



# **A Report from the Analysis of the Alien Work Permit Report-2024**

## **Submitted To:**

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President Pro-Tempore

The Liberian Senate | Republic of Liberia

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## Table of Content

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>03</b>
<b>2. Legal Framework Governing Foreign Employment</b>	<b>03</b>
2.1. Work Permit Requirement	<b>03</b>
2.2. Priority for Liberian Nationals	<b>03</b>
2.3. Equal Treatment of Foreign Workers	<b>04</b>
<b>3. Work Permit Issuance Overview January 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>4. Summary of Issued Work Permits</b>	<b>05</b>
4.1. All Nationalities Issued Permits	<b>05</b>
4.2. Top Ten (10) Nationalities	<b>06</b>
4.3. Summary of Employers	<b>06</b>
4.4. Summary of Positions	<b>07</b>
<b>5. Analysis and Classification by Skill Level and Nationality Eligibility</b>	<b>09</b>
5.1. Jobs Reserved for Liberian Nationals	<b>09</b>
5.2. Jobs Open to All (Liberians and Non-Liberians)	<b>10</b>
<b>6. Analysis of Findings and Implications</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>7. Recommendations</b>	<b>11</b>
7.1 Establish a Joint Inter-Ministerial Taskforce with Strong Oversight:	<b>11</b>
7.2. Immediate Review and Revocation of Non-Compliant Permits:	<b>11</b>
7.3 Develop and Mandate a Comprehensive National Job Portal:	<b>12</b>
7.4 Institute Regular and Transparent Compliance Audits:	<b>12</b>
7.5 Intensify and Diversify Training and Capacity Building Initiatives:	<b>12</b>
7.6. Implement Public Awareness Campaigns and Employer Sensitisation:	<b>13</b>
7.7 Foster Stronger Collaboration with Educational and Training Institutions:	<b>13</b>
<b>8. Conclusion</b>	<b>14</b>

## 1. Introduction

This report is submitted to the Liberian Senate to provide an in-depth analysis of the issuance of work permits to foreign nationals in Liberia. It evaluates the current practices against the foundational principles and specific provisions of the Decent Work Act (DWA) of 2015, particularly Chapters 45.1 and 45.5, which underscore the paramount importance of prioritizing Liberian citizens for employment opportunities. This report aims to identify areas of non-compliance, assess the implications for the Liberian labor market, and propose actionable recommendations to foster a more equitable and sustainable employment landscape for our citizens.

## 2. Legal Framework Governing Foreign Employment

The legal framework governing the employment of foreign nationals in Liberia is enshrined in the Decent Work Act (DWA), which repealed and replaced previous labor laws. The relevant provisions are as follows:

### 2.1. Work Permit Requirement

Chapter 45.1 stipulates: ***"An employer shall not employ a foreign worker unless they possess a current work permit issued by the Ministry [i.e., the Ministry of Labor]."***

This fundamental requirement serves as the cornerstone for regulating foreign employment, enabling the Ministry to monitor the influx of foreign labor and ensure adherence to national labor standards. Employers are legally obligated to verify the validity of work permits before engaging foreign workers, demonstrating a commitment to due diligence and legal compliance.

### 2.2. Priority for Liberian Nationals

Chapter 45.1(c) states: ***"The Ministry shall not issue a permit to work in Liberia unless it is satisfied that there is no suitably qualified Liberian available to carry out the work required by the employer."***

This provision establishes the principle of Liberianization within the labor market. It mandates that the Ministry of Labor thoroughly assess the availability of qualified Liberian nationals for any given role before authorizing the employment of a foreign worker. This is intended to protect and promote local employment, preventing displacement and fostering the development of indigenous (home-grown, local/domestic) skills.

## 2.3. Equal Treatment of Foreign Workers

Chapter 45.5 affirms: *"A foreign worker resident in Liberia is entitled to enjoy all benefits of this Act, provided that the provisions of this Act shall not discriminate against Liberian workers."*

This provision ensures that foreign workers legally employed in Liberia receive the same rights and protections as Liberian workers. However, it also emphasizes that this must not compromise employment opportunities or working conditions for Liberian citizens. Maintaining this balance is crucial for fair labor practices and preventing discrimination against the local workforce.

