

Ghana Overview



Region: Africa



28 million

people live in Ghana



1/2

of the population is aged under 25



Map of Ghana and its regions

Ghana is located along the Gulf of Guinea in the sub-region of West Africa and is bordered by the Ivory Coast in the west, Burkina Faso in the north, and Togo in the east. Ghana has a population of over 28 million,¹ with more than half of the country aged under 25 years.² The official language of Ghana is English, and its capital city is Accra, in the south.

Ghana is currently ranked 140 out of 189 countries and territories on the United Nations Human Development Index, which puts it in the medium human development category.³ In recent years, the Government has invested heavily in human development and from 1992 to 2013 the country experienced a reduction in poverty rates from 52% to 24%.⁴

However, during this time, inequality between the rich and poor increased and economic growth mainly benefited the wealthy.⁵ Although poverty has declined in Ghana, it remains pervasive in the north, with some of the highest poverty rates in the country.⁶ All of the projects in this booklet are located in northern Ghana, which is made up of the Upper West, Upper East, North East, Northern and Savannah regions. In February 2019, the internal boundaries of northern Ghana were redefined, and the North East and Savannah regions were created.⁷

The north of Ghana experiences significant dry periods due to its proximity to the Sahara Desert.⁸ The harsh climate contributes to adverse economic conditions in the region, where the main economic activity is agriculture.⁹ In comparison, southern Ghana experiences a higher level of economic development, and there is a corresponding trend of migration from the north to the south of Ghana where people seek better economic outcomes and access to services.¹⁰ This in turn contributes to underdevelopment in the north, reinforcing the cycle of poverty.¹¹



Traditional huts in Ghana's Northern Region

1 World Bank, 2018

2 CIA, The world factbook: Ghana, May 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gh.html>

3 UNDP, Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update, Briefing note for countries on the 2018 Statistical Update – Ghana, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/GHA.pdf

4 UNICEF, Child protection baseline research: Northern Regional profile, https://www.unicef.org/ghana/P1417_unicef_ghana_NORTHERN_WEB.pdf

5 *ibid.*

6 UNICEF, University of Sussex & Ashesi University, The Ghana Poverty and Inequality Report, 2016, [https://www.unicef.org/ghana/Ghana_Poverty_and_Inequality_Analysis_FINAL_Match_2016\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/ghana/Ghana_Poverty_and_Inequality_Analysis_FINAL_Match_2016(1).pdf)

7 Government of Ghana (2017). Northern, Background and Location, <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/about-ghana/regions/northern>

8 UNICEF, Child protection baseline research: Northern Regional profile, https://www.unicef.org/ghana/P1417_unicef_ghana_NORTHERN_WEB.pdf

9 Ghana Statistical Service, 2010 Population & Housing Census, June 2013

10 Ghana Statistical Service, Migration in Ghana, October 2014

11 *ibid.*

History

Ghana's history is rich and diverse, with inhabitants from as early as 10,000 B.C. The area has been ruled and populated by many different ethnic and cultural groups over time. In the 16th century, much of its lands were united under the Ashanti Empire. Today, the Ashanti people remain as one of the largest ethnic groups in Ghana.

As a coastal nation, Ghana has played a prominent role in historical trade interests. From the 15th century, the country established direct sea trade with Europe, including Portugal, the Netherlands and Great Britain. Ghana's primary commodity was originally gold. Sadly, in this time, Ghana also became a major port for the international practice of human slavery. With trade came European settlers and a series of conflicts, as colonial powers involved themselves in local tensions throughout the 19th century.

In 1957, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan country to achieve independence, led by Pan-African Kwame Nkrumah. Over the following decade, more than thirty African countries, prompted by Ghana's example, declared their independence. In the second half of the 20th century, Ghana saw political instability and military coups before democracy was recognised again in the early 1990s.

Ghana is now a constitutional republic, with two spheres of government: central and local. The head of state and government is the executive president, currently Nana Dankwa Akufo-Addo, who was elected in 2016 through a peaceful, democratic process and with 54% of the vote. As a former British colony, Ghana remains a member of the Commonwealth of Nations.

