

# Gabon

## KEY FACTS

**Official name:** République Gabonaise (Gabonese Republic)

**Head of State:** President Ali Ben Bongo Ondimba (from 3 Sep 2009)

**Head of government:** Prime Minister Raymond Ndong Sima (PDG) (from 27 Feb 2012)

**Ruling party:** Parti Démocratique Gabonais (PDG) (Gabonese Democratic Party) (since 1960; re-elected 17 Dec 2011)

**Area:** 267,667 square km

**Population:** 1.54 million (2012)\*

**Capital:** Libreville

**Official language:** English (from Oct 2012)

**Currency:** CFA franc (CFAf) = 100 centimes (Communauté Financière Africaine (African Financial Community) franc)

**Exchange rate:** CFAf495.02 per US\$ (Jul 2013); CFAf655.96 per euro (pegged from Jan 1999)

**GDP per capita:** US\$11,929 (2012)\*

**GDP real growth:** 6.21% (2012)\*

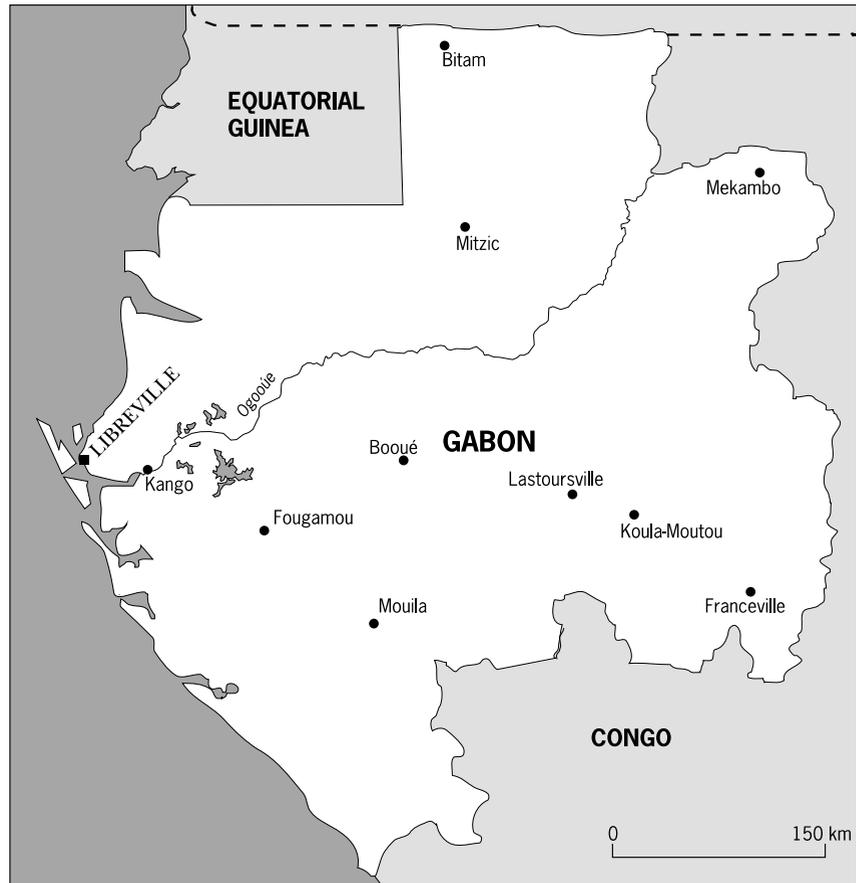
**GDP:** US\$18.38 billion (2012)\*

**Inflation:** 3.00% (2012)\*

**Oil production:** 245,000 bpd (2012)

**Balance of trade:** US\$5.21 billion (2011)

\* estimated figure



**G**abon's main resource is oil. It has enabled Gabon, as the fifth largest producer in Africa, to become a middle-income country, with a per capita income among the highest south of the Sahara (just under US\$12,000, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)). However, this resource is beginning to run out. The *British Petroleum Statistical Review of World Energy June 2013* estimates reserves at the end of 2012 were 2 billion barrels, while production during the year had been 245,000 barrels per day (bpd). Doubts remain, however, over the size of identified reserves. The *African Economic Outlook 2013* (AEO), published jointly by the African Development Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, notes that some experts even consider the

country's fields will have run dry in 30 years or so. Whatever the truth, efforts to escape from the stranglehold of oil are necessary, taking into account the desire to establish a balance in the future, whether in terms of employment, of public finances or of international trade. Even taking the most optimistic view of the future for oil, the need to diversify is real, even if only to satisfy the expectations of the public at large, many of whom are in search of work. Oil does not provide many jobs.

Through its Strategic Plan for Emerging Gabon (PSGE), the government aims to turn Gabon into an emerging economy by 2025. This rests on three pillars: 'Green Gabon', 'Industrial Gabon' and 'Service-Industry Gabon'. The PSGE hopes to bring about an ambitious programme of

structural change in the national economy, based on improved governance of the state, the recovery in public and private investment, the development of infrastructure and human resources and a more equitable distribution of national wealth.

### The economy

Recent trends show the real economy has weathered the financial crisis and its implications rather well. Growth is still above average for the region. After a recession of about 1.5 per cent in 2009, the economy was able to continue growing at about 6 per cent for the last three years. Indeed in 2010, notes the AEO, Gabon was the only country in the Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC) (Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa) to respect all the region's macroeconomic convergence criteria: primary budget in surplus, inflation under 3 per cent, public debt below 70 per cent of GDP and no backlog of late payments.

For 2012, real GDP growth was put at 5.7 per cent, down from 2011 (7.0 per cent), but above forecasts, which were for 4.4 per cent. Increasing public investment and an upturn in mining – stimulated by demand from big emerging markets – were in part responsible for the change in internal demand. In terms of structure, 2012's GDP shows three things: the low contribution of the primary sector (5 per cent), the preponderance of the secondary sector (64 per cent), whose contribution fluctuates widely according to world oil prices, and the importance of the tertiary sector, which represents 32 per cent of internal activity. The primary budget balance was consolidated. The current account surplus is considerable in a climate of rising inflation, which, however, remains within CEMAC convergence criteria.

