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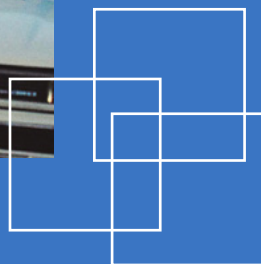
SKILLS



International
Labour
Organization



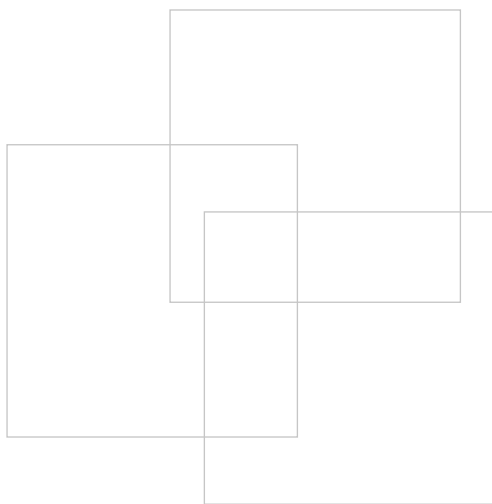
1919-2019



Gabon

State of

SKILLS



Gabon

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The socio-economic context

The economy of Gabon is characterized by high reliance on the oil sector (50 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product and 80 per cent of exports) and by massive foodstuff importations (85 per cent of requirements). Aware of the situation, Gabon launched an economic transformation strategy (Emerging Gabon) in 2010 in which agriculture plays a central role. This strategy's aim is to help diversify the economy by providing a skilled national workforce to attract foreign direct investment, create jobs and increase business productivity. To implement this strategy, the country launched several reforms and developed partnerships with international stakeholders as well as flagship projects to foster employment that is useful and relevant for the economy and to target jobs of the future. Gabon has not succeeded yet in setting up an appropriate regulatory mechanism to take full advantage of the skills that come with sub-regional and regional immigration. The challenges around skills creation and recognition remain high.

Gabon is a sparsely populated country.

Gabon is a low human-density country in Central Africa due to its small population (about 1.811 million in 2018, of which 877,000 women and 934,000 men (UNFPA)¹ for a surface area of 267,667 km². As the last general population and housing census was conducted in 2013 (RGPH, 2015), population figures are estimates. In addition, due to the large forest coverage over the territory, the population is very unevenly distributed, with almost all the inhabitants essentially in two coastal cities (the capital Libreville with 700,000 to 900,000 inhabitants depending on the source, and the centre of oil production Port Gentil with about 140,000 inhabitants in 2016). The population is 87 per cent urban and occupies only 1.1 per cent of the national territory. This gives a density of 7 inhabitants per km² over the whole territory but less than 2 per km² (comparable to Namibia, generally viewed as the least densely populated country in Africa) if the two main coastal urban areas are excluded. The population is young (median age 22 years old and average age 26 years old), with a growth rate of 2.9 per cent.

Gabon has been enjoying a rather favourable economic situation with positive growth for more than 40 years.

Although in sharp decline since the middle of the decade after the 2014 fall in oil prices - and one of the highest Gross Domestic Products per capita in Africa (US\$8,329 in 2018).

¹ <https://gabon.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Resultats>

This is thanks mainly to oil fields operations on the coast and offshore in the Port Gentil area. However, poverty remains a major issue and has not decreased between the two surveys on poverty assessment in Gabon (Egep and Egep II), i.e. from 2005 to 2017 (DGS, 2018). The country has adopted an “Emerging Gabon” 2025 Strategic Plan (PSGE), which is the reference document for national policy in all sectors. The aim of Strategic Priority No. 3 in the 2025 PSGE is to ensure that growth benefits all Gabonese by increasing individual incomes but also by fast-tracking social services (health, education, social protection, drinking water, electricity). Five strategic objectives will help achieve priority No. 3: (i) establish quality health services for all; (ii) provide universal access to drinking water and sanitation services, (iii) provide universal access to decent housing; (iv) promote access to employment and combat exclusion; and (v) promote cultural heritage assets and encourage population access to cultural services. Full employment is to be achieved through the creation of 300,000 jobs in the private sector. This vision of shared prosperity is translated into strategic programmes around three pillars of growth: Green Gabon, Industrial Gabon and Services Gabon, as illustrated by the following “Emerging Gabon” Pyramid:

Figure 1. “Emerging Gabon” Pyramid.



Around 30 per cent of the population is in a vulnerable position.

With a monthly income below the guaranteed minimum wage of 80,000 CFA Francs, i.e. about US\$150 (McKinsey, 2013)². The evolution of poverty is not well understood in Gabon. However, it seems that with the recent oil crisis, households have become poorer, especially in rural areas. There are also very strong inequalities across the country. According to their own subjective perception, about 20 per cent of Gabonese households experience poverty on a daily basis, as they are unable to feed themselves properly, to own material goods, to shape their lives, to avoid vulnerability to external shocks, to be included in society, and above all to acquire human capital. Those who work in the informal private sector, as well as unemployed and inactive persons, experience subjective poverty more keenly (about 30 per cent) than the employed. In addition, in 60 per cent of the regions, social conditions have worsened in terms of access to basic services (healthcare, drinking water and electricity). In 2016, Gabon ranked 109th out of 188 countries on the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) despite a high per capita Gross Domestic Product (fifth in Africa and second in Central Africa behind Equatorial Guinea and ahead of Angola)³. The economy began to stagnate in 2017, with a growth rate of 0.6 per cent for the Gross Domestic Product against 2.1 per cent in 2016⁴. This follows a long period of sustained, albeit relatively unstable, economic growth.

² <https://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/country/gabon/overview> and <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/countries-by-gdp/>

³ <https://lalibreville.com/gabon-second-pays-pib-habitant-plus-eleve-afrique-centrale/> and <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/countries-by-gdp/#africanCountries>

⁴ <https://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/country/gabon/overview>

About 17 per cent of Gabonese have received no education.