## 3. Work Permit Issuance Overview January 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024

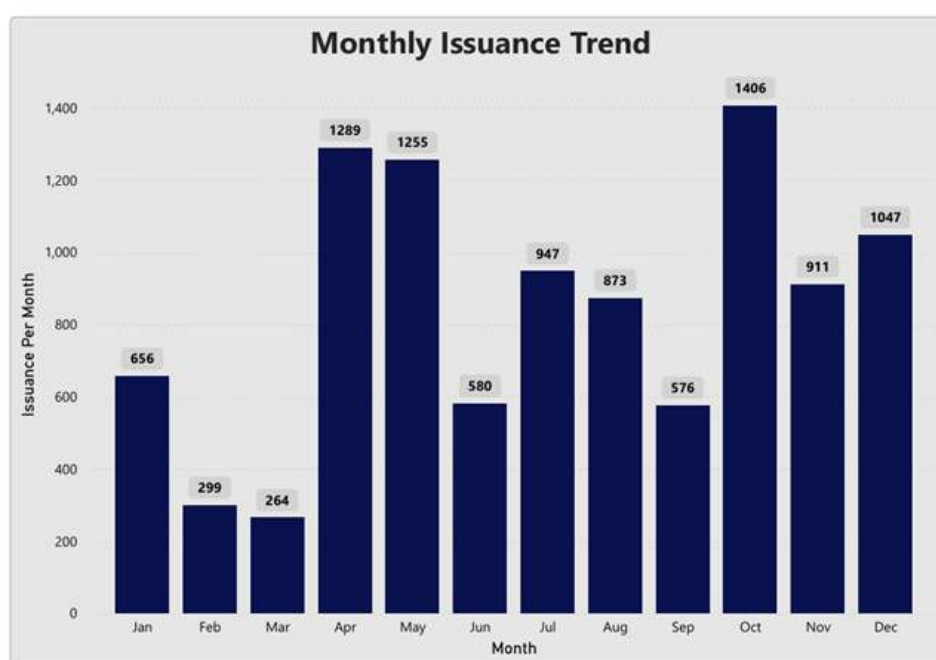


Figure 1: **Monthly Issuance Trend**

During the specified reporting period, a total of 10,103 work permits were issued to foreign nationals in Liberia, as shown in the monthly distribution above.

The work permits issued were in three (3) categories:

- **Regular Permits** – 8792 **(87.02%)**: These permits are typically issued for long-term employment in various sectors, subject to the Ministry's assessment of local availability.
- **ECOWAS Permits** – 438 **(4.34%)**: Issued to citizens of member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), these permits facilitate regional labor mobility under specific agreements.

- **GRATIS Permits** – 873 (**8.64%**): Often granted for humanitarian, non-profit, or specialised roles, primarily within Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or for individuals providing services to the Liberian government without direct remuneration from a private employer.