Overall, economic activity was moderate in 2012. This was due to two things: the end of large-scale stadium-building works for the Africa Cup of Nations (ACN) 2012 and cut-backs in road improvement schemes. In 2013 economic activity should grow by around 6.2 per cent, supported in large part by the non-oil sector. This growth will undoubtedly not be sufficient to absorb a population of relatively young people unable to find jobs. The authorities are attempting to solve this problem in several ways: they are setting aside special funds to support reforms undertaken by the National Employment Office and encouraging the foreign direct investment (FDI) currently under way in

three special economic zones, among other initiatives.

The exploitation of minerals, especially manganese, is the third area of production with a big impact on foreign trade. Generally speaking, mining's share in GDP remained at 6.3 per cent in 2011 and 2012. It should show a slight improvement for 2013 (6.5 per cent) when mining of the manganese deposit at Ndjolé begins and production at the Compagnie minière de l'Ogooué (COMILOG) is stepped up.

Exports fell slightly in 2012 as marginal oil fields stopped, production of manganese at the new Ndjolé mine belonging to the Compagnie Industrielle et Commerciale des Mines de Huazhou (CICMHZ) fell, and production of ore from Franceville by BHP Billiton was delayed (initially forecast at 250,000 tonnes in 2012). COMILOG, however, managed to keep to its initial forecast (3.75 million tonnes for 2012). In general terms, the trade balance has a structural surplus, with an import-cover ratio above 150 per cent. The current value of exports easily made up for the purchase of equipment following the dynamic public and private investments in recent years. Thanks to the high price of oil on the world market, Gabon enjoyed exceptional oil income. In 2012 it represented over 80 per cent of export income, 48 per cent of GDP and 50 per cent of fiscal income.

Forestry is the second main economic resource after oil, as well as the country's main employer. It will only be 0.4 per cent of GDP over 2012 and 2013, slightly up

from 2011 (0.3 per cent) thanks to increased production and transformation capacity at Rougier Gabon, Olam and the Société nationale des bois du Gabon (SNBG) (National Wood Company of Gabon). The ban on trade in unfinished timber since May 2010 ought to increase local added value by giving Gabon a role in timber processing. The 'Green Gabon' of the PSGE relies on this target of adding value to forestry, which presupposes building plants for secondary and tertiary processing. It is still hard to assess the effectiveness of the ban on the export of lumber. Businesses complain this measure was not thought through and that they incur extra costs from delays in adding value to a significant proportion of exported timber. The export restrictions do indeed give rise to transitional costs, but do not prejudice the ability subsequently to become more competitive, subject to investment. The special economic zones (SEZs), which are very attractive, could provide a framework from within which processing industries could take off. An example is the Nkok zone opened in September 2011, 40 per cent of which is used for timber processing.

Farming is still limited, with cash crops, food crops and market gardens around towns developed with the assistance of the Gabonese Development Support Institute.

In the long term the government is relying on the PSGE to stop selling primary resources in their raw state, but rather, to add value so as to diversify economic activity and create jobs. Over time, the

## KEY INDICATORS

## Gabon

	Unit	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Population	m	*1.45	*1.48	*1.50	*1.52	*1.54
Gross domestic product (GDP)	US\$bn	14.54	10.95	13.20	17.10	*18.38
GDP per capita	US\$	10,018	7,409	8,768	11,114	*11,929
GDP real growth	%	2.3	-1.4	6.6	4.8	*6.2
Inflation	%	14.7	19.4	18.6	17.4	*3.0
Industrial output	% change	0.4	-5.6	8.2	–	–
Agricultural output	% change	-0.2	3.0	-7.8	–	–
Oil output	'000 bpd	235.0	229.0	245.0	245.0	245.0
Exports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	7,602.5	3,021.8	7,469.0	8,071.0	–
Imports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	2,305.1	1,764.7	2,814.0	2,861.0	–
Balance of trade	US\$m	5,297.3	1,257.1	4,655.0	5,210.0	–
Current account	US\$m	2,607.6	1,283.0	1,336.0	2,676.0	*2,324.0
Total reserves minus gold	US\$m	1,923.5	1,993.2	1,735.9	2,149.3	*2,351.6
Foreign exchange	US\$m	1,922.3	1,784.2	1,530.5	1,937.1	*2,146.4
Exchange rate	per US\$	418.59	514.03	495.28	466.82	*505.65
* estimated figure						

authorities expect the supply of jobs to meet demand. The success of this development strategy depends in large part on the dynamics of investment, especially in the local and foreign private sector. The opportunities Gabon offers are considerable, including mining, forestry, tourism, agri-food, and new information and communication technologies. To attract investors, reduce risks to entrepreneurs and create conditions for profitability, the authorities must improve the economic and institutional environment still further.

## Risk assessment

Economy	Fair
Politics	Fair
Regional stability	Poor

## COUNTRY PROFILE

### Historical profile

1472 Portuguese navigators arrived in the Ogooué estuary and Gabon soon became an important centre for slave trading for the Portuguese, Dutch, British and French.

1839 Having gained a dominant position in the area and despite Fang resistance, Gabon became part of the French Congo. The French began work to abolish the slave trade.

1910 Gabon became part of French Equatorial Africa.

1939–1945 Gabon was held by the Free French.

1946 Gabon became a province of French Equatorial Africa. In gratitude for the support of the local population for the Free French, President Charles de Gaulle of France granted French citizenship to all the territory's people.

1957 Gabon gained internal autonomy.

1958 It achieved self-government within the French community.

1960 Gained full independence from France, under President Léon M'Ba. The Parti Démocratique Gabonais (PDG) (Gabonese Democratic Party) assumed power.

1964 French forces restored M'Ba to the presidency after an abortive military *coup d'état*.

1967 President M'Ba died. Vice President Albert-Bernard Bongo became president.

1973 Bongo was re-elected and converted to Islam, adopting the forename Omar.

1981–89 Political unrest grew as people called for more democracy.

