



# GUINEA BISSAU'S HEALTH SECTOR

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# 1. Country Overview

Guinea Bissau is a tropical country situated on the Atlantic coast in West Africa. The country is bordering Senegal on the north, Guinea to the east and south and Atlantic Ocean to the west. The country has a land area of 28,120 square kilometers<sup>[1]</sup>. Its capital city is Bissau.

The country has a population size of 2,015,987 according to United Nations data. This is equivalent to 0.03% of the world's population which makes the country ranked 150 in the world in terms of population size. 44.9% of the population lives in urban areas and the median age is 18.8 years<sup>[2]</sup>. The population is dominated by more than 20 African ethnicities, with Fulani and Balanta being the main ones each representing 28.5% and 22.5% of the country's population, respectively while 45.1% of the population is Muslim. Crioulo, Portuguese, Pular and Mandingo are the most spoken languages in the country with Portuguese being the official language<sup>[3]</sup>.



The country gained its independence from Portugal in 1974. The Guinea Bissau constitution was promulgated in 1984 and it has been amended several times since then. The country has experienced several coups and remains one of the politically unstable countries in the world. The country's constitution defines the government as republic. The executive power is vested in the president who is normally assisted by prime minister. The legislature consists of unicameral National People's Assembly. A new constitution was adopted by the national assembly, but it was not promulgated.

The country has struggled to secure stable governance and political leadership, and this has caused significant development challenges despite its economic opportunities. On March 25, 2015, the government launched a new strategic and operational plan for up to 2025. The plan was dubbed "*Terra Ranka*" (A fresh start). The plan consists of six pillars: (i) peace and governance, (ii) infrastructure, (iii) industrialization, (iv) urban development, (v) human development and (vi) biodiversity.

According to WorldData.Info, the total length of streets and highways in Guinea Bissau is 4,400 kilometers. This is equivalent to 2.24 meters for each of the 2.0 million inhabitants of the country and it is ranked 169th in terms of worldwide comparison of roads infrastructure. There is no noticeable railway system in the country. The country has eight airports.

Guinea Bissau is a member of several regional and international trade agreements. Guinea Bissau is a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which includes fifteen countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. ECOWAS is in the process of developing a customs union among its members, allowing for the free

flow of goods and services between member nations. The country also, became a member of United Nations in 1974.

Guinea Bissau Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was approximately \$1.43 billion in 2020. It increased from \$0.41 billion in 2001 to \$1.43 billion in 2020 growing at an average annual rate of 7.22%. The country is classified as a low-income country. According to the 2021 Index of Economic Freedom, the country has an economic freedom score of 54.9 making its economy 139th freest in the world.

## 1.1. Key Country Statistics



**58 years**

Life expectancy, at birth, 2019



**Negative 2.4**

GDP growth (annual %), 2020



**25.4%** <sup>[5]</sup> Exports of goods and services as a percent of GDP, 2019



**29.2%** Imports of goods and services as % of GDP, 2020

*\*Source: World Bank*



Exported products, 2019: Coconuts, Brazil Nuts, and Cashews (**\$127M**), Gold (**\$69.2M**), Non-fillet Frozen Fish (**\$34.1M**)



Imported products, 2019: Refined Petroleum (**\$49.8M**), Rice (**\$41.1M**), Wheat Flours (**\$10.5M**) <sup>[4]</sup>



**Deficit of \$ 90393.48** <sup>[5]</sup> Balance of trade, 2019

## 2. COVID-19 situation

As of 16<sup>th</sup> July 2021:

- There were 3,998 total cases with 70 deaths and 3,664 recoveries.
- The first two COVID-19 cases were reported in Guinea Bissau on 25th March 2020.
- The country recorded its highest daily COVID-19 cases on 4th May 2021, which was 156. It also, experienced relatively high daily number of COVID-19 cases between periods of April 2020 to September 2020 and January 2021 to March 2021. The current daily number of COVID-19 cases has been relatively low.
- The number of active COVID-19 cases was highest during the month of June 2020. Since then, there has been a variation of the numbers. Only 264 COVID-19 active cases were reported on 15th July 2021.
- The number of daily reported COVID-19 death cases have been relatively low. The highest number of death cases to be recorded was only 5. The late death case to be recorded was on 1st June 2021.