There is a significant gap between rural and urban areas to the advantage of the latter. Conversely, the gap between women and men is not pronounced (DGS, 2018). In detail, 9.7 per cent of the population over the age of 30 have a higher level of education, 39.3 per cent have secondary education, 28 per cent have received primary education, 5.7 per cent received pre-primary education and 17.3 per cent have no education at all. Significant efforts are required also for young people (aged 15 to 17) 6.3 of whom have never attended school.



(© ILO)

The rate of repetitions is massive across the board.

In primary schools, the repetition rate is 37 per cent. This is one of the highest rates in the world and twice the African average. Less than 5 per cent of pupils entering primary school reach the school certificate without repeating at least one year. In secondary education, the repetition rate is 26 per cent in lower secondary education and 23 per cent in upper secondary education. On average, a Gabonese student achieve the credential (BEPC) issued at the end of the first cycle of secondary education at the age of 17, instead of the theoretical 12 years.

As in many areas, there is a scarcity of recent and relevant quantitative data and no efficient mechanism for anticipating skills and jobs requirements.

Nor are there any longitudinal surveys. The annual number of school leavers by level of education and the number of graduates by level in the population are not available (see for example UNEVOC, 2009, tables 2 and 3). However, partnerships are under consideration, for example with UNESCO's Institute for Statistics, to produce the General Census on Educational Supply (RGOE, 2019), which is shown as "in progress" on the website of the General Department of Statistics of Gabon⁵.

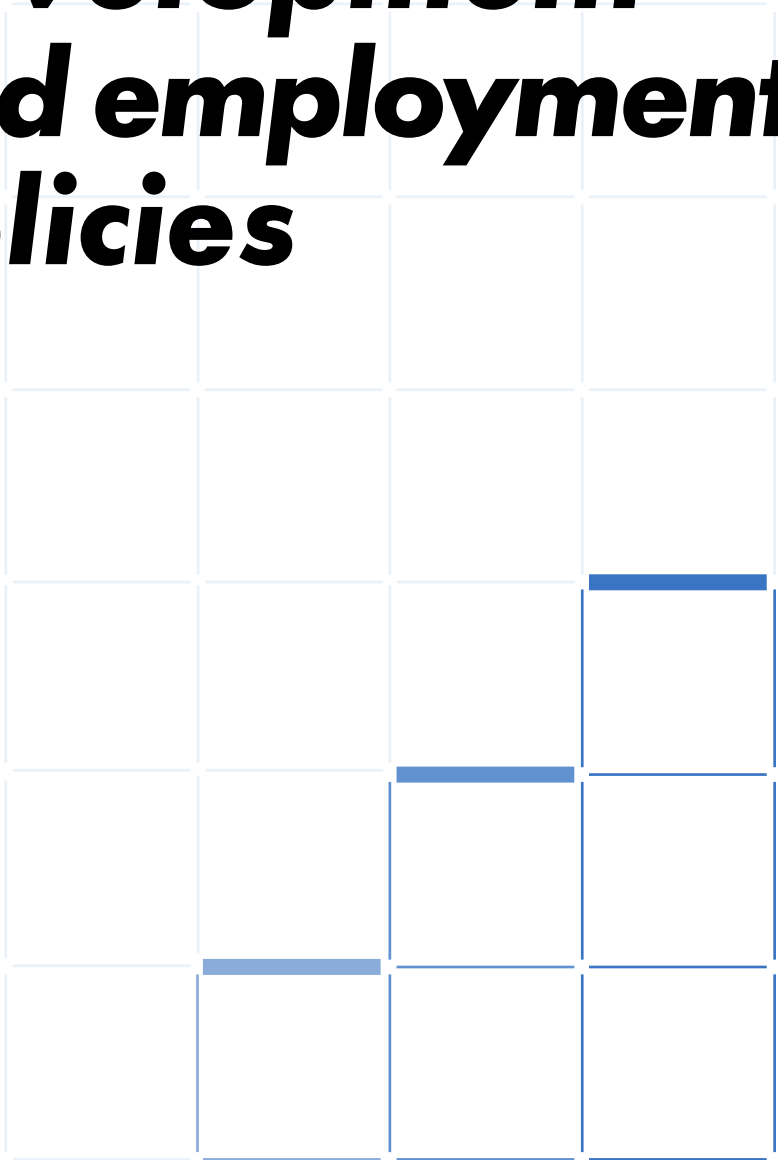
⁵ <https://www.gabonreview.com/blog/education-le-gabon-en-quete-de-statistiques/>

The unemployment rate is very high and rising sharply.

Gabon has a high unemployment rate, especially among young people and graduates. The strong decade of economic growth in the 2000s did not create jobs. As a result, the informal sector prevails. In the formal sector of the economy, salaried jobs are the main form of employment and supervisory positions are dominant, especially in the public sector. Two-thirds of Gabonese with a higher level of education work in the civil service, the majority of which are at management level. In 2019, unemployment affects about 20 per cent of the working population. While the rate is fairly even throughout the country - 21 per cent in urban areas and 19 per cent in rural areas -, the number of unemployed is much higher in urban areas. The National Employment Office (ONE), which is the public job service, is responsible for connecting job seekers with businesses. However, it cannot cover all needs with only five branches throughout the country. As a consequence of this limited coverage and the lack of synergy with other key sectoral ministries as well as training centres and institutes, private competitors have established and developed operations. The number of people registered with these private companies is not known.

Structurally, the working population presents large gender differences. In 2010, the working population totalled 494,000, including 209,000 women (42 per cent). However, unemployment is equally high for women and men (MEEDD, 2012). Unemployment is often long-term and affects young people more often (the rate is double). The employed workforce is therefore small (393,000, of which 149,000 women); it is mainly urban and informal. The breakdown of employed workers by activity sector shows a high proportion of services (68 per cent), followed by commercial activities (15 per cent) and agriculture (11 per cent). The industrial sector employs a bare 7 per cent of the workforce (MEEDD, 2012).

Development and employment policies



Despite the growth of the economy over the very long term, few jobs were created in Gabon.