1990 After demonstrations by students and strikes by workers, President Bongo legalised opposition parties.

1991 A new constitution was introduced that formalised the multi-party system.

1993 Bongo narrowly won the presidential election, although the opposition claimed massive electoral fraud.

1996 Parliamentary elections gave the PDG an overwhelming majority.

1998 President Bongo won another seven years in power with more than two-thirds of the vote.

1999 The country was plunged into a deep recession due to the fall in the world price of oil.

2001 The PDG won the parliamentary elections.

2002 The PDG formed a coalition with the opposition to form the government.

2003 Constitutional changes made in July allow presidents to run for office for unlimited terms. The president modified his name to El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba.

2004 Gabon signed separate agreements to export around one billion tonnes of iron ore as well as oil to China.

2005 In presidential elections incumbent El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba won 79.2 per cent of the presidential vote; Pierre Mamboundou 13.6 per cent and Zacharie Myboto 6.6 per cent. Turnout was 63.3 per cent.

2006 Omar Bongo Ondimba was sworn in as president for a third seven-year term. Jean Eyeghe Ndong (PDG) was appointed prime minister. In parliamentary elections the ruling PDG won 82 out of the 120 seats, allied parties won 17, opposition 17 and independents four seats.

2008 Former foreign minister Jean Ping was elected chairman of the African Union Commission.

2009 The ruling PDG won senate elections. President Omar Bongo Ondimba had his assets in France frozen by the authorities and a French court ordered him to return a payment made to him for the release of a French businessman, jailed in Gabon. The president was thought to have around US\$4 million held in French bank accounts; he claimed the money received was for the sale of a business and not for the release. The president suspended his functions as head of state and was reported to be seriously ill. He died in Spain and his body was flown back to Gabon for burial. Senate leader Rose Francine Rogombé became interim president. Ali Ben Bongo Ondimba (son of the late president Bongo) (PDG) won presidential elections. The Constitutional Court rejected opposition challenges to the official election results. Paul Biyoghé became prime minister.

2010 The government signed contracts, expected to generate up to US\$4.5 billion in investment, with three Asian companies in a move designed to diversify the economy as oil reserves begin to dwindle. The contracts included the setting up of a special economic zone in Nkok (27km east of

Libreville) with a capacity to process one million cubic metres of timber annually; improving the infrastructure, which would create around 50,000 jobs; developing a palm oil plantation of up to 300,000 hectares, and a palm oil refinery, with a possible new port for exports in the south east of Gabon. 5,000 low-cost homes are also included in the plans. Transparency International successfully appealed against a Paris court's ruling in 2009 that it could not act against foreign heads of state. France's highest appeal court gave investigative judges permission to proceed with investigations into assets held in France by the late president, Omar Bongo and his family, as well as Teodoro Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea and Denis Sassou-Nguesso of Congo. The Singaporean multinational, Olam International, agreed to invest US\$1.7 billion in Gabon, including the construction of a fertiliser plant and palm oil plantations.

2011 In April, members of the oil workers union, the National Organisation of Oil Employees, went on strike for four days, shutting down Total and Royal Dutch Shell operations, in protest at the employment of foreign workers rather than local workers. The cost to the government and companies was estimated at US\$131 million. In May, the opposition leader André Mba Obame was stripped of his parliamentary immunity as the government prepared to charge him with treason, following his TV broadcast in January, when he had declared himself the winner of the 2009 presidential election. Parliamentary elections were held on 17 December; however, since the government rejected the suggestion of biometric voter registration to prevent fraud, the opposition and other community and civic groups called on voters to boycott the elections, declaring that they could not be free and fair and would be rigged in favour of the President's PDG. Of the five political parties that contested the elections all-but-one supported the presidency of Ali Bongo Ondimba. The PDG won 74.2 per cent of the vote (115 seats out of 121) and the RPG 4.3 per cent (three). Three other political parties (including the only opposition party, Union pour la nouvelle République (UPNR) (Union for a New Republic) each won one seat; turnout was 34.8 per cent.

2012 On 13 February, Paul Biyoghé Mba resigned; Raymond Ndong Sima (PDG) was appointed as prime minister on 27 February. On 7 September the credit ratings agency, Standard and Poor's revised Gabon's rating upward from BB- to B with a stable outlook. On 19 October, over 300 Nigerian fishermen and their families were removed from three small islands in

Akanda National Park (north of Libreville) and relocated either to another island outside the park or back to Nigeria. The families had originally fled during the war in Biafra in 1967.

2013 Gabon withdrew the right of Addax Petroleum, a subsidiary of Chinese oil giant Sinopec, to exploit the south-western Obangue oilfield, transferring it to state-run Gabon Oil Company (GOC). The Chinese company was accused of failing to meet 'contractual obligations'.

### Political structure

#### Constitution

In 1991 a new constitution was introduced which restored multi-party elections and protected civil liberties. The constitution maintained a strong presidential role but allowed for a more influential prime minister.

In July 2003, the constitution was changed to allow presidents to run for office for unlimited number of times, and the number of presidential election rounds was reduced from two to one.

#### Independence date

17 August 1960.

#### Form of state

Presidential democracy

#### The executive

Executive power is divided between the president, elected by universal suffrage every seven years, and the prime minister and Council of Ministers (Cabinet) who are appointed by the president.

Government members must be more than 35 years of age and have at least seven years' professional experience.

The president is head of state, head of administration and chief of the armed forces.

#### National legislature

The bicameral parliament consists of the Assemblée Nationale (national assembly) with 120 members, of which 111 are elected in single seat constituencies and nine are appointed by the president, all to serve for five-year terms, and the Sénat (senate) with 91 members elected in single seat constituencies by representatives of subordinate assemblies, to serve for six-year terms.

#### Legal system

The legal system is based on the French civil law system and customary law. There is judicial review of legislative acts in the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court.

