Unions (SEKRIMA).

Achievements

1. **Primary Education:** over the past two decades the percentage of Madagascan children enrolled in primary school has risen from 64.7 per cent in 1991 to near universal enrolment in 2008. Completion rates have also improved. The 2009 coup may have negatively affected the educational situation in the country, although a lack of reliable data has thus far prohibited a fuller understanding of the post-Ravalomanana state of Madagascar's education system.
2. **Under-five mortality:** the under-five mortality rate in the country has been reduced from 167 per 1,000 live births in 1991 to 58 per 1,000 in 2009.

Development Challenges

1. **Water/sanitation:** Madagascar has the lowest percentage rates of access to improved sanitation in the whole of southern Africa: just 11 per cent of the population had access in 2008 (the latest year with available data). Levels of access to clean water are also low, with just 47 per cent of the population drinking from improved water sources. Part of the reason for this has been a lack of institutional capacity, which the establishment of a governmental Ministry of Water in 2008 has done little to change.
2. **HIV/AIDS:** the prevalence of the infection in the country is just 0.2 per cent; one of the lowest rates in the whole of Africa. However, the levels of prevention and education are equally low, which leaves Madagascar with a high risk of suffering a rapid epidemic. The levels of funding for HIV/AIDS programmes in the country have significantly decreased since 2009, due to the suspension of aid by international donors.
3. **Political normalisation:** the August 2010 agreement on a return to electoral democracy did not have the support of the three main opposition parties, and as such it is difficult to see how a return to constitutional, democratic governance can be accomplished. The longer political uncertainty continues, the more damaging it will be to Madagascar's economy and consequently to the human

development of its people.

4. Environmental protection: following the 2009 coup there has been exponential growth in illegal logging and the poaching of endangered species in the northeast of the country. The good health of the environment is vital to the wellbeing majority of the population, who subsist through agriculture, fishing or forestry, so it is imperative that this increase in environmental degradation is halted. The country is renowned worldwide for its flora and fauna, 80 per cent of which is unique to the island, and the benefits to the economy through ecotourism are potentially substantial. As well as being intrinsically damaging to Madagascar, the loss of biodiversity will negatively affect the prospects for growth in the tourism industry.

For more information on Madagascar, visit the following websites:

- August 2010 BBC Radio 4 documentary examining the economic and environmental situation following the 2009 coup d'état – http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00t4qbd/Crossing_Continents_Madagascar
- UK-based charity working with local NGOs for environmentally sustainable development in Madagascar – <http://www.madagascar.co.uk>
- WaterAid's Madagascar page – http://www.wateraid.org/international/what_we_do/where_we_work/madagascar
- Official site of President Rajoelina - <http://www.madagascar-presidency.gov.mg>