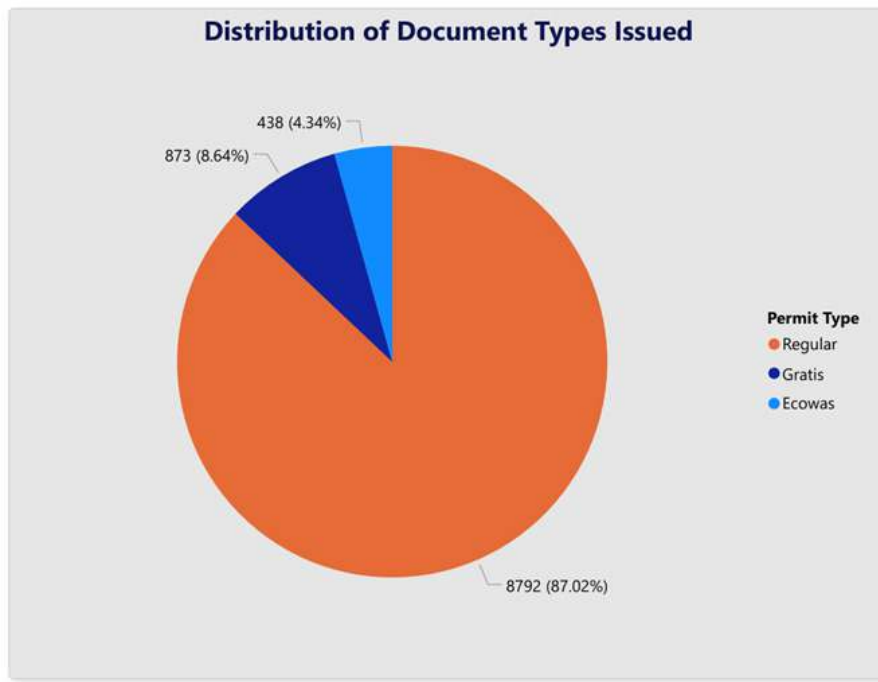


Figure 2: **Distribution of Document Types Issued**

## 4. Summary of Issued Work Permits

### 4.1. All Nationalities Issued Permits

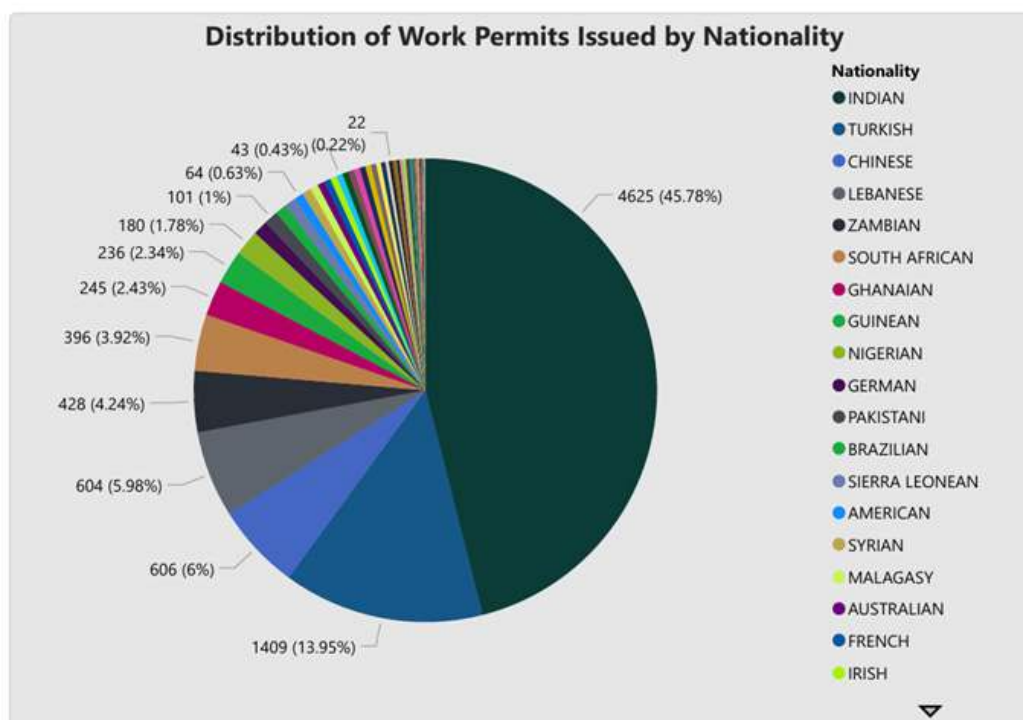


Figure 3: **Distribution of All Nationalities Issued Permits.**



As shown in the chart above, permits were issued to as many as 100 nationalities. Indians make up the highest proportion, 51.79%.

## 4.2. Top Ten (10) Nationalities

However, from a closer look, we can see the top **ten (10)** nationalities that make up the most work permits issued in 2024, as shown in the graph below.

Indians make up **51.79%** of the top ten nationalities, followed by Turks, Chinese, Lebanese, Zambians, and others.