The economy was historically driven by the timber sector. In 1970, the oil sector took first place (50 per cent of GDP), along with manganese and uranium. But this industry employs a very small workforce. For a long time, the public sector was the main provider of employment: in 2015 for example, there were 109,564 jobs in the public sector and 90,327 in the private sector. Besides, since the middle of the 2010-2019 decade, the fall in crude oil prices has led to a recession and the government has entered an austerity phase. The public sector has not been recruiting since 2016. As oil extraction became less profitable, exploration for new oil fields stopped and the only production that is still ongoing in 2019 was already operating. The main impact has been a reduction in the services and jobs, which benefited from the oil windfall, particularly in the Port Gentil area. Historical sectors such as timber or those in great demand such as palm oil are growing once again but this shift came late. Besides the historically high place of oil, there are other structural causes, such as shortcomings in technical and vocational education and training (TVET), low rates of transition to tertiary education, a tough business climate and strict labour legislation that protects those who have a job but tends to limit new recruitments.

Job creation objectives are constantly being revised downwards.

In 2016, the Gabonese government set an annual target of 20,000 new jobs. On 19 May 2017, Chapter 2 of the Economic Recovery Plan (PRE)⁶ forecast only 10,000 new jobs annually between 2017 and 2019. On 31 December 2017, the annual target of 10,000 new jobs was confirmed. It was presented by the Presidency of the Republic as a target to be achieved without delay, in particular by exempting employers from the total or partial payment of social security contributions. In practice, none of these targets have been met yet. About 10 per cent of the targets were achieved in the early years of the Plan. This is due to the fact that the sole private sector was to create the jobs, since a hiring freeze was in place in the public sector.

Gabon does not seem able to evolve towards emergence, despite the fact that this is a major policy objective for 2025.

The country faces the challenges of creating and developing potential growth economic sectors, which are not getting sufficient support, either in political terms or in funding effort. Gabon lacks skills in sectors such as agriculture, the timber industry, ecotourism, new information and communication technologies and even in oil upgrading.

⁶ <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/amdb/blog/280617/gabon-assemblee-nationale-presentation-du-plan-de-reliance-economique-2017-2019>

This is a direct result of the focus placed on oil production at the time of the independence. Due to a lack of political vision, a lack of interest from investors and despite the drop in oil prices, Gabon did not consider these alternative economic sectors early enough, amongst which ecotourism and timber exploitation seem most promising. In fact, for a very long time, joining the public service was the sole objective of most graduates. Despite the slump in oil prices and the realisation that economic sectors other than commodity extraction should be developed, the documents regularly published in Gabon on the need to wake up have not in fact led much to the development of growth economic sectors. The issue of formalising the informal sector of the economy is addressed (“gabonization” of jobs) but without linking it to the high proportion of migrants working in highly informal sectors, who are recruited, often directly abroad, by a well-organized network.

Gabon has developed a Strategic Plan titled Emerging Gabon (PSGE)⁷ with employment and vocational training as a strategic priority.

Published in 2012, it covers strategies and policies implemented from 2011, with a vision for 2025. To help increase employment, the Strategic Plan aims in particular to provide better access to employment, combat exclusion and encourage entrepreneurship and social dialogue.

⁷ sgg.gouv.ga/plan-strategic-gabon-mergent

Unemployment and poverty are highly correlated. People without jobs and/or without strong certifications are more exposed to the risk of poverty. One of the explanations is the weak vocational training infrastructure, where limited numbers of young Gabonese are trained, which in turn compels businesses to use foreign labour. Besides, training standards are obsolete and do not meet business needs.

Gabon also has a robust National Employment and Vocational Training Policy (PNE).

Published in 2018 with the support of the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), it gives an uncompromising assessment on the state of employment in Gabon. The government's vision and the focus areas for strategic action are equally compelling. They include: improving the national economy's capacity to absorb the workforce; supporting private sector development and entrepreneurship; improving employability; and improving and modernizing labour market governance.



“Everyone has the right to education. Education must be free of charge, at least with respect to elementary education. Elementary education is mandatory. Technical and vocational education must be widespread; access to higher education must be open equally to all on the basis on their own merit.”



– Constitution of the Republic of Gabon

Article 26.1

The skills system in Gabon

Skills demand is unclear and supply is scarce. Gabon lacks national expertise in many areas, even in the growth sectors identified above. Another consequence of the reliance on oil extraction for revenue is that the school system and the TVET system have not evolved to provide the skills required to bring the economy to emergence as intended. Employers regularly report recruitment issues and a low skills level in the recruits they end up hiring or taking on a trial basis. Data from the National Employment Office indicate a significant mismatch between labour supply and demand at all levels of qualification: the demand for jobs is greater than jobs on offer and more than two-thirds of the jobs offered by businesses are not filled for want of matching profiles (Table 1).

Table 1. Satisfaction rates and job applications by qualification level, 2010.

	Jobs wanted	Jobs offered	Jobs filled	Satisfaction rate of job offers in per cent	Satisfaction rate of jobs wanted in per cent
Managers/engineers	971	188	64	34,0	6,6
Senior technicians	1 324	321	149	46,4	11,2
Technicians	302	217	68	31,3	22,5
Skilled workers	1 086	82	19	23,2	1,7
Specialized workers	835	142	67	47,2	8,0
Ordinary workforce	142	42	25	59,5	17,6
Total	4 660	992	392	39,5	8,4

Source: Dieye et al. (2013); data from the National Employment Office.

TVET reform policy

Gabon has launched several initiatives to reform its skills anticipation and development system. An initial structural reform led to the merger of the Ministry of Employment, Youth, Vocational Training, Integration and Reintegration (MEJFPIR) with the Ministry of the Civil Service, Public Service Innovation and Labour, resulting in the Ministry of Employment, Civil Service, Labour and Vocational Training, which is responsible for social dialogue. This new ministry includes the Division of Human Resources, tasked with the development and recognition of skills.

(© ILO)



The Strategic Plan mentioned above also addresses the issue of skills. The intent is to set up an education information and management system (SIME; PSGSE, 2012, p. 65); to design a student's identity card; to develop school and university infrastructures; to reform training and courses curricula and schedules.