*\*Source: Worldometer*

On May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the country reduced the then existing “state of calamity” to “state of alert” which have been in effect up to now (July 2021). The related restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19 are still in effect. Domestic public transport is still in operating but with capacity limitation. Wearing of masks in public is mandatory. Funeral attendance is capped to 50 people. Night clubs and gyms are closed. All social and recreational gatherings should not exceed 20 people. Other meetings should not exceed 25 people. Passenger, humanitarian, medical and cargo flights are also operating.

The country received its first 28,800 doses of COVID-19 vaccine on 14th April 2021 through COVAX facility. According to Our World in Data 2021, only 25,012 doses have been given, 1,463 people fully vaccinated, and this represents only 0.1% of world population fully vaccinated.

### 3. Health Overview

The national health system of Guinea Bissau has been affected by the existing political instability and adverse economic conditions including low investment by Ministry of Public Health and international donors. It has one the lowest Human Development Indexes in the world with 0.480 which positions it at 175 out of 189 countries in the world according to UNDP 2019. Despite this slow pace, there has been a significant reduction of under-five mortality rate, with 78.5 deaths per 1000 live births in 2019. Maternal mortality remains one of the highest in the world. Neonatal mortality remains significantly high than average in West Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, estimated 35.8 per 1000 live births<sup>[6]</sup>. The live expectancy at birth is 59.4 years with females estimated to live longer than men. Life expectancy for females is 61.3 years where else for men is 57.3 years. HIV/AIDS prevalent is still high though decreasing.

Guinea Bissau joined UHC 2030 (then, international health partnership) in 2013. In 2017, its national health policy was validated. With UHC partnership support, the country is currently implementing the National Health Development Plan 2018 -2022. The government is also in partnership agreement (2016 to 2025) with United Nations which expresses the commitment to gradually reinforce operationalization of “Delivering as one” approach with one of the expected outcomes as to ensure equitable, sustainable access to health, nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene, education, and quality protection services<sup>[7]</sup>.

The country’s health system faces persistent problems related to limited supply of health workers, low public spending, poor infrastructure, and weak governance. The healthcare delivery is done around 11 districts, local, regional, and centralized levels. The local level are generally health centres which are primarily for implementation of health sector activities. Technical support and coordination are done at regional level. Health policies, strategies and regulations are made at the central level. Primary healthcare facilities are also classified into three types (A, B, C) depending on their capacity to deliver more or less complex health interventions.

Government spending on health is still low, although it is projected to increase drastically by year 2050<sup>[8]</sup>. There is high reliance on development assistance for health and out of pocket is the most preferred and available method of financing health services.

According to World Health Organization, 62% of deaths in Guinea Bissau are estimated to be caused by communicable, maternal, perinatal, and nutritional conditions on the other hand, non-communicable diseases are estimated to account for 30% of all deaths in the country <sup>[6]</sup>.

## The top 10 causes of death <sup>[16]</sup>.



Neonatal disorders



Diarrheal diseases



Lower respiratory infections



HIV/AIDS



Ischemic heart diseases



Stroke



Tuberculosis



Malaria



Measles



Road injuries

Sources: Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2019

## 3.1 Key Health Statistics



**7**  
Current health expenditure as a % of GDP, 2018

**78.40**  
Domestic private health expenditure as a % of current health expenditure, 2018

**9.16**  
Domestic government health expenditure as a % of current health expenditure, 2018



**74.48**  
Out-of-pocket expenditure as a % of current health expenditure, 2018




**35**  
Maternal mortality rate, neonatal (per 1000 live births), 2019



**79**  
Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births), 2019

\*Source: World Bank



Do you need more in-depth information on Guinea Bissau's health sector and how your project or business can contribute?

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## 4. Key private health sector challenges

- Limited health workers
- Poor health infrastructure
- Poor government health funding
- High maternal and neonatal mortality rates
- High poverty levels
- Weak governance

## 5. Key private health sector opportunities

- Training and capacity building in the health sector
- Increased need for private health funding to supplement current government funding
- New innovative interventions for child and maternal health services
- Need for unified voice for private health sector


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