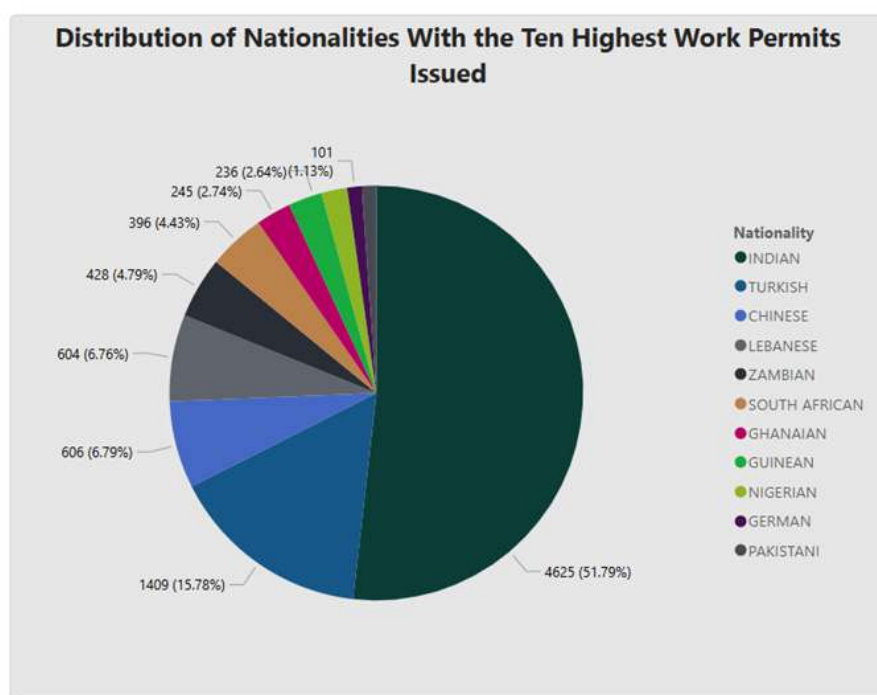


Figure 4: **Top Ten Nationalities Issued Permits**

## 4.3. Summary of Employers

As part of the requirements for obtaining a work permit in Liberia, foreigners must present a term of reference for the position they are seeking. . This assumes that the individual must have had a job offer.

Here, we examine the entities or employers of these individuals. Notably, the employment data were reported by 1,037 employers, which also includes individuals who are self-employed and in roles that can only be fulfilled by them, such as taxi drivers and shop owners.

<sup>1</sup>Ministry of Labor Official Website – Services (<https://mol.gov.lr/faq/>)

In the chart below, we illustrate the top ten (10) highest employers of these foreign employees:

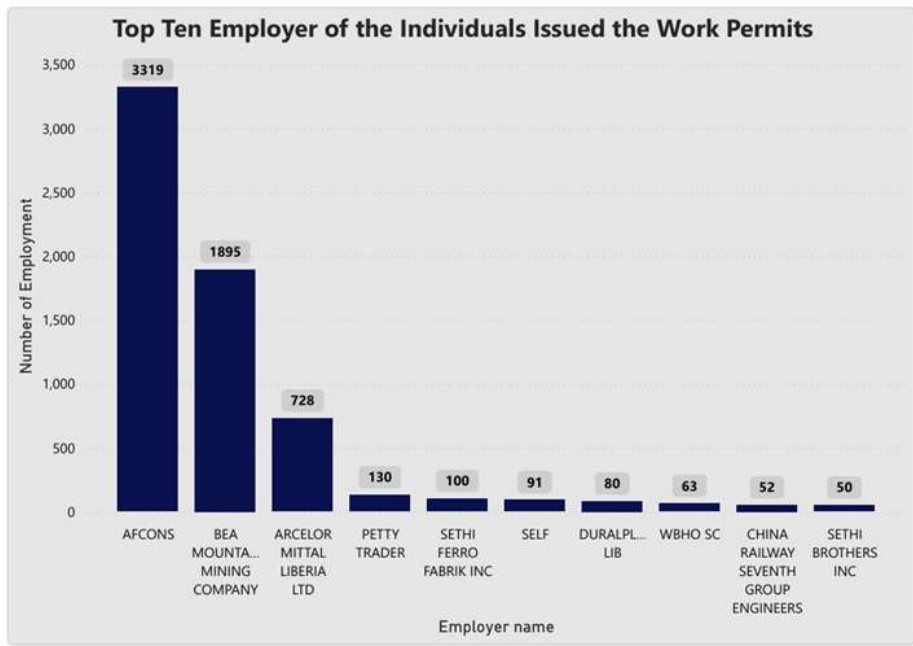


Figure 5: **Highest employers of foreign employees in 2024.**

As shown above, there are three major employers of these employees: **AFCONS (3319/10103)**, **BEA Mountain (1895/10103)**, and **Arcelor Mittal (728/10103)**.

#### 4.4. Summary of Positions

To adequately understand the implications of these issued permits, we dived deeper into the positions that these individuals occupy using these work permits.

In the chart below, we illustrate the top frequent positions (at least 50) occupied by these foreign employees across all employers.

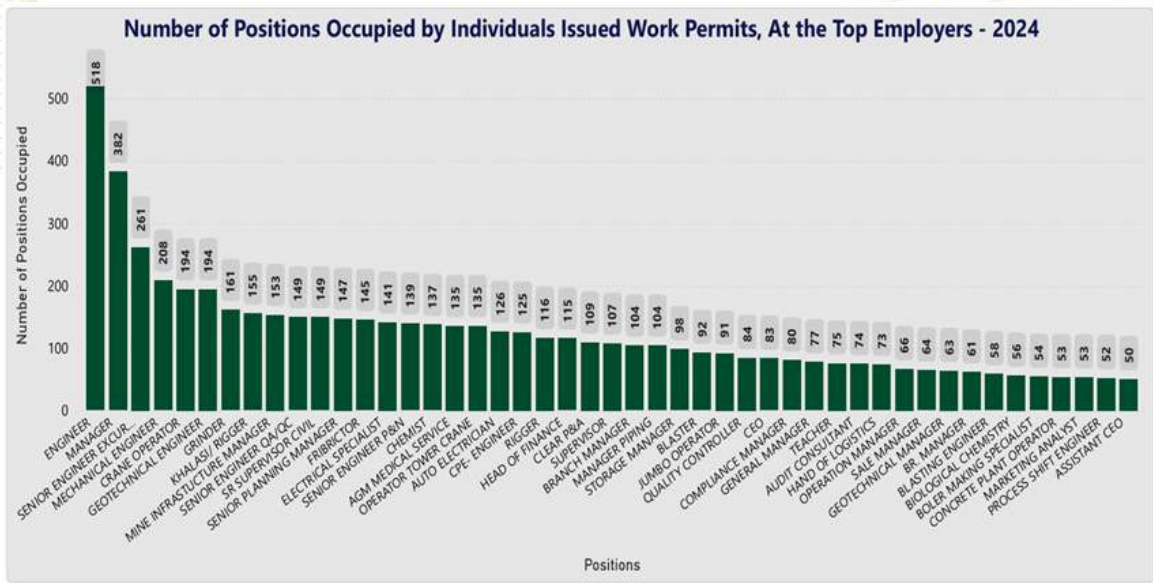


Figure 6: **Highest positions by foreign employees based on 2024 permits.**

From the graph above, for all positions that appear at least 50 times (47 positions) across all employments, there are no positions that can only be fulfilled by work permit recipients.

Furthermore, before issuing a work permit, the Ministry of Labor must have asserted that the position for which a permit is being sought:

- **No Liberian is qualified for it.**
- **Has been duly advertised.**

Therefore, in analyzing each of the positions for Liberians' eligibility, we have narrowed down the classification to a precise and straightforward question: **"Are Liberians qualified for this job?"**

Based on this question, we effectively categorized all positions for which work permits were issued into two categories: Eligible and Not Eligible.

