

Forum: General Assembly 4

Issue: The situation in Mayotte

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Introduction

Mayotte, a French overseas department located in the Indian Ocean between Madagascar and the coast of Mozambique, has been grappling with escalating humanitarian, social, and political challenges over the past decades, which intensified in recent years. The island has one of the highest population growth rates in France, fueled largely by immigration from the nearby Union of Comoros, which has put enormous pressure on its limited infrastructure and public services such as healthcare, education, and housing. The majority of the population lives in precarious conditions, with a significant proportion residing in illegal and makeshift settlements known as bangas, lacking access to clean water, sanitation, and electricity (RFI, 2024).

Definition of Key Terms

Mayotte

Unlike other Comorian islands, Mayotte chose to remain under French sovereignty following referendums in the 1970s and became an official overseas department on 31 March 2011. This status grants Mayotte the same legal and administrative framework as metropolitan France, although the island maintains some local customary laws and faces significant socio-economic challenges. Mayotte is also classified as an outermost region of the European Union, giving it a special status within EU law (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Bangas

Informal and precarious housing, often constructed from scrap materials, where a significant part of Mayotte's population lives. These makeshift dwellings are typically found in shanty towns or slums lacking basic services such as clean water, sanitation, and electricity. The existence of Bangas highlights the severe issues of housing insecurity and poverty on the island (RFI, 2024).

Operation Wuambushu

A French government security and law enforcement operation launched in 2023 aiming to combat illegal immigration, dismantle slums (Bangas), and improve public order on the island. It involves police crackdowns, evictions of unauthorized settlements, and efforts to formalize immigration flows. The operation is controversial due to social and human rights concerns among local communities (RFI, 2024).

Customary Law

Customary law refers to unwritten legal rules and norms derived from the traditions, customs, or long-standing practices of a local community. It is often applied at a community or regional level and may coexist with formal legal systems. These laws are recognized as binding by the communities that observe them and govern social and economic relations locally. However, customary law can vary widely and sometimes faces criticism when conflicting with modern human rights standards or national laws (RFI, 2024).

Overseas Department

An overseas department is a territorial division fully integrated into the French Republic with the same legal and administrative status as departments in metropolitan France. These departments form overseas regions with full application of French law, political representation in French national institutions, and are part of the European Union with citizens holding EU rights. Mayotte has been an overseas department of France since 2011.

Background Information

Historical and Political Context

Mayotte has a complex colonial and political history. Unlike other Comorian islands,

Mayotte chose to remain a French territory in the 1970s referendums. This distinction has led to ongoing sovereignty disputes with the Comoros Union, which claims Mayotte as its territory. The integration into France has brought legal and administrative challenges, especially given Mayotte's Muslim customary laws and relative underdevelopment compared to mainland France (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Mayotte's population as of 2024 is approximately 320,901, with an annual growth rate of about 3.6%. The population is young, with roughly half under the age of 18. A significant portion (around 36%) are immigrants mainly from the Union of Comoros, and nearly half the population holds foreign nationality. The official language is French, while Mahorian, a Swahili dialect, is widely spoken. Literacy rates remain low relative to mainland France (RFI, 2024).

Economically, Mayotte has a fragile economy dominated by a transitioning service sector, which accounts for roughly 80% of job offers. Public administration is the largest employer, followed by a growing private sector. Employment is low, with an employment rate around 32.2% and a high unemployment rate over 28%, especially among youth. There is a significant gender gap in employment rates. Informal employment is widespread, especially in primary sectors like agriculture (RFI, 2024).

Socially, the workforce includes many young people with limited education, contributing to high unemployment and underemployment. The population's cultural makeup includes a majority Comorian ethnic background, which is a mix of Bantu, Arab, and Malagasy origins, reflecting Mayotte's rich cultural diversity (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

Socioeconomic Conditions and Immigration

Mayotte is the poorest overseas department of France, with high poverty rates and a fragile economy reliant on labor from economic migrants, many undocumented. The influx of Comorian migrants has led to overcrowding in housing and public services, especially healthcare and education, generating local resentment and social unrest. Efforts to regulate immigration and improve living conditions have created tensions (RFI, 2024).

Impact of Cyclone Chido

Cyclone Chido devastated Mayotte in December 2024, destroying homes, infrastructure, and agriculture, and worsening pre-existing vulnerabilities. The cyclone

destroyed large parts of the largest shantytown, Kawéni, severely damaging precarious housing and limiting access to food, water, and electricity. It triggered health crises and the risk of epidemics, while psychological needs among the population increased. Recovery efforts were complicated by the island's poverty and lack of resources (Solidarites, 2025; ReliefWeb, 2025).

Government and International Response

The French government launched emergency relief and a reconstruction plan, including a €3 billion package announced by President Macron in April 2025 to rebuild infrastructure and address social issues. Operation Wuambushu targeted illegal immigration and gang-related crime, with considerable police presence and evictions of shantytowns. International and European partners, including Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Sweden, have offered humanitarian aid coordinated through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (France24, 2025; Solidarites, 2025).

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

France

As the administrative authority over Mayotte, France is the primary actor responsible for governance, security, and disaster response. The government initiated Operation Wuambushu to manage migration and security and proposed modifications to birthright citizenship policies to address social tensions. It also leads reconstruction and humanitarian efforts post-cyclone.

Comoros

The neighboring Union of Comoros claims sovereignty over Mayotte, which it views as an occupied territory. The Comoros government opposes the French administration and migration policies that affect Comorian migrants on the island.

European Union

Through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, member states including Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Sweden have provided emergency humanitarian aid to support Mayotte's recovery from Cyclone Chido, signifying European solidarity with France's overseas department.

Humanitarian Organisations

The French Red Cross, Doctors of the World, Fondation de France, and various NGOs

are active in providing emergency healthcare, food aid, shelter, and psychological support to affected populations, particularly the vulnerable displaced by the cyclone.

Viable Solutions

Addressing Humanitarian and Reconstruction Needs

A comprehensive, multi-year reconstruction strategy focusing on rebuilding homes, restoring infrastructure, and revitalizing agriculture is critical. It should prioritize resilient housing to withstand future cyclones and improve access to basic utilities like water and electricity. Increased funding, such as the €3 billion government plan, should be effectively managed to reach the most vulnerable populations.

Managing Immigration and Social Integration

Balanced immigration policies must be implemented that respect human rights while addressing local concerns. Regularisation programs, improved border controls, and integration initiatives, combined with outreach and education, could reduce tensions. Operation Wuambushu should be complemented by social support and economic development programs.

Enhancing Healthcare and Education

Restoring and enhancing healthcare infrastructure and education facilities, particularly in cyclone-damaged areas and informal settlements, is vital. Mobile clinics, health promotion, epidemic prevention, and psychological services should be expanded to meet ongoing needs.

International Cooperation and Aid Coordination

Mayotte's recovery requires continued international solidarity, with coordinated aid efforts between France, the EU, humanitarian organizations, and regional partners. Transparent coordination mechanisms can maximize the impact of aid and support long-term resilience against climate change and migration pressures.

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