#### Last elections

17 December 2011 (parliamentary); 30 August 2009 (presidential)

**Results:** Parliamentary: Parti Démocratique Gabonais (PDG) (Gabonese Democratic Party) won 74.2 per cent of the vote (115 seats out of 121), Rassemblement pour le Gabon

(RPG) (Rally for Gabon) 4.3 per cent (three); three other political parties each won one seat. Turnout was 34.8 per cent. Presidential: Ali Ben Bongo Ondimba (PDG) won 41.73 per cent of the vote, André Mba Obame (independent) 25.88 per cent, Pierre Mamboundou (Union du Peuple Gabonais (UPG) (Union of the Gabonese People)) 25.22 per cent; 15 other candidates each won less than 4 per cent.

#### Next elections

November 2016 (presidential); 2016 (national assembly)

#### Political parties

##### Ruling party

Parti Démocratique Gabonais (PDG) (Gabonese Democratic Party) (since 1960; re-elected 17 Dec 2011)

##### Main opposition party

With only one parliamentary seat the Union pour la nouvelle République (UPNR) (Union for a New Republic) has little opportunity of providing any effective opposition.

#### Population

1.54 million (2012)\*

The rural population is lightly spread over a large area.

Although the Gabonese enjoy one of the highest per capita incomes in sub-Saharan Africa, income distribution is unequal.

#### Last census:

1 December 2003:

1,269,000 (provisional)

**Population density:** Five inhabitants per square km. Urban population 86 per cent (2010 Unicef).

**Annual growth rate:** 2.4 per cent, 1990–2010 (Unicef).

#### Ethnic make-up

There are some 40 different ethnic groups, of which the Fangs are the largest (40 per cent of the total); the Bopounous (20 per cent) are also highly significant. There are some 25,000 Europeans, mainly of French nationality.

#### Religions

Christianity (59 per cent), mostly Roman Catholic; indigenous animist beliefs (40 per cent). There is a small Muslim community (less than 1 per cent).

#### Education

School is compulsory and free for all children up to the age of 16 years. Secondary education covers seven years, divided into a lower cycle lasting four years and an upper cycle lasting three years. On completion of the upper cycle, pupils take the examinations for the *Baccalauréat* for advancement to university. On completion of the lower cycle, pupils may opt to take a 'short' or a 'long' course of technical secondary education. The former leads to the *Brevet de Technicien* and the latter to the *Baccalauréat technique*.

Two universities – Omar Bongo University and the University of Science and Technology of Masuku (USTM at Franceville) – as well as various independent institutions provide higher education. Universities enjoy a certain degree of autonomy, even though higher education is financed exclusively by public funds.

Public expenditure on education typically amounts to 2.5 per cent of annual GDP. **Literacy rate:** 79.8 per cent, male; 62.2 per cent, female; adult rates (World Bank).

**Enrolment rate:** 62 per cent total primary school enrolment of the relevant age group (World Bank).

**Pupils per teacher:** 56 in primary schools.

#### Health

Gabon is plagued by poor health conditions, which are aggravated by the hot and humid climate and is the country worst affected by malaria in sub-Saharan Africa.

Gabon faces a growing crisis of male impotence affecting 25 per cent of all adult men, blamed on high levels of alcohol and tobacco use.

#### HIV/Aids

HIV/Aids is a rapidly growing crisis the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 30,000 people in Gabon are being infected with HIV each year and Gabon is beginning to experience the serious effects of the African pandemic. Around 8,600 children have been orphaned by the disease. The main concentration of HIV/Aids cases is in the capital, Libreville. The government has launched a campaign to prevent the disease spreading further.

**HIV prevalence:** 8.1 per cent aged 15–49 in 2003 (World Bank)

**Life expectancy:** 57 years, 2004 (WHO 2006)

**Fertility rate/Maternal mortality rate:** 3.3 births per woman, 2010 (Unicef); maternal mortality 600 per 100,000 live births (World Bank).

**Birth rate/Death rate:** 16 deaths to 36 births per 1,000 population,

**Child (under 5 years) mortality rate (per 1,000):** 62 per 1,000 live births (WHO 2012)

**Head of population per physician:** 0.29 physicians per 1,000 people, 2004 (WHO 2006)

#### Welfare

Gabon's social welfare system, while deeply flawed, is one of the best in sub-Saharan Africa. It operates a social insurance system and healthcare system through separate funds administered by the National Social Security Fund (CNSS) and National Social Guarantee Fund (CNGS) for self-employed and state

workers under contract through a pay-as-you-go system. As these funds have experienced financial difficulties and the government has undertaken to restructure them with a view to their long-term viability. Inadequate contributions have been blamed for the over-spending. The social insurance system covers benefits including old age, disability, sickness, maternity and work injuries with provision for certain categories of self-employed workers. Old age pensions are available to men aged 55 with 20 years of insurance and 120 months of contribution during the last 10 years. It is set at a minimum of 40 per cent of average earnings during the last three or five years of pay. There is also provision for old-age settlement with a lump sum equal to 50 per cent of average monthly earnings for every six months of contribution, if the person is ineligible for pension. Medical services are provided by hospitals and dispensaries operated by the CNSS, and by other establishments. Free maternity care is payable up to six weeks before, and eight weeks after, confinement. A family allowance law also offers benefits to employees with one or more children under the age of 16 years. Family Allowance Benefits provide a month income for each child and a year school allowances for primary, secondary and technical school students.

### Main cities

Libreville (capital, estimated population 797,003 in 2012), Port-Gentil (150,484), Masuku (59,231), Oyem (42,556), Moanda (41,564), Mouila (30,974).

### Languages spoken

French is used for all documentation. The main native language is Fang, with a number of other Bantu dialects spoken. It is essential that business visitors should be able to conduct business in French. Interpreters can be hired locally.

### Official language/s

English (from Oct 2012)

### Media

The constitution guarantees freedom of speech and of the press, however, these are not always respected and this has led to self-censorship by local journalists.

### Press

The national press is heavily influenced by government which owns the majority of newspapers used to discredit opposition political parties and independent media. While all newspapers may be critical of the government and political leaders, none are critical of the president. The government has shown itself to be quick to use libel laws, which can be both criminal and civil matters, and to suspend

publications it deems unacceptable in their reporting.

Foreign newspapers and magazines are readily available in Libreville.