The People

Ghana is ethnically and culturally diverse. While English is the official language, there are more than 250 languages and dialects spoken across the country.¹² There are also many different ethnic groups in Ghana, the most populous of which is the Ashanti-Akan people at around 47% of the Ghanaian population, followed by Mole-Dagbon (16.6%), Ewe (13.9%), Ga-Dangme (7.4%) and Gurma (5.7%).¹³

Ghana is a predominantly Christian country (71.2% of the population in 2010), with a sizeable Muslim population (17.6%) and a smaller number of Traditionalists (5.2%) and non-religious (5.2%). The remaining 0.8% of the population identify as 'Other'.¹⁴ In the Northern Region the dominant religion is Islam (60% of the population), with Christianity being the next largest religion (21%).¹⁵ In the Upper East Region, Traditionalism is predominant (46%), followed by Christianity (28.3%) and Islam (22.6%),¹⁶ while in the Upper West Region the largest religion group is Christianity (35.5%), closely followed by Islam (32.2%) and then Traditionalism (29.3%).¹⁷



Women draw clean water from a borehole

12 Embassy of the Republic of Ghana, What is the official language of Ghana?, <http://www.ghanaembassy.nl/index.php/faqs-mainmenu-25/121-what-is-the-official-language-of-ghana.html>

13 World Atlas, Major Ethnic Groups of Ghana, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-and-tribes-in-ghana.html>

14 Ghana Statistical Service, 2010 Population & Housing Census, National Analytical Report, May 2013

15 *ibid.*

16 Modern Ghana, Ghana Upper East Region, https://www.modernghana.com/GhanaHome/regions/uppereast.asp?menu_id=6

17 Modern Ghana, Ghana Upper West Region, https://www.modernghana.com/GhanaHome/regions/upperwest.asp?menu_id=6&sub_menu_id=14&gender=



Education

Free and compulsory basic education was adopted by Ghana in 1961.¹⁸ However, for many people, the pressures of poverty and the reality of everyday living mean they never get to attend school. While almost three quarters of Ghana's national population aged eleven years and older are literate, literacy varies greatly across regions, and is much lower in rural areas. At 37.2%, the literacy rate in Ghana's Northern Region is the lowest in the country.¹⁹ Gender inequality in access to education remains an issue, with literacy rates for males being higher than those for females in every region across the country.²⁰

According to the 2010 census, more than half of the females aged six years and older across the Upper East, Upper West and Northern Regions had never attended school.²¹ The World Bank has identified the education of girls as being a key strategic development priority because, "better educated women tend to be healthier, participate more in the formal labor market, earn higher incomes, have fewer children, marry at a later age, and enable better healthcare and education for their children, should they choose to become mothers."²² When these elements occur an education can be seen to have a powerful effect on helping households, communities and countries to put an end to poverty.



Clockwise from top left: Schoolchildren in northern Ghana; a teacher marking papers; and teachers in training in Yendi

18 Ghana Statistical Service, 2010 Population & Housing Census, June 2013

19 *ibid.*

20 Ghana Statistical Service, 2010 Population & Housing Census, National Analytical Report, May 2013

21 *ibid.*

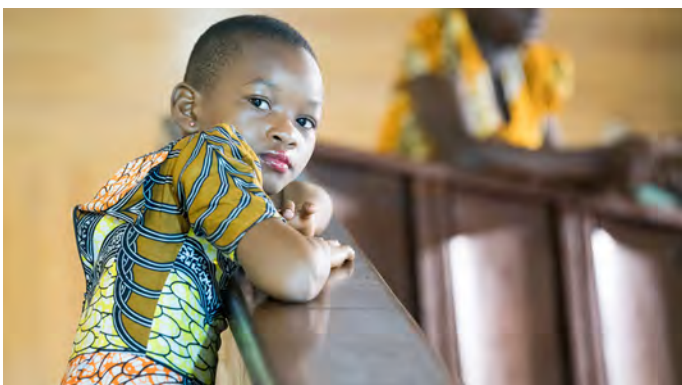
22 The World Bank, Girls' Education, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation>

The Church

Since it was first established in 1879, the Catholic Church in Ghana has grown to over three million people.²³ Across the country, there are 20 dioceses, including four archdioceses and one vicariate. Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, who heads the Ghanaian Church is the first prefect of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development and served previously as the president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. In these roles he has been a tireless advocate for society's most vulnerable and spoken of the need to foster "brotherhood and solidarity" in the face of fear.²⁴

Across Ghana, the Catholic Church, through its missionaries at the grassroots level, is accompanying vulnerable children and young people on their journey to independence, health and spiritual fulfilment. The Church is well known and respected throughout the country for providing quality education and social services as well as for its role in addressing community-based conflicts in remote communities.

Catholic Mission has a strong relationship with the Church in Ghana, which continues to grow and bear much fruit. Since 2017, when Catholic Mission's direct partnerships commenced, the support of people like you has provided 603 full-time and 2,577 part-time catechists. Over this period, and with your ongoing support of the direct projects profiled in this booklet, the lives of 1,400 children will be changed.



Mass at the Cathedral in Tamale

²³ Ghana Statistical Service, 2010 Population & Housing Census, National Analytical Report

²⁴ "Card. Turkson: 'How do we welcome the least?'," Vatican News, 19 September 2018, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2018-09/turkson-world-conference-xenophobia-racism-council-churches.html>