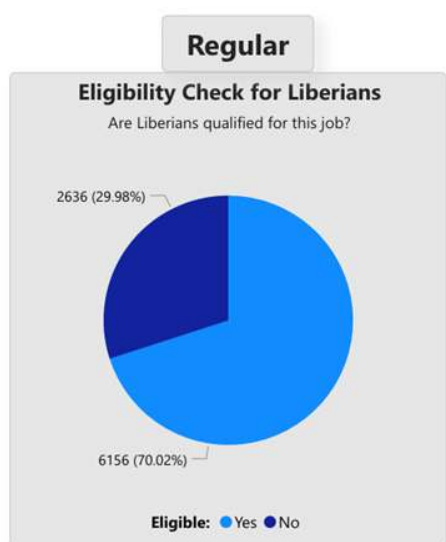
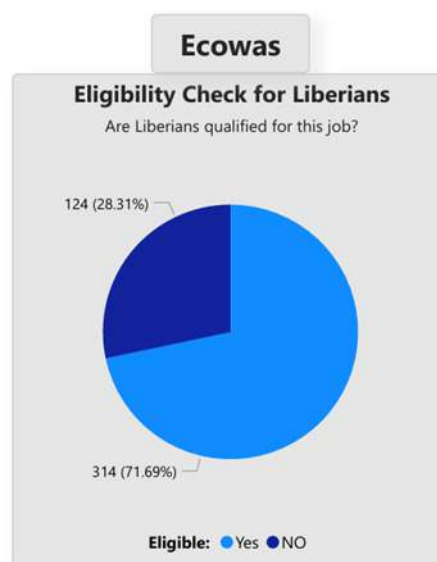


Figure 7: **Eligibility Check for Regulars.**

For the permits issued under the category of **Regular**, we determined that Liberians are eligible for 6,156 of the 8,792 positions.

Figure 8: **Eligibility Check for ECOWAS.**





Additionally, in the ECOWAS category, we determined that Liberians are eligible for 314 of the 438 positions.

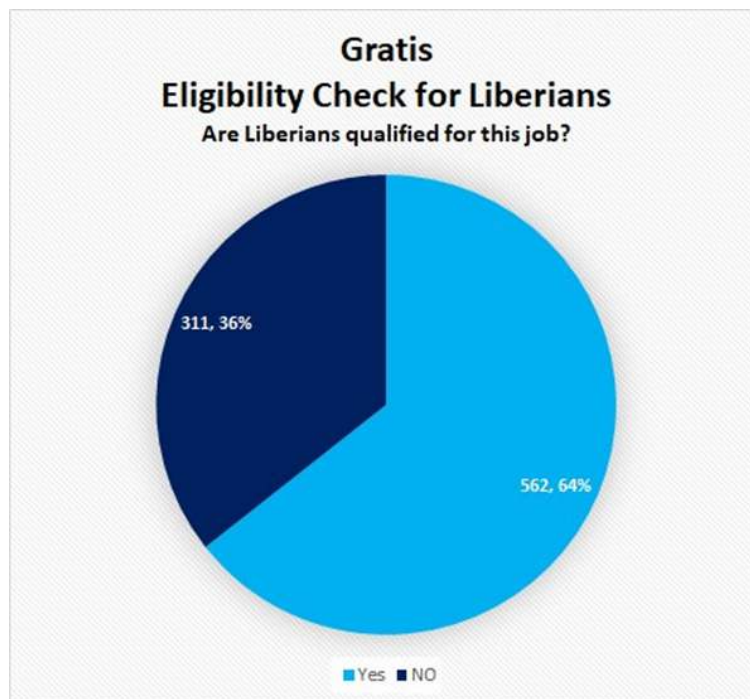


Figure 9: **Eligibility Check for GRATIS.**

Finally, in the GRATIS category, where NGOs fall, we established that all the positions are flexibly available to all, as they mostly require specialized expertise.

## 5. Analysis and Classification by Skill Level and Nationality Eligibility

To provide a clearer picture of employment patterns, the issued permits have been classified into two main categories based on the nature of the jobs and the eligibility criteria for Liberian and non-Liberian nationals:

### 5.1. Jobs Reserved for Liberian Nationals

**Definition:** These roles are designated exclusively for Liberian citizens across all skill levels, including Unskilled, Skilled, and Highly Skilled positions. The underlying principle is that the skills required for these roles are readily attainable through local education, vocational training, apprenticeships, and accumulated work experience within Liberia.