The Skills Development and Employability Project (Prodece)⁸ was implemented by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Technical and Vocational Training and Youth Inclusion, with the support of the World Bank. Initially scheduled to operate between 2016 and December 2021, it was launched in 2017. Targeting young adults between 18 and 34 years of age who have had little or no schooling, it has many aims. One is to improve the supply of TVET with the creation of training centres – including one in construction and public works and another in new information and communication technologies – and structures such as technical high schools. It also aims to improve the inclusion and employability of young people by developing their entrepreneurial skills.

⁸ www.travail.gouv.ga/2-actualites/536-projet-de-developpement-des-competences-et-de-l-employabilite-prodece/

Phase 1 of the Graine⁹ Support Project (PAPG1), executed by the Ministry of Agriculture with funding from the African Development Bank and technical assistance from the International Labour Organization, aims to improve employability in and promote access to the agricultural sector, expand the courses offered by the National School of Rural Development and create jobs for rural youth. Put forward in September 2017, this programme was launched on 4 October 2019 by the Prime Minister's Office.

The “Train My Generation - Gabon 5000” programme¹⁰ is part of UNESCO's skills development policy, which aims to facilitate access to employment and business creation. Through this programme, UNESCO is assisting the Gabonese State with skills development by defining a TVET policy and creating training centres in the field of information and communication technologies.

A proposal for a skills and jobs anticipation system (Gpec) is scheduled for 2018, as part of a World Bank's project in support of administrative reform¹¹.

⁹ Gabonaise des réalisations agricoles et des initiatives des nationaux engagés.

¹⁰ www.unesco.org/new/fr/bureau-de-lunesco-a-libreville/education/developpement-de-lenseignement-et-la-formation-technique-professionnelle-et-lentrepreneuriat-des-jeunes/

¹¹ <http://gabonl.com/index.php/2018/11/06/le-gouvernement-envisage-de-passer-a-la-gestion-previsionnelle-des-emplois-et-competences-gpec/>

The State particularly wishes to start with the civil service when implementing the jobs and skills anticipation system.

In the area of migration policy, even if the institutional framework has yet to be defined, Gabon wishes to establish collaboration between the Ministries of Labour and Foreign Affairs in order to research migrants' skills so that they can be used to develop the economy. At the tripartite workshop organized by the International Labour Organization in Yaoundé in September 2019, Gabon's representatives referred to projects developed with other countries of the subregion such as, for example, a coordinated information platform for migrant workers, the creation of a joint commission on training and skills development in the livestock and agriculture sectors, and the recognition of vocational credentials in growth sectors.



Governance

The skills development system falls under the auspices of several institutions, with little cooperation between them: Synergies are present but under-utilized because the technical and financial partners are unable to agree on a joint action plan. The first institution is the Ministry of National Education, which is responsible for civic education. There is also the National Agency for Professional Training and Development (ANFPP)¹². Attached to the Ministry in charge of vocational training, it develops training courses for adults. Also involved in this management structure are the Ministry for Higher Education, Scientific Research and Technology Transfer on the one hand (general education) and the Ministry of Employment, Civil Service, Labour and Vocational Training (for technical and vocational training)¹³. Finally, the National Employment Office also contributes to the development of jobseekers' skills. Vocational training centres bring the practical application of the skills development system to the local level.

¹² <http://www.onfp.sn/cooperation-lagence-nationale-de-formation-et-de-perfectionnement-professionnels-anfpp-du-gabon-sinspire-de-lonfp/>

¹³ The exact names of the ministries change with the regular reorganizations and this is the one in use at the time of writing.

Social dialogue

Employers' organizations are regularly invited to contribute to the discussions: This results from Gabon's acceptance of one of the International Labour Organization's recommendations on the consultation of the social partners. However, their involvement in TVET is limited, particularly in the design of study and training programmes, dual apprenticeships and active participation in the management committees or boards of directors of training institutions. Several factors limit the engagement of employers' organizations and its relevance. Firstly, there are many of them (23) and it is difficult to achieve a form of consensus between them. Besides, very few have the technical skills in-house. Finally, most trade unions have limited resources and cannot recruit their own experts for example, nor can they fully work on the issues under discussion.

Financing

Several international organizations contribute to fund skills development: For example, the African Development Bank funds the following projects: Capacity Building for Youth Employability and Social Protection Improvement (RC/EJPS);

the Support Project for the GRAINE Phase 1 Programme with the participation of the International Labour Organization to improve employability, entrepreneurship and business productivity in the agricultural sector. The World Bank funds the Prodece programme among others. In addition, following a meeting in August 2018 between the Ministry of Labour and the World Bank's Director of Operations, an amount of 55 billion CFA francs is to be invested in vocational training, including in the establishment of training centres¹⁴. The European Union is also present in Gabon¹⁵ and funds the training of 3,000 young people without jobs or qualifications. Finally, UNESCO participates financially and pedagogically in various projects, including the "Gabon 5000" Programme.

The Ministry of Labour remains the main provider at the local level: In 2009, the education budget amounted to 13.4 per cent of total government expenditure, i.e. 2.7 per cent of GDP (World Bank, 2013), which is below average for Sub-Saharan countries. The data are a little old but between 2012 and today, no education-focused policy has been implemented. In 2019, as part of the draft budget, measures to improve the funding of technical and vocational education and training were announced. In a manner of speaking, vocational training and development centres can be self-funding on a very small scale by turning to production whilst they provide training.

¹⁴ <https://www.gabonmediatime.com/banque-mondiale-va-investir-55-milliards-de-fcfa-formation-professionnelle-gabon/>

¹⁵ <http://www.lenouveaugabon.com/social/0908-12361-l-union-europeenne-finance-la-formation-professionnelle-de-3-000-jeunes>

The Human Resources Division of the Ministry of Employment is to become the Directorate General for Employment: It will coordinate prospective skills and jobs studies. At this time, the institutions in charge of skills identification and anticipation are the Ministry of Labour, the General Workforce Directorate for the skills needed immediately by the job market, and the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Technology Transfer for academically acquired knowledge-based skills. As yet, there is no up-to-date job directory by sector and these institutions have not been able to set up monitoring and evaluation programmes to provide qualitative and quantitative data on the skills available. There is no information system on the labour market and the skills sought. There is also no survey of graduates from TVET or tertiary education institutions. However, the new government policies - in relation to employment, TVET and the education system - reflect Gabon's commitment to address the issue of skills.

