

# Comoros

## Geography

Location: Southern Africa, group of islands in the Mozambique Channel, about two-thirds of the way between northern Madagascar and northern Mozambique

Map references: Africa

Area:

total area: 2,170 sq km

land area: 2,170 sq km

Land boundaries: 0 km

Coastline: 340 km

Maritime claims:

exclusive economic zone: 200 nm

territorial sea: 12 nm

Climate: tropical marine; rainy season (November to May)

Terrain: volcanic islands, interiors vary from steep mountains to low hills

Natural resources: negligible

Land use:

arable land: 35%

permanent crops: 8%

meadows and pastures: 7%

forest and woodland: 16%

other: 34%

Environment:

current issues: soil degradation and erosion results from crop cultivation on slopes without proper terracing; deforestation

natural hazards: cyclones and tsunamis possible during rainy season (December to April); Mount Kartala on Grand Comore is an active volcano

Note: important location at northern end of Mozambique Channel

## People

Population: 549,338 (July 1995 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 48% (female 131,334; male 132,327)

15-64 years: 49% (female 137,083; male 133,629)

65 years and over: 3% (female 7,860; male 7,105) (July 1995 est.)

Population growth rate: 3.56% (1995 est.)

Birth rate: 46.22 births/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Death rate: 10.6 deaths/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Net migration rate: 0 migrant(s)/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Infant mortality rate: 77.3 deaths/1,000 live births (1995 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 58.27 years

male: 56.04 years

female: 60.57 years (1995 est.)

Total fertility rate: 6.73 children born/woman (1995 est.)

Nationality:

noun: Comoran(s)  
adjective: Comoran

Ethnic divisions: Antalote, Cafre, Makoa, Oimatsaha, Sakalava

Religions: Sunni Muslim 86%, Roman Catholic 14%

Languages: Arabic (official), French (official), Comoran (a blend of Swahili and Arabic)

Literacy: age 15 and over can read and write (1980)  
total population: 48%  
male: 56%  
female: 40%

Labor force: 140,000 (1982)  
by occupation: agriculture 80%, government 3%

## Government

Names:

conventional long form: Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros

conventional short form: Comoros

local long form: Republique Federale Islamique des Comores

local short form: Comores

Type: independent republic

Capital: Moroni

Administrative divisions: three islands; Grand Comore (Njazidja), Anjouan (Nzwani), and Moheli (Mwali)

note: there are also four municipalities named Domoni, Fomboni, Moroni, and Mutsamudu

Independence: 6 July 1975 (from France)

National holiday: Independence Day, 6 July (1975)

Constitution: 7 June 1992

Legal system: French and Muslim law in a new consolidated code

Suffrage: 18 years of age; universal

Flag: green with a white crescent in the center of the field, its points facing upward; there are four white five-pointed stars placed in a line between the points of the crescent; the crescent, stars, and color green are traditional symbols of Islam; the four stars represent

the four main islands of the archipelago - Mwali, Njazidja, Nzwani, and Mayotte (a territorial collectivity of France, but claimed by Comoros); the design, the most recent of several, is described in the constitution approved by referendum on 7 June 1992

## Economy

Overview: One of the world's poorest countries, Comoros is made up of several islands that have poor transportation links, a young and rapidly increasing population, and few natural resources. The low educational level of the labor force contributes to a subsistence level of economic activity, high unemployment, and a heavy dependence on foreign grants and technical assistance.

Agriculture, including fishing, hunting, and forestry, is the leading sector of the economy. It contributes 40% to GDP, employs 80% of the labor force, and provides most of the exports. The country is not self-sufficient in food production; rice, the main staple, accounts for 90% of imports. The government is struggling to upgrade education and technical training, to privatize commercial and industrial enterprises, to improve health services, to diversify exports, and to reduce the high population growth rate. Continued foreign support is essential if the goal of 4% annual GDP growth is to be reached in the late 1990s.

Industries: perfume distillation, textiles, furniture, jewelry, construction materials, soft drinks

Agriculture: accounts for 40% of GDP; most of population works in subsistence agriculture and fishing; plantations produce cash crops for export - vanilla, cloves, perfume essences, copra; principal food crops - coconuts, bananas, cassava; world's leading producer of essence of ylang-ylang (for perfumes) and second-largest producer of vanilla; large net food importer

Transportation

Highways:  
total: 750 km

Ports: Fomboni, Moroni, Mutsamudo

Airports:  
total: 4  
Defence Forces

Branches: Comoran Security Force