**Dailies:** The only newspaper is the government-owned *L'Union*, published in French.

**Weeklies:** In French, privately-owned newspapers include *Le Temps* which has a satirical tenor, *Le Témoin* covers general news and information, *La Lowe*, *La Relance* and the fortnightly *Le Journal*.

**Business:** In French, a monthly journal *Business Gabon* ([www.gaboneco.com/businessgabon/Business\\_Gabon.pdf](http://www.gaboneco.com/businessgabon/Business_Gabon.pdf)) has business articles and information.

**Periodicals:** *L'Union* also publishes a monthly magazine, with a similar circulation. *M'Bolo* has three issues on holiday and travel.

### Broadcasting

Gabon is developing as the centre of Francophone broadcasting for Central and West Africa, being the base of the radio service Africa No 1 and for the African operations of France's Canal Plus. The state has taken a financial interest in these broadcasting media, as well as in the main newspaper, directly and through parastatal groups. It therefore retains a high degree of control.

The government-owned, national, public broadcasting service, Radiodiffusion-Télévision Gabonaise (RTG), operates radio stations and a network of provincial stations.

**Radio:** RTG operates two national radio stations, based in Libreville, and a network of six regional stations broadcasting in French and local languages.

A major international station, Africa No 1, is 60 per cent government owned, with the rest owned by private Gabonese shareholders. It is in partnership with the French-owned Radio France Internationale (RFI), broadcasting throughout Africa.

Other, commercial stations include Black FM and Radio Emergence.

**Television:** RTG operates a network of provincial TV stations, which broadcast in French and local languages. RTG 1 is a national service, broadcast in Libreville and Franceville; while RTG 2 can be received only in the Libreville and the coastal area.

Téléafrika, is a private commercial channel that broadcasts 24 hours a day. Subscription TV is available through the French, Canal Horizons (Gabon), a channel designed to serve the whole of Francophone Central Africa.

**National news agency:** Agence Gabonaise de Presse (AGP)

**Other news agencies:** Gabonews: [www.gabonews.ga](http://www.gabonews.ga)

Internet Gabon: [www.internetgabon.com](http://www.internetgabon.com)

### Economy

Gabon has sub-Saharan Africa's third-largest oil reserves – revenue from oil exports accounts for over 60 per cent of GDP. The dominance of oil in the economy has resulted in undue bias, not only in a weak non-oil sector but also a wide gap in pay levels. The 2005 criticism by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) of the Gabonese economy that it faced a 'lack of economic diversification and weak non-oil growth' remained true 2010. Although per capita income in 2009 was US\$13,900 (by purchasing power parity), income is distributed extremely unevenly with 90 per cent of the wealth held by 5 per cent of the population. It has been estimated that over 50 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line and poverty is widespread particularly in rural areas.

Timber exports are an important source of foreign exchange, although coupled with farming, agriculture only accounts for 4 per cent of GDP. The service sector accounts for over 30 per cent of GDP, which typically provides support for the extractive industry.

GDP growth was a high of 5.6 per cent in 2007, as record global oil prices pushed up oil production and exports. As oil prices began to fall in 2008 the economy slowed to a growth figure of 2.3 per cent, then into recession in 2009 with GDP growth estimated at -1.4 per cent.

Public sector employment and wages are considered a drag on entrepreneurial enterprises, while domestic growth in non-oil activities has been modest and dominated by foreign companies.

Gabon has been criticised by the World Bank and the IMF for poor economic management. It also has a poor reputation with the Paris Club of creditor countries for the weak management of its debt and revenues. Nevertheless, a series of loans from the IMF and the Paris Club were approved by 2007; however, following the death of former president Omar Bongo, and the financial and social upheaval this caused, Gabon was unable to meet its economic goals in 2009 leading to a strain in relationships with its lenders.

### External trade

Gabon is a member of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (Cemac), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Bank of Central African States, using the CFA franc. There is a common external tariff (CET) within Cemac.

### Imports

Principal imports are foodstuffs, machinery and equipment, chemicals and construction materials.

**Main sources:** France (32.8 per cent of total in 2011), China (8.4 per cent), US (6.3 per cent).

#### Exports

Principal exports are crude oil (over 70 per cent of total), timber, manganese and uranium

**Main destinations:** US (40.8 per cent of total in 2011), Australia (9.1 per cent), Malaysia (8.6 per cent).

#### Agriculture

Total agricultural land is 25.8 million hectares of which 18.1 per cent is pasture and 1.3 per cent arable and employs 26 per cent of the workforce.

The agricultural sector in Gabon has been neglected, forcing the importation of a large percentage of the country's food needs. A shortage of cultivated lands has been the major problem facing the agricultural sector which, mostly through subsistence farming, supports a large portion of the population.

Principal cash crops are palm oil, cocoa and refined sugar, while subsistence crops are cassava, maize and plantains. Cocoa is grown mainly in Woleu Ntem province and coffee mainly in Ogooué-Ivindo, Ogooué-Lolo and Haut Ogooué provinces. Sugar cane is grown and refined by the Société Sucrière du Haut-Ogooué (Sосуho). Annual sugar output is around 30,000 tonnes. Agrogabon set up three cattle ranches in the 1980s, importing tsetse fly-resistant cattle. They are located at Lekabi, Nyanga and N'Gounie. The only industrial-scale poultry farm is run by the Société Industrielle d'Agriculture et d'Elevage de Boumango (SIAEB).

Gabon has well-stocked fishing grounds, which are only partially exploited. Domestic demand is estimated at around 36,000 tonnes. The typical annual catch is over 40,000 tonnes. Traditional fishing accounts for two-thirds of national fishing output. There are about a dozen fleets, most of which are foreign, engaged in industrial fishing in Gabonese waters. Exports of forest products amount to around US\$320 million annually and timber is a source of employment for nearly a third of the working population outside the public sector. Forests cover almost 85 per cent of the land area, estimated at 21.8 million hectares (ha). Deforestation typically accounts for 0.05 per cent annually average decrease, or the equivalent of 10,000ha of forest cover.