Several projects and programmes are already underway to better identify the country's skills requirements. The jobs and skills anticipation system mentioned above would help define job profiles, with a description of the skills required, and thus improve human resources management in ministries (recruitment, non-replacement of staff). The new National Employment and Unemployment Survey (Enec) is being prepared.





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NEW VISION

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SALE

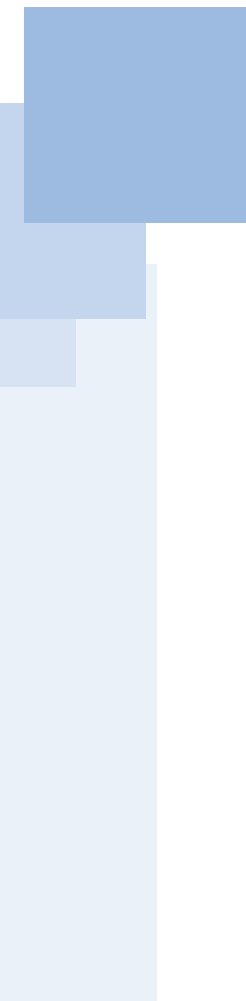
Local...
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The last one dates back to 2010 and is still widely used, given the lack of more recent and accurate data. The aim of this survey is to identify the characteristics of all jobs in Gabon and to obtain quantitative and qualitative data on the labour market. The survey will cover the formal labour market sector in 2019 and the informal sector in 2020. A project for a National Employment and Training Observatory (Onef) was launched in 2013 and would help with research on skills (identification, recognition), and on migrant workers' skills specifically. The Gabon Employment Directory (Remeg) exists in draft form. It would help identify skills shortages and set up appropriate courses in tertiary education and in technical and vocational education and training. There is already a similar directory for cross-functional jobs.

The most complete data source to date, beside the 2010 and 2020 National Employment and Unemployment Surveys, is the second Poverty Assessment Survey of Gabon (Egep II). Based on the 2007 Poverty Assessment Survey, it contains data on education, gender and of course poverty. However, it does not replace real forward-looking work, such as a directory of jobs and trades, a catalogue of certifications and longitudinal surveys to follow those who graduate from training courses on the labour market in Gabon.

Skills development

The technical and vocational education and training system is incorrectly calibrated, in quality, quantity and equity. The main issues found are: poor geographical distribution of training, a lack of the contemporary specialized courses requested by employers, no training in cross-functional skills, insufficient practical applications and vocational preparation too focused on theory. There is also a high level of gender inequity. The training on offer in Gabon is scattered, poorly optimized and short on quality assurance.



There are nine “vocational training and development centres” run by the State, 11 technical high schools (7,000 students), and a business school. Private institutions are also expanding across the country, but their number is not known and not all of them are listed, as some of them are not approved by the State. There is no current plan to make an inventory of them. In the public system, TVET covers 43 curricula, 17 of which are in the tertiary sector but in traditional courses and there are few returns to scale even though students are concentrated in a relatively small geographical area. These “vocational training and development centres” are not able to open training courses even when needs are identified on their territory. TVET Governance is highly centralized and the fact that TVET is a local solution to local issues does not come into consideration. There is little coordination with private centres. Besides, because of the variety of courses offered by each centre, the costs of teaching materials are not shared. Finally, as there are many private institutions and because businesses arrange in-house training with these private institutions, certifications, levels of training and curricula are not standardized, particularly in terms of quality. Quality is not verified in an effective manner: no attempt is made to link the knowledge supposedly acquired by the students with their subsequent performance on the labour market. There is no research on the internal rate of return either.

The enrolment rate in technical and vocational education and training institutions is low. Gabon has successfully and significantly increased access to general basic education, but access to TVET remains very low. The ratio of students enrolled in technical and vocational schools per 100,000 inhabitants is estimated at 377, which is barely above the African average (364) and more than three times lower than in Cameroon or Tunisia and one and a half times lower than in Mauritius, for example. TVET represents only 8 per cent of total enrolments in the education and training system (World Bank, 2013, p. 72). The sharp decline in the proportion of students in technical and vocational education and training should also be noted: 19.6 per cent in 1985 down to 9.5 per cent in 1995 (UNEVOC, 2009). On the other hand, the participation rate of young women in TVET is relatively encouraging. Of all students enrolled in technical and vocational education and training, young women represent 37 per cent in technical education and 51 per cent in vocational training.



However, Gabon is actively working towards better access to, and supply of, vocational training. A large number of programmes has been setup, mainly for young people. Implemented since 2016, the “One young person = one trade” programme¹⁶ (2016) aims to enable young people aged 16 to 35 who live in extreme poverty (“street youths”) to re-enter mainstream society through a three-month apprenticeship in a growth sector. In addition to the Prodece programme supported by the World Bank, for the implementation of which the National Employment Office is partly responsible (particularly dual apprenticeships for young people aged 16 to 24), two programmes have been setup by the same Office, such as the one with Société d’énergie et d’eau du Gabon (SEEG).¹⁷

¹⁶ <https://fr.infosgabon.com/gabon-lancement-du-projet-un-jeune-un-metier-pour-reinserer-2580-jeunes-de-la-rue/>

¹⁷ <https://www.oneentreprendre.com/actualite/5-la-seeg-renouvelle-son-partenariat-avec-le-fir>

In this programme, about thirty young Gabonese graduates, aged 18 to 34, have the opportunity to do an internship and to learn about occupations related to water, electricity and customer relations. This project aims to meet requests by businesses looking for qualified and operational workers in these specific areas. There is also the Youth Apprenticeship Contract (CAJ),¹⁸ which is only at the draft stage. The objective is to support appropriate training, financed by the World Bank. Finally, the Ministry of Employment, Civil Service, Labour and Vocational Training endeavours to give credibility to its objective of providing Gabon with a qualified workforce of 10,000 young people by 2023. To this end, five vocational training institutions are under construction with delivery scheduled to start in March 2020.¹⁹ They will be built in five different provinces and provide training courses aligned with technical occupations in demand, particularly in industry and processing. Even if the infrastructure seems to be on the right track, challenges around the training of the teachers who work there, teaching materials and input materials will remain unchanged, if the situation and operation of existing centres are anything to go by.

