

Holidays

Holidays are very important to your sponsored child and family. The most important ones have religious or political significance:

- ☀️ **January 1**
New Year's Day
- ☀️ **January/February***
Prophet's Birthday
- ☀️ **May***
Ascension Day
- ☀️ **May 1**
Labor Day
- ☀️ **August 1**
Independence Day
- ☀️ **August 15**
Assumption Day
- ☀️ **November 1**
All Saints' Day
- ☀️ **December 25**
Christmas

**date varies*

Religion in Benin

About 43 percent of the people in Benin are Christian. Twenty-four percent are followers of Islam, 17 percent believe in Vodoun, and the rest of the population practice other religions.

Christians are followers of Jesus, a carpenter and a Jew from the city of Nazareth in present-day Israel.

Christians believe that Jesus is the only son of God, born of a virgin woman (Mary) in a stable in Bethlehem. His story is told in the New Testament of the Christian holy book, the Bible. The Christian symbol—the cross—reminds the faithful that Jesus died for them, for the forgiveness of their sins. Christian holidays include Christmas (December 25), which celebrates the birth of Jesus; Good Friday (March/April), which commemorates the death of Jesus on the cross; and Easter (March/April), the most holy of Christian sacred days, which celebrates the resurrection of Jesus on the third day after his death.

Islam is an Arabic word meaning “submission to the will of Allah (God).” Muslims believe that Allah’s will was revealed to the prophet Muhammad more than 14 centuries ago and was captured in the Islamic holy book, the Koran (Qur’an). Together with the Sunnah, a collection of sayings attributed to Muhammad, these texts provide a firm basis for religious and social life for all Muslims, including rules for diet, dress, hygiene, and more.

Vodoun is a traditional organized religion in coastal West Africa. “Vodoun” means “god” or “spirit.” In Vodoun, there is a single divine Creator called Mawu or Nana Buluku, who bore seven children and gave each rule over a realm of nature. All creation is considered divine, although there is a hierarchy of creations that range in power, from major deities governing the forces of nature and human society, to the spirits of individual streams, trees, and rocks.

Additional sources include the CIA World Factbook and State Department websites.



BENIN

Population	10 million
Capital City	Porto-Novo
Official Language	French
Per Capita Income	US\$750/year
Youth Literacy Rate	55% male/31% female
Access to Safe Water	85% urban/69% rural
Under 5 Mortality Rate	90/1,000 live births

Source: The State of the World's Children 2014 (UNICEF)

Benin is a small West African country located in the intertropical zone. It is bordered to the north by the Niger River, which separates it from the Republic of Niger, to the northwest by Burkina Faso, to the east by Nigeria, and to the west by Togo. The southern part of the country is coastland with little range in temperature. It rains for most of the year, especially between May and October, with a dry season from December to April. In the north, the humidity is much lower, but the temperature is higher, particularly during the dry season between November and June. It gets much cooler during the wet season, from July to October. Central Benin has two wet seasons: a short one between October and November and a lengthier one between March and June. The dry season is between November and March.



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A Brief History

Among the main ethnic sources of the Beninese population are the Adja people in the south. The cradle of this group is located in Notse, not far from Tado in today's Togo. Through a historical migration pattern toward the south and southeast, various ethnic groups organized themselves into kingdoms of different sizes and importance. Over time, these different kingdoms adopted different socio-political structures. The most feared kingdom was the Dahomey Kingdom, whose sovereigns led frequent conquest wars against other entities to the south or the north.

After independence from French colonial rule on August 1, 1960, life in Dahomey was characterized by many difficulties stemming from the rivalries between political parties. In 1972, a coup d'état saw the installation of a Revolutionary Military Government. Subsequently, the Republic of Dahomey became the People's Republic of Benin. With the adoption of a new constitution in 1991, democratic presidential elections were held and Benin entered its sixth republic with a new presidential regime.

Plan's work in Benin covers three key areas, all of which are rooted in the rights of the child:

- ☀ Governance and child rights
- ☀ Youth leadership
- ☀ Women's empowerment

Governance and child rights

Plan works to ensure that councils (newly decentralized communes) have signed up to child protection codes and increased their investment in the areas of water and sanitation, basic education, and maternal and infant health—including the reduction of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Plan also actively supports women's organizations with access to relevant information about

the functioning of their councils, so they can effectively participate in the councils' public deliberations, putting the interest of girls and women on the political agenda.

Youth leadership

Plan facilitates projects that strengthen the capacity of girls' and boys' clubs to discuss topics that concern their communities and nation. As a result, children's opinions become more visible, and they enjoy increased opportunities to participate in decision-making at the local and national levels. Plan also works to make sure that orphans and vulnerable children regularly benefit from legal, psychological, educational, and nutritional support, as well as essential health care, contributing to their integration into society, reduction of stigma, and increased access to education or vocational training.

Women's empowerment

Through this program, Plan works to guarantee that people living with HIV benefit from a psychosocial support package facilitated by Plan, which will result in lower mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Benin. With Plan's support, many children can drink safe water and have access to better hygiene and sanitation facilities year-round. Also, children under the age of 5 with fever symptoms are treated through the community-integrated management of childhood illness protocol, which contributes to lower under-5 mortality rates. In addition, village savings and loans associations help rural women access credit at lower rates so that they can invest in their own businesses and meet the needs of their families.

Economic Security

Agriculture production is the base of the economy and employs the majority of Benin's population. The principal crops include: maize, yam, cassava, beans, and cotton. Despite the tremendous labor force working to feed the people of Benin, self-sufficiency in food



production has been threatened by rapid population growth over the past few years. The vast majority of farmers still use manual tools such as a shovels, hoes, and machetes to cultivate small plots of land. These small areas of land are quickly becoming overexploited.

Family Structure

Women typically get up early and start their daily activities before sunrise. Most of the time they wash, do the housekeeping, and prepare breakfast. After these morning chores they go to the fields and work until evening, then fetch water and firewood, and then cook dinner before going to bed. They must manage to have cereal ground, usually every three days. During the high season for agricultural activities, which is more than eight months in a year, the village is empty by six in the morning. Women, men, and children go to work in the fields, often far away from their village. Most of them will not return until sunset. When there is not much to do in the fields, women start their day with the processing of agricultural products, such as making *gari* (cassava flour), oil, or soap that they sell at the market. The men knock down palm trees, from which they make *sodabi* (a local drink); hunt for small game; or do small jobs around the house. During the school year, children get ready for school in the morning. They take with them money or a breakfast of either porridge made of corn or of millet, or maize-flour dough.

Language

The official language in Benin is French. Local languages currently spoken in Benin are Adja, Fon, Goun, Mina, Yoruba, Dendi, and Bariba. English is taught in secondary schools but not used outside of the classroom. It is very likely that you will encounter a language barrier in communicating with your sponsored child as the majority of the children do not know enough English to write a letter. Children who cannot write will be assigned to community workers or volunteers who will explain your letters and help the children compose their responses.

Here are a few phrases in French that you might want to use in your correspondence with your sponsored child:

☀ **Comment ca va?**
How are you?

☀ **Bonne journée**
Good day

☀ **Ca va très bien merci**
Very well thank you

☀ **Merci**
Thank you

☀ **Au revoir**
Goodbye