The forestry industry is the second-largest industry in the country. Gabon commercially exploits and exports both soft and hard woods, but cultivation and processing of timber comprises the main portion of forestry activities. The country produces sawn timber, veneers and plywood. Tropical hardwood logs constitute the bulk of

its roundwood exports. The potential commercial volume of live trees is estimated at 400 million cubic metres, 130 million of which is the much celebrated ebony gaboon wood.

Gabon is the fifth-largest world producer of timber, behind Finland, Canada, Sweden and New Zealand.

The forest is divided into three administrative zones. The coastal area is already fairly well exploited. The zone around Ngounie, Nyanga and Haut-Ogooué has the bulk of current activity. The Booue-Lastourville axis of the Transgabon railway is largely undeveloped. Seven large companies dominate okoume production. The largest is the majority state-owned Compagnie Forestière du Gabon (CFG).

Okoume, designated as the most important commercial timber, is selectively logged in a significant proportion of the country's forests. Exploitable forest potential is more than 300 million cubic metres. One-third of this is okoume, which is particularly suited to the production of plywood.

#### Industry and manufacturing

The main industrial activities are oil refining and timber processing, although these activities are treated separately from other industry in the national accounts. The other main manufacturing sectors are food processing, drinks and tobacco, metal transformation (primarily connected with shipyard activities and supplying the oil and wood industries) and building materials. Small sub sectors include textiles and chemicals (lubricants, paints, varnishes and detergents).

A fair proportion of the very modest industrial sector has been based on a policy of import substitution. This is now being abandoned as part of structural adjustment measures. The outlook for industry is therefore bleak even though there are plans to develop a regional export market within the Union Douanière des Etats de l'Afrique Centrale (UDEAC) (Central African Customs and Economic Union) countries. In theory, this larger potential market would allow industry to develop economies of scale that the small domestic market does not justify. In practice, however, high labour costs are likely to frustrate efforts to promote the regional market. Gabon's labour costs are high due to the well-established social security system, most of the cost of which is borne by employers, offering benefits that are not found in many other West and Central African countries.

#### Tourism

The tourist sector is still in its infancy, but since the global economic crisis cut trade in Gabon's principal export earners,

timber and oil (a declining resource) the government has given tourism a higher profile in its long-term plans, not only to stimulate the economy but to encourage diversification. Gabon can offer tourists sights of spectacular natural wonder, traditional cultures, history and treasures. The number of arrivals in 2006 was 296,000, which by 2008 had grown to 358,000.

Gabon's vast forests with their abundant flora and fauna, are becoming important centres for eco-tourism. Unesco designated the ecosystem and prehistoric landscape of Lopé-Okanda as a World Heritage site in 2007. A Gorilla sanctuary was established in 2001, on the island of Evangué-Ezango just north of the Loango National Park, to promote practical and sustainable tourism while curbing the trade in 'bush-meat' that threatens the survival of gorillas, which have been identified as a potentially lucrative source of foreign exchange.

#### Mining

Mining and hydrocarbons together contribute around 50 cent to GDP and employ 10 per cent of the workforce. Gabon is one of the world's leading producers of manganese and uranium. Other areas of interest are gold and iron ore. Activity is concentrated on extraction and export of manganese ore (reserves of 200 million tonnes) and uranium (reserves of 35,000 tonnes). Both are crudely refined before export, the manganese as a 51 per cent concentrate and the uranium as 74 per cent pure yellow cake. Manganese goes mainly to Europe, but also to the US and the Far East. Uranium goes mainly to France (about 10 per cent of France's requirements), the rest to Belgium and Japan. Manganese and uranium account for 10 per cent of merchandise exports. Manganese production is declining, while large deposits of iron ore, barytes (used in paint-making) and niobium, discovered during construction of the Transgabon railway, have yet to be exploited. There are 50 million tonnes of phosphate reserves.

#### Hydrocarbons

Gabon is sub-Saharan Africa's fourth-largest oil producer, after Nigeria, Angola and Equatorial Guinea. With income from oil exports representing around 40 per cent of GDP and 80 per cent of export revenue, Gabon's economy is highly dependent on this one commodity. The exports go primarily to Western Europe, although China also imports Gabonese crude oil.

Proven oil reserves were 3.7 billion barrels at the end of 2011, with production at 245,000 barrels per day (bpd), falling by -2.0 per cent on the 2010 figure.

Production has fallen from the high of 364,000bpd in 1997. The country's downstream industry consists of the Sogara refinery, which was expanded in 2010, to a total capacity of 24,000bpd. The government has consistently maintained a market-oriented policy towards its sizeable oil reserves and has one of the most attractive hydrocarbons codes in Africa. Under this law, the state has a minimum 25 per cent holding in all oil-producing companies. Oil exploration permits are awarded under production-sharing agreements, which are individually negotiated.

Natural gas reserves totalled 28.3 billion cubic metres (cum) in 2011. All gas produced in Gabon is used for electricity or refinery fuel.

Any coal produced or imported is commercially insignificant.

### Energy

Gabon has a total electricity generating capacity of 400MW. In 2000 around 60 per cent of all energy was generated by conventional thermal power stations and the remainder by hydroelectricity. By 2007 the energy mix had changed as hydroelectric power stations provided 76 per cent of all energy and solar panels were being installed in remote villages. Around 90 per cent of urban households have access to electricity and 35 per cent of rural households.

The largest hydroelectric dams are Tchimbele (69MW) and Kinguele (58MW), on the M'Bei River. There is around 6,000MW of undeveloped hydroelectric potential and government plans to increase the role of hydropower while diminishing the role of thermal power, with commitments to upgrade and develop existing dams, power stations and the distribution network.

While the Société d'Énergie et d'Eau du Gabon (SEEG) has a monopoly on electricity sales, production and distribution of electricity is open to commercial competition.

### Banking and insurance

#### Central bank

Banque des États de l'Afrique Centrale

#### Main financial centre

Libreville

### Time

GMT plus one hour

### Geography

Gabon is an equatorial country on the west coast of Africa, with Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon to the north, and the Republic of Congo to the south and east.