¹⁸ <https://www.oneentreprendre.com/actualite/6-contrat-dapprentissage-jeunesse-des-gabonais-en-immersion>

¹⁹ www.gabonactu.com/formation-professionnelle-le-gabon-vise-une-main-doeuvre-qualifiee-de-10-000-jeunes-dici-2023/

Skills recognition and quality assurance

The certification system in Gabon can issue five levels²⁰ of credentials in technical and vocational education and training²¹. The approach relies fully on an equivalence system with strict theoretical correspondence - equivalence - between the certification level and the qualification of the job that the graduate can hold. In addition, it is the highest level of schooling that allows entry into a given level of formal technical and vocational education and training. The equivalence method, which binds together certification level and employment, seems almost baked into society in Gabon (for example, people with high certification levels have high expectations when entering the civil service). Equivalence in general is problematic because it does not take into account the recruitment strategies of businesses where workers can be promoted internally based on their experience and/or proven skills. Nor does it support personal plans, where a young person can have a career path (studies followed by employment) other than the one required by this equivalence system, which is too rigid.

²⁰ www.travail.gouv.ga/430-flash-infos/568-offre-nationale-de-formation-des-centres-publics-de-formation-professionnelle/

²¹ In tertiary education, Gabon uses the Licence (Bachelor's degree), Master, and Doctorate (LMD) system.

The certification system, which should confirm the skills of an individual, is not very effective. Economic actors give little recognition to certifications issued in Gabon, partly because their knowledge of the curriculum is limited or because their expectations are not met, particularly the balance between theoretical knowledge, practical know-how and cross-functional skills. No relevant research has yet been carried out by Gabonese authorities on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning - also known as recognition of prior learning (Werquin, 2010) - even though skills exist in Gabon, particularly in the informal sector of the economy, and would open access to decent work if they were confirmed by a document, a statement or even a certification recognized by employers. In brief, there are neither tools nor formal framework to implement a quality assurance process in technical and vocational education and training²². There is little transparency on the knowledge and skills gained by successful TVET graduates. There is therefore no real trust in the certifications issued by the Gabonese system. Since there are also clear signs of low quality, economic stakeholders do not really recognize the certifications. In fact, they do not use them to recruit or for internal mobility and continue to rely on traditional methods: references from former employers, personal networks and trial periods. The work done on the National Qualifications Framework has not achieved consensus on a common language for skills, qualifications and certifications, nor has it led to the development of an operational qualifications register.

²³ In tertiary education, the approach is a little more advanced but not compelling: <https://www.ladissertation.com/Divers/Divers/L>

Gabon's situation with regard to the recognition of prior learning is both simple and complex. It is simple because there is no learning road map and no operational system to validate and recognize non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the issue is under discussion and it is complex. The recognition of prior learning has received sustained attention in several circles and not all points of view converge. Employers' organizations are very interested but do not have the internal expertise to set up an appropriate mechanism and incidentally plan to rely on international organizations. The Ministry of Labour has started work on the subject but the publication of the instruments is slow due, in particular, to a lack of consensus on legal aspects and a very slow consultation process with the social partners - process recommended by the International Labour Organization - who do not agree on the subject. Some employers have taken up the issue because they rightly believe that it will help identify the skills of their potential recruits or even to better understand the skills of their existing workforce, for example for internal reorganizations and mobility. Similarly, the National Employment Office (ONE) has decided to set up initiatives on the subject of recognition of prior learning in its "ONE entrepreneur" programme for job seekers.

In TVET in particular, the absence of a mechanism for effective guidance and transparency on graduates' true skills level, together with negative experiences reported by employers who recruited young people from among these graduates, contribute to a substandard image of the technical and vocational education and training system. The lack of transparency extends to certification standards, which are rarely available and theoretically contain the standards and assessment procedures required to obtain certification. The training programmes (curricula) are old and there are no mechanisms to update them, monitor labour market developments and meet employers' expectations. Graduates from TVET institutions have therefore a poor grasp of the latest approaches, methods and tools. It is not clear whether the teachers themselves understand these innovations, mainly because of the lack of continuous training.

Social inclusion



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The tools which are usually considered most inclusive are not operational yet. As mentioned above, technical and vocational education and training, which provides successful graduates with social integration and access to the job market, even among disadvantaged groups, is not fully operational yet. For one thing, because of the uneven TVET coverage across the country, to the detriment of rural and forest regions. For another, because admission is conditioned by the candidates' schooling level, which results in locking out the most underprivileged groups. However, the International Labour Organization has introduced the TREE (*Training for Rural Economic Empowerment*) methodology into the PAPG1 programme to provide partners with tools for better inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

Nor is the recognition of prior learning in place. Employers have reported that some of their employees with thirty years on the job still have the same formal level despite their irreplaceable experience. Experience recognition is also extremely inclusive as it provides an alternative path to formal education and training towards certification. However, certification remains an important component of employability, particularly at the sub-regional and continental levels, especially in the formal sector of the economy. The Ministry of Labour's first projects target people with five years' work experience and no certification. Based on these two criteria, the Ministry of Labour indicates that the recognition of prior learning could apply to about 50 per cent of the working population. In other words, a large part of the population has more skills than shown by their highest certification. This point alone justifies the implementation of measures such as the recognition of prior learning. The Ministry is working on the idea that work experience of at least three years should be recognized as prior learning. The process would start with a skills assessment, according to the draft policy outline. In addition, the process of recognition of prior learning would be conducted within the company. This last point raises issues because it would leave out the unemployed and the self-employed. It seems that this challenge has been noted by the National Employment Office, which is planning to undertake something in terms of recognition of prior learning within the "ONE entrepreneur" programme.

The extremely satisfying aspect of this approach still in the making is that Gabon has found a fairly satisfactory solution to the main problem experienced by many African countries: the need to take into account the newly gained certification, if any, in the remuneration. The social partners were able to negotiate, not without difficulty apparently, a wage increase every two years for newly certified workers who would therefore have a new employment status. It is not clear whether all companies will implement this agreement but it provides a strong foundation.