#### Permit Issuance in Reserved Jobs:

- Total: **7,032** permits
- Regular Permits: **6,156**
- ECOWAS Permits: **314**
- GRATIS Permits: **562**

**Analysis:** The fact that 7,032 work permits were issued to foreign nationals for roles explicitly designated as **"Reserved for Liberian Nationals"** is a matter of grave concern. This figure represents approximately 69.5% of all permits issued, indicating a significant potential deviation from the statutory requirement to prioritize Liberian labor. This raises fundamental questions about the efficacy of the **"no suitably qualified Liberian available"** assessment and the overall enforcement mechanisms.

## 5.2. Jobs Open to All (Liberians and Non-Liberians)

**Definition:** This category encompasses jobs that are open to both Liberian citizens and foreign nationals. These roles typically require highly specialized skill sets, unique expertise, or foundational leadership capabilities that may not be widely available within the Liberian labor market. This category also includes critical leadership positions such as Business Owners, Founders, Co-Founders, Shareholders, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), Country Directors, and Country Representatives.

### Permit Issuance in Open Jobs:

- Total: **3,072** permits
- Regular Permits: **2,636**
- ECOWAS Permits: **124**
- GRATIS Permits: **311** (*primarily for roles within NGOs, often requiring specialized expertise in development or humanitarian aid*).

**Analysis:** While it is expected that foreign nationals will fill some roles in this category due to genuine skill gaps or strategic leadership requirements, continuous monitoring is necessary to ensure that these positions are not used as a loophole to circumvent the employment of qualified Liberians. The proportion of GRATIS permits in this category for NGOs suggests a recognition of the specialized nature of some humanitarian work.

## 6. Analysis of Findings and Implications

The data presented in this report highlights a critical challenge to the spirit and letter of Liberia's labor laws:

**6.1. Undermining of Liberalization Policy:** The issuance of 7,032 work permits for jobs reserved for Liberians directly undermines the Ministry of Labor's statutory obligation under Chapter 45.1(c) of the Decent Work Act. This suggests that the process for determining the unavailability of suitably qualified Liberians may be insufficient or inadequately enforced.

**6.2. Increased Unemployment and Underemployment Among Liberians:** A sustained influx of foreign labor into sectors where Liberian skills are available is exacerbating unemployment and underemployment rates among the local

population. This not only impacts individual livelihoods but also constrains national economic development by limiting the full utilization of the domestic workforce.

**6.3. Disincentive for Local Skill Development:** If employers can easily secure work permits for foreign nationals for jobs that Liberians could perform, there is less incentive for businesses to invest in training and developing local talent. This creates a cycle of dependency on foreign labor rather than building a robust and self-reliant Liberian workforce.

**6.4. Potential for Wage Depression:** Although this report does not include a detailed wage analysis, the high reliance on foreign labor in specific sectors could potentially lead to wage stagnation or depression for Liberian workers in similar roles, thereby impacting their economic welfare.

**6.5. Erosion of Public Trust:** The continued perception that foreign nationals are occupying jobs that Liberians can do can erode public trust in government institutions responsible for regulating the labor market and protecting national interests.

## 7. Recommendations

To address these issues and ensure compliance with the Decent Work Act of 2015, the Liberian Senate should consider the following recommendations for urgent consideration and action:

### 7.1 Establish a Joint Task Force with Strong Oversight:

- The Task Force should have a clear mandate to conduct a comprehensive, independent review of all work permits issued, with a specific focus on the 7,037 "Jobs Reserved for Liberian Nationals." The Task Force should be empowered to investigate claims of non-compliance and recommend appropriate actions, including punitive measures where deliberate violations are found.

**Mechanism:** Implement a rigorous, standardized protocol for assessing the "no suitably qualified Liberian available" clause, requiring employers to provide verifiable evidence of extensive recruitment efforts within Liberia, including partnerships with vocational and technical training institutions and universities.