The eastern boundary lies along the watershed of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), so that all rivers flow

broadly west through Gabon into the sea. The sandy coastal strip consists of palm-fringed bays, lagoons and estuaries. The uplands are heavily eroded by river action, and there is a wide coastal plain, which is largely alluvial in nature. The natural vegetation is dense rain forest.

### Hemisphere

Straddles the equator; Libreville, the capital, is in the north.

### Climate

The climate is equatorial with an annual mean temperature of 28 degrees Celsius and high levels of humidity. The rainy seasons are between October and mid-December, and between mid-January and May. The dry season is from June to September.

### Dress codes

Lightweight or tropical clothing is suitable, with rainwear for the monsoon season. Businessmen should wear a lightweight or tropical suit and women a lightweight suit or equivalent.

### Entry requirements

#### Passports

Required by all. Passports must be valid for more than six months after the date of departure.

Proof of return/onward passage is necessary.

#### Visa

Required by all and to be applied for before travelling. Applications for business visas require a letter from the representative's company accepting responsibility for any expenses incurred, a full itinerary and a letter of invitation from a host company in Gabon.

#### Currency advice/regulations

There are no limits on the import of foreign or domestic currency, although any sum should be declared on arrival. Export of local currency, to countries outside the CFA franc zone, is limited of CFAf200,000.

Visitors are advised to carry travellers cheques in euros to avoid extra exchange fees.

### Health (for visitors)

#### Mandatory precautions

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required.

#### Advisable precautions

Immunisations are advisable for yellow fever, hepatitis A, tetanus and typhoid.

There is a rabies risk.

Malaria and HIV/Aids are prevalent and standard measures should be taken to avoid these diseases.

Water which is used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should first be boiled.

Dysentery can be caught from contaminated raw fruit and vegetables and unboiled water. Dairy products made from

local milk should be avoided. Meat and fish should be well cooked and eaten hot.

### Hotels

Available in Libreville, Port Gentil, Lambaréné and other main centres. Service charge is usually included in bill, if not a tip of 10–15 per cent is usual.

### Credit cards

Credit cards are not widely accepted.

### Public holidays (national)

#### Fixed dates

1 Jan (New Year's Day), 1 May (Labour Day), 16 Aug (Assumption Day), 16–18 Aug (Independence Day celebrations), 1 Nov (All Saints' Day), 25 Dec (Christmas Day).

#### Variable dates

Easter Monday, Whit Monday, Eid al Adha, Eid al Fitr.

#### Islamic year 1435 (5 Nov 2013–24

Oct 2014):: The Islamic year contains 354 or 355 days, with the result that Muslim feasts advance by 10–12 days against the Gregorian calendar. Dates of feasts vary according to the sighting of the new moon, so cannot be forecast exactly.

### Working hours

#### Banking

Mon–Fri: 0730–1130, 1430–1630.

#### Business

Mon–Fri: 0730–1200, 1430–1800.

#### Government

Mon–Fri: 0730–1530 (30 minute lunch break); Sat: 0800–1300.

#### Shops

Mon–Sat: 0800–1200, 1500–1900.

### Telecommunications

#### Mobile/cell phones

GSM 900 services are available in the most populated areas.

### Electricity supply

220-30V AC, 50 cycles. Round two-pin plugs are standard.

### Social customs/useful tips

Business is conducted in French. Appointments should be made in advance. It is customary to shake hands when meeting and taking leave. Business cards are exchanged after introduction.

Gratuities are between 10–15 per cent if no service charge is included.

The lifestyles of the middle classes in Libreville, Port-Gentil and Franceville have been heavily influenced by the French, and French etiquette has been largely adopted.

As elsewhere in Africa, it is extremely unwise to attempt to photograph any military installations or troop movements, security checkpoints, etc.

### Security

Crime is increasingly a problem with incidents of robbery and armed attacks,

particularly around Libreville and Port-Gentil. Avoid carrying valuables or wearing jewellery in public and walking alone at night. Avoid travelling at night and always comply with the frequent police roadblocks.

### Getting there

#### Air

**National airline:** Air Gabon (Compagnie Nationale Air Gabon).

**International airport/s:** Libreville-Léon M'Ba (LBV), 12km from city; restaurant, currency exchange; Port Gentil (POG), 4km from city.

**Other airport/s:** Franceville-Mvengue (MVB) has air charters. There are 65 other public and 50 private airfields linked mostly with the forestry and petroleum industries.

**Airport tax:** None

#### Surface

**Road:** The major routes are from the Republic of Congo, Cameroon or Equatorial Guinea. These are semi-surfaced but generally are in good condition and well maintained.

**Water:** There is a boat to and from São Tomé every five days.

**Main port/s:** The principal deep-water ports are Port Gentil, Owendo (Libreville). Mayumba and Nyanga are used for shipping timber. There is a fishing port in Libreville.

### Getting about

#### National transport

**Air:** Air Gabon operates scheduled and charter flights to all main centres.

**Road:** There are an estimated 8,590km of roads, including 3,290km of main roads and 1,950km of secondary roads. Except for the routes Libreville-Ndende, Booué-Bitam, roads can be difficult in the rainy season. Travel by bush taxis and truck can be dangerous, especially in the rainy season.

**Buses:** Regular coach and minibus services link Libreville with Lambaréné, Oyem, Mouila and Bitam. Some services are subject to rainy season conditions.

**Rail:** Regular services operate on the Transgabon railway linking Libreville with Booué, Ndjolé and Franceville. There are two classes. The railcars are air-conditioned for some services but no refreshment or sleeping accommodation is scheduled. The rolling stock is generally new.

**Water:** The principal river is the Ogooué, navigable from Port-Gentil to Ndjole (310km), and serving the towns of Lambaréné, Ndjolé and Sindara. A ferry service (taking two hours) operates between Libreville and Port-Gentil.

#### City transport

**Taxis:** Unmetered 'collective' and private taxis are available in main towns; tipping

is not usual; rates vary according to the time of day. The journey from the airport to the Libreville city centre takes 10 minutes.

#### Car hire

Available in main towns, at airports and through hotels. International driving licence required. Charges are high.

### BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

#### Telephone area codes

The international dialling code (IDD) for Gabon is + 241 followed by subscriber's number.

#### Useful telephone numbers

Police: 732-036761-044  
760-950720-951  
Fire: 18 761-520  
Ambulance: 732-771 762-344

#### Chambers of Commerce

Gabon Chamber of Commerce, Agriculture, Industry and Mines, PO Box 2234, Libreville (tel: 722-064; fax: 746-477).

#### Banking

Banque Gabonaise de Développement; PO Box 5, Rue Alfred Marche, Libreville (tel: 762-429, 762-489; fax: 742-699).

Banque Gabonaise et Française Internationale (BGF), PO Box 2253, Blvd de l'Indépendance, Libreville (tel: 732-326, 764-035; fax: 740-894, 744-456).

Banque Internationale pour le Commerce et l'Industrie du Gabon SA, PO Box 2241, Avenue du Colonel Parant, Libreville (tel: 762-613, 763-811; fax: 746-410).

Banque Nationale du Crédit Rural, PO Box 1120, Avenue Bouët, Libreville (tel: 724-742, 766-144, 763-045; fax: 740-507).

Banque Populaire du Gabon, PO Box 6663, Blvd de l'Indépendance, Libreville (tel: 724-719; fax: 728-691).

Caisse Nationale d'Épargne, Siège Social, Libreville (tel: 766-509).

Centre de Chèques Postaux, Siège Social, Libreville (tel: 766-509).

Union Gabonaise de Banque SA, PO Box 315 & 2238, Avenue du Colonel Parant, Libreville (tel: 777-000; fax: 764-616).

#### Central bank

Banque des États de l'Afrique Centrale, Direction Nationale; PO Box 112,

Libreville (tel: 761-352; fax: 744-563; e-mail: beaclbv@beac.int).

#### Travel information

ADL (Aéroport de Libreville), BP 363, Libreville (tel: 736-128).

Air Gabon (Compagnie Nationale Air Gabon), BP 2206, Aéroport International Léon M'ba, Libreville (tel: 730-027; fax: 731-156).

Eurafrique Voyages, BP 4026, Libreville (tel: 762-787; fax: 761-897).

Libreville Léon M'Ba International Airport, BP 363, Libreville (tel: 736-244/246/247; fax: 736-128).

#### Ministry of tourism

Ministry of Transport, Tourism and National Parks, BP 3974, Libreville (tel: 763-240).

#### Ministries

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, BP 551, Libreville (tel: 721-579).

Ministry of the Arts, Culture and People Education, BP 1007, Libreville (tel: 724-028).

Ministry of Defence, Security and Immigration, BP 13493, Libreville (tel: 760-835).

Ministry of Economy, Finance, Budget and Privatisation, BP 9672, Libreville (tel: 721-571, 760-580; fax: 761-518).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Co-operation, BP 2245, Libreville (tel: 762-251).

Ministry of Forestry and Environment, BP 199, Libreville (tel: 733-191).

Ministry of Higher Education, BP 3919, Libreville (tel: 763-252).

Ministry of Home (in charge of Local Collectivities and Mobile Security), BP 2110, Libreville (tel: 762-181).

Ministry of Housing, Land Registry and Town Planning, BP 512, Libreville (tel: 740-461).

Ministry of Justice, BP 547, Libreville (tel: 720-160).

Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, BP 2256, Libreville (tel: 732-739).

Ministry of Mining, Energy and Hydraulic Resources, BP 4041, Libreville (tel: 762-863).

Ministry of National Education and Professional Training, BP 6, Libreville (tel: 721-741).

Ministry of Public Health, BP 50, Libreville (tel: 762-522).

Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Reform, BP 496, Libreville (tel: 762-150).

Ministry of Shipping, BP 803, Libreville (tel: 733-210).

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Ministry of Small and Medium Businesses, BP 4120, Libreville (tel: 720-636).

Ministry of Social Affairs, Family and Solidarity, BP 5684, Libreville (tel: 761-700).

Ministry of State Control, Decentralisation, Administration of Territory and Regional Integration, BP 178, Libreville (tel: 763-550).

Ministry of Trade Industry, BP 3906, Libreville (tel: 722-887).

Ministry of Youth and Sport, BP 3904, Libreville (tel: 763-576).

### Other useful addresses

Compagnie Minière de l'Ogoué (Comilog), BP 578, Libreville (tel: 722-474).

Conseil Economique et Sociale de la République Gabonais, BP 1075, Libreville (tel: 762-668).

European Development Fund, BP 321, Libreville (tel: 732-250).

Gabonese Embassy (US), 2034 20th Street, NW, Washington DC 20009 (tel: (+1-202) 797-1000; fax: (+1-202) 332-0668).

Société de Développement de l'Agriculture au Gabon (Agrogabon), BP 2248, Libreville (tel: 764-082).

Société Equatoriale de Travaux Pétroliers Maritimes, BP 493, Libreville (tel: 753-509).

Société Gabonaise de Financement et d'Expansion, BP 2151, Libreville.

Société Gabonaise de Participation et de Développement, BP 1624, Libreville.

Société Gabonaise de Raffinage, BP 530, Libreville (tel: 752-365).

Société Nationale de Transports Maritimes (Sonatram), BP 3841, Libreville (tel: 740-632; fax: 745-967).

US Embassy, Boulevard de la Mer, BP 4000, Libreville (tel: 762-002).

**National news agency:** Agence Gabonaise de Presse (AGP)

BP 168, Libreville (tel: 443507; fax: 443509; internet: [www.agpgabon.ga](http://www.agpgabon.ga)).

**Other news agencies:** Gabonews: [www.gabonews.ga](http://www.gabonews.ga)

Internet Gabon: [www.internetgabon.com](http://www.internetgabon.com)

### Internet sites

Africa Business Network: <http://www.ifc.org/abn>

AllAfrica.com: <http://allafrica.com>

African Development Bank: <http://www.afdb.org>

Africa Online: <http://www.africaonline.com>

Mbendi AfroPaedia (information on companies, countries, industries and stock exchanges in Africa): <http://www.mbendi.co.za>