Finally, in the absence of effective alignment between qualifications internationally and as there is no automatic mechanism for the recognition of immigrants' skills in Gabon yet, there is no explicit recognition of certifications issued in the migrant's country of origin. Nor are they inclined to start a course of study after arriving in Gabon, because of their often irregular situation and also because a credential is not really a means of access to employment for them, confined as they are to the informal sector of the economy. However, the tripartite workshop held in Yaoundé in September 2019 opened up new directions and action plans were adopted. In addition, Gabon has a mechanism to identify the expertise required: the doors were open to many migrants from West Africa, particularly in the health and education sectors.

Supported employment exists for jobseekers registered with the National Employment Office. In 2018, as part of the initiative to create 10,000 jobs annually as mentioned above and to assist population categories who experience difficulties in finding employment, such as young people, people with disabilities or employees at the end of their careers, the government set up a subsidised contract with exemptions from labour law requirements. Employer who join the program receive financial assistance or tax incentives. The exemption waives employment regulations to help jobseekers registered with the National Employment Office and provides an advantage to employers as well as employees (tax credit). After one year, the worker party to the contract, prepared by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Vocational Training, may be appointed under a permanent or fixed-term employment contract.

Similarly, the “One young person = one trade” programme mentioned earlier enables young people aged 16 to 35 who live in very insecure conditions (“street youth”) to return to the job market. They may be qualified or unqualified, attending school or not. The program offers a three-month apprenticeship in a growth sector. It applies only to young Gabonese people.

As part of the Strategic Plan, the government wants to promote access to employment and fight against exclusion. Given the socio-economic context (high unemployment rate, low entrepreneurship, mismatch between training and employment, no employment policy), social exclusion is steadily increasing. The State's ambition is to provide decent work for all Gabonese people. Access to employment for young people, women and vulnerable groups is therefore a priority, as well as social entrepreneurship, which is underdeveloped in Gabon. The aim is to promote access to the job market for young people, as well as low-income populations, through entrepreneurship and self-employment. This will in particular enable women to access training and jobs in commercial activities and fish processing.

Finally, as one of the groups usually targeted by policies, migrants have limited opportunities in Gabon to enter the formal sector, among other reasons owing to the lack of access to the National Employment Office. As a result, for them, labour market intermediation can only occur through private actors. In the absence of research on the success of workers who access the job market through these private agencies or of any qualitative study on their methods, market coverage and ethics, it is difficult to assess the relevance and performance of this system. Here again, the Yaoundé workshop has suggested interesting new directions.

Lifelong learning

The absence of a continuous training system touches the whole population. This is due to a strong policy and programme focus on youth issues, which is not surprising given the high unemployment rates among young people (twice that of adults) regardless of characteristics (e.g. male or female, rural or urban, highly qualified or not). There are a few opportunities for adults to resume full-time studies, such as the continental university of Libreville²³, but continuous training in the literal sense - as upskilling or reskilling over short periods during working hours - is virtually non-existent.

In addition, workers' organisations rarely get involved in providing training programmes for their members. They lack the tools to better guide their members in terms of continuous training.

²³ And again, with very specific conditions: to have at least two years' professional experience and a certification level at least equal to the BTS/DUT/DTS [first level of tertiary education].

For young adults, some aspects of the Skills Development and Employability Project (Prodece) mentioned above may in a way cover a form of continuous training because of its provisions on internships in the workplace and training/reskilling. Similarly, the “One young person = one trade” programme applies to individuals up to the age of 35, which leads to the issue of adult and continuous training.



Key challenges

1 Lack of calibration of technical and vocational education and training and lack of coordination of actions taken by development partners.

The TVET system could be developed to include new specialized courses, particularly those applicable to contemporary jobs (including green jobs), and to cover the whole territory. This would be an opportunity to streamline the system, avoid duplications, introduce quality assurance and align teaching programmes (*curricula*) with employers' expectations (cross-functional skills, practical applications, internships). Once it is more inclusive (migrants, women and casual workers), it could also help establish a continuous training system.

2 **Insufficient funding for technical and vocational education and training.**

Besides the lack of vision and systemic approach, lack of funds is the cause of almost all the issues found in TVET. Indeed, the challenges have been clearly identified by TVET experts, Gabonese and international. There are ideas and there are solutions. However, new resources are lacking and even investments already in the budget have not always been expended. Vocational training and development centres have no cash flow and therefore no ability to evolve. Increased funding would also help develop continuous teacher training and initial training for non-teaching staff in education and training, such as specialists in school demographics, education planning, curriculum development, assessment and certification, recognition of prior learning, social integration and job market entry. Finally, it would be an opportunity to consider a form of decentralized governance for training centres.

3 Inadequate skills recognition system.

Certifications issued by the formal education and training system suffer from limited visibility and recognition by economic operators. The work on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (recognition of prior learning) is encouraging but still in its infancy. There are early discussions on the national qualifications framework, the national qualifications catalogue and meta-frames (including the regional qualifications framework specific to the Economic Community of Central African States) (Coles and Werquin, 2007).

4 Inadequate information system for the collection of qualitative and quantitative data.

The data on employment and unemployment used in 2019 in Gabon come almost always from the 2010 National Employment and Unemployment Survey. A new survey is scheduled for 2019-2020. In order to devise a policy that suits the labour market and vocational training, it is important to strengthen (create) an effective information system, together with thematic surveys (on employment, such as the National Employment and Unemployment Survey, as well as on social integration and job market entry for young people). The Report of the National Education System (RESEN) of the International Institute for Educational Planning (Pôle de Dakar) took three years at the beginning of the 2010 decade due to a lack of data (AFD, 2012).

5 Limited skills diversification.

The long-term reliance of the Gabonese economy solely on oil extraction is the main reason for the limited range of training options and available skills. This lack of vision has clearly been recognized, albeit very late. The “Training my generation - Gabon 5000” programme is an example of diversification which produced its first graduates in December 2017 (117 graduates in Introduction to computer literacy).