### 7.2 Immediate Review and Revocation of Non-Compliant Permits:

- Prioritize the immediate review of all existing work permits issued for unskilled and semi-skilled roles that Liberian nationals can demonstrably fill.

**Impact:** Where it is determined that a suitably qualified Liberian was available at



the time of permit issuance, or is now available, the corresponding foreign work permit should be revoked following due process. This will directly free up job opportunities for Liberian citizens and send a strong signal to employers about the government's commitment to enforcing labor laws.

### 7.3 Develop and Mandate a Comprehensive National Job Portal:

- Establish a robust, user-friendly, and mandatory national job portal, managed by the Ministry of Labor in collaboration with the Civil Service Agency and other relevant agencies.

**Requirement:** All employers seeking to hire foreign nationals must first post job openings on this portal for a minimum period of six to eight weeks. This mandatory pre-posting period will ensure maximum exposure for Liberian job seekers and allow the Ministry to monitor the availability of local talent. This portal should be created and managed by the Civil Service Agency and the Ministry of Labor.

**Integration:** The portal should be integrated with technical vocational training centers and university career services to facilitate a streamlined process for connecting qualified Liberian graduates and skilled workers with available positions.

### 7.4 Institute Regular and Transparent Compliance Audits:

- Implement a schedule of regular, unannounced audits of employers' records to ensure strict compliance with the Decent Work Act and all work permit regulations. These audits should not only verify permit validity but also assess the actual roles being performed by foreign workers.

**Financial Impact Assessment:** As part of these audits, evaluate the salaries and benefits of foreign workers to understand their economic implications. This data can inform the establishment of fair wage benchmarks for Liberian employees in similar positions, combating potential wage disparities.

**Public Reporting:** Publish aggregated, anonymized results of these audits periodically to promote transparency and accountability, while maintaining the confidentiality of sensitive business information.

### 7.5 Intensify and Diversify Training and Capacity Building Initiatives:

- Launch and aggressively promote targeted national training and vocational programs designed to upskill Liberians for high-demand, high-skilled positions currently held by foreign nationals. This should include partnerships with private



sector companies for on-the-job training and apprenticeships.

**Strategic Planning:** Conduct a comprehensive labor market needs assessment to identify critical skill gaps and align educational curricula and vocational training programs with industry demands, thereby proactively preparing Liberians for future employment opportunities.

**Funding:** Allocate sufficient government funding and actively seek international partnerships to support these crucial human capital development initiatives.

## **7.6. Implement Public Awareness Campaigns and Employer Sensitization:**

- Develop and launch comprehensive public awareness campaigns to educate Liberian citizens about their rights and the processes for reporting suspected work permit violations.

**Employer Engagement:** Conduct regular sensitization workshops and seminars for employers, clearly outlining their obligations under the Decent Work Act, the penalties for non-compliance, and the benefits of investing in the Liberian workforce. This should emphasize corporate social responsibility and national development goals.

## **7.7 Foster Stronger Collaboration with Educational and Training Institutions:**

- Formalize and strengthen partnerships among the Ministry of Labor, educational institutions (including universities and colleges), and vocational training centers.

**Outcome:** This collaboration should aim to:

***Align academic and vocational curricula with the evolving needs of the Liberian job market.***

***Facilitate internships and practical experiences for Liberian students.***

***Create a pipeline of readily available and qualified Liberian talent, thereby reducing the perceived need for foreign labor in specific sectors.***

## 8. Conclusion

The findings of this report underscore the urgent need for a more robust and proactive approach to managing foreign work permits in Liberia. While recognizing the value that specialized foreign expertise can bring to national development, the employment of foreign nationals must not come at the expense of Liberian citizens' right to work and thrive in their own country.

Scrupulously implementing these recommendations outlined in this report will ensure strict adherence to existing labor laws, create a more equitable and competitive labor market for Liberians, and promote sustainable economic growth by empowering the national workforce. This collective effort will not only secure current job opportunities for Liberians but also build a foundation for future generations, fostering a truly prosperous and self-reliant Liberia.



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