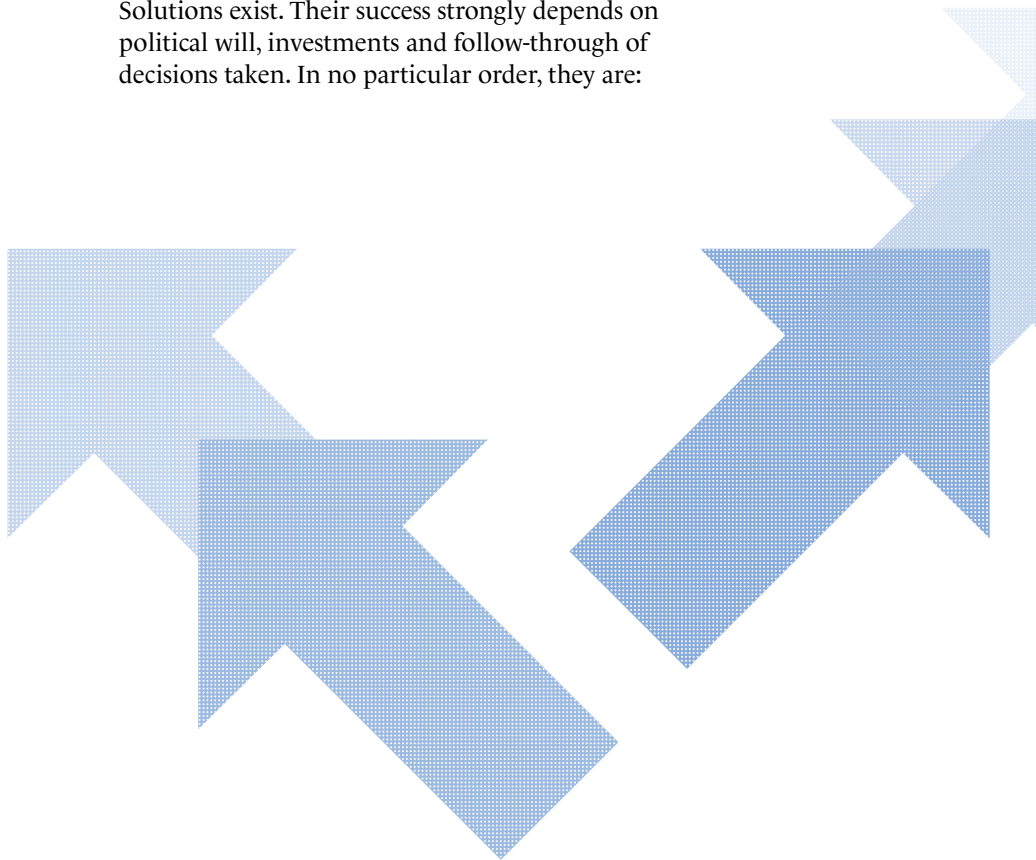



6 Limited use of migrants' skills.

For a long time, the country was closed to official immigration and this is another choice that is challenging for the operation of the economy and in meeting employers' skills requirements. Despite international agreements and Gabon's CEMAC and ECCAS memberships, there is no real free movement of people and rare are workers with a work permit across the sub-region. In practice, this means that employers cannot access foreign workers' skills, even though some countries have clearly acquired expertise in developing and recognizing certain skills. Employers and other labour market stakeholders have limited tangible evidence of what migrants have studied in their countries of origin, let alone what they have actually learned (learning outcomes, skills), especially when it comes to non-formal and informal learning. As a result, migrants' actual skills level is poorly understood in the formal sector and labour market stakeholders simply ignore it. The limited trust in Gabonese technical and vocational education and training does not help in this respect. In the absence of a skills and qualifications recognition system, gaining recognition for one's skills is a major challenge for both nationals and migrants.

The way forward

Solutions exist. Their success strongly depends on political will, investments and follow-through of decisions taken. In no particular order, they are:





1 Ensure greater involvement of employers' and workers' organizations in the definition/ formulation of training programmes.

This involves setting up effective tripartite management committees in training institutions, helping employers express their skills and credentials requirements and in return assist educators in responding to labour market expectations. In both cases, the challenge is immense because it requires complex work. Identifying the skills needed for the future is not an easy task. Social dialogue is one of the tools to achieve this. The appointment of full-time experts to employers' and workers' organizations could help improve the attention given to issues under discussion and communication.

2 Review technical and vocational education and training and improve guidance structures.

Notwithstanding funding, the current system can be reviewed to improve governance. The aim would be to increase the autonomy of schools and make them responsive to the demand for skills. This can be achieved by opening up new courses that are useful and relevant to the economy, reviewing curricula, partnering with businesses for internships, apprenticeships and learner assessments, recruitment of new staff, continuous training for existing staff and purchasing teaching and input materials. The job market moves much faster than the education and training system and developing an agile skills creation and recognition system is a necessity to track market changes as closely as possible, and this at the smallest geographical level



3

Adapt modern tools to the local context.

Recognition of prior learning, qualifications frameworks, the competency-based approach and the dual system have all been imported into Gabon. They will only be truly effective if the Gabonese context is taken into account. The French-style recognition of prior learning requires major support and is very intensive. National qualifications frameworks are very ambitious. The Canadian competency-based approach is complex and requires significant resources. The German dual system needs businesses to be deeply involved. All these approaches are relevant but need to be adapted. This requires extensive field work and taking into account the Gabonese context.

4 Data collection.

No solution can work without a careful review of initial conditions and an associated assessment to correct any deficiencies. This requires constant collection of quantitative and qualitative data on a regular basis, and therefore the implementation of an appropriate information system for all surveys that may be necessary and the availability of parent populations for sampling.

5 Establish partnerships between all or some of the actors involved in the skills creation and recognition system.

Partnerships can indeed help share costs, exchange information, create a common language and thus improve communication, achieve returns to scale and thus obtain results at a lesser cost, involve the Gabonese diaspora more easily and leverage its expertise. In short, encouraging partnerships links up with the idea that any shared development is immediately grasped and recognized by everyone and everywhere, resulting in better skills and qualifications portability (Werquin and Panzica, 2018).



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