



# Development pathways for the DRC to 2050

Poverty and inequality

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Last updated 15 May 2023

## Poverty and inequality

The DR Congo is among the world's poorest countries with a GDP per capita of US\$837 in 2019. In 2005, 94% of the Congolese were surviving on less than US\$1.90 a day, the international threshold of extreme poverty for low-income countries. It declined to about 77% in 2012. The latest estimation by the World Bank put the extreme poverty rate at 73% in 2018.[1]

Despite this modest decline, extreme poverty in the DR Congo is exceptionally high and above that of sub-Saharan Africa which is at about 41.1%.[2] With about 60 million people living in extreme poverty, DR Congo is the country with the highest number of poor people in sub-Saharan Africa after Nigeria which has about 83 million people in extreme poverty. According to the World Bank, DR Congo, India, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Bangladesh are home to 50% of the people that are extremely poor in the world.

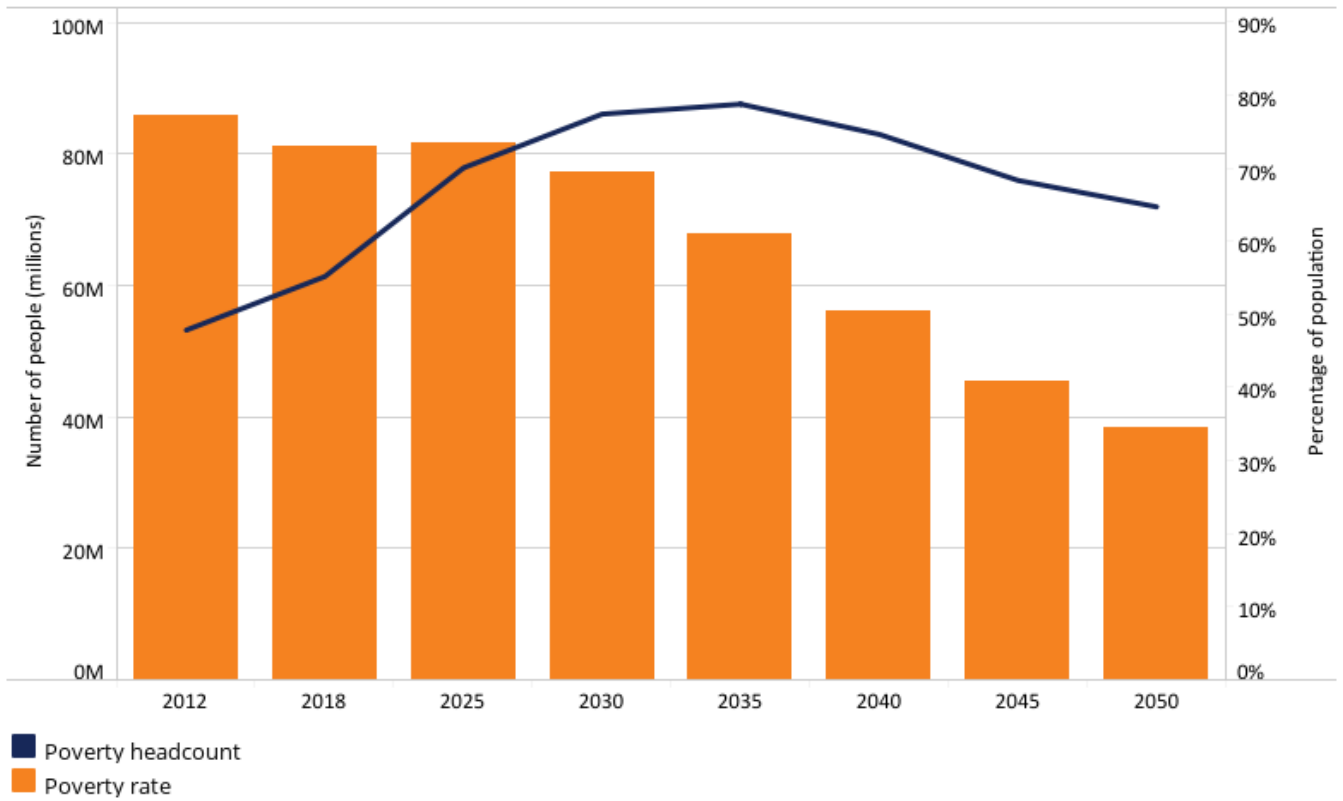
The poverty incidence varies across provinces. For instance, Equateur, Kivu and the former Orientale provinces experienced a significant decline in extreme poverty from 2005 to 2012, (-16% to -21%) while Maniema and the Kasai provinces recorded an increased incidence of poverty (+8.6% to +23.3%).[3]

Poverty seems to have become more an urban phenomenon in the country as the poverty rate has declined faster in rural areas than in urban areas. The latest data from the World Bank indicates that, in 2012, the national poverty rate was 64.9% in rural areas compared to 66.8% in urban areas (excluding Kinshasa). Between 2005 and 2012, the poverty rate in rural areas declined by 5.6 percentage points compared to 5.1 in urban areas (excluding Kinshasa). The poverty rate in Kinshasa is lower than the national average, although it has decreased slower than in rural and other urban areas.[4]

Poverty is not just a lack of money. Poverty is multidimensional, thus, measuring poverty by focusing only on the monetary aspect can be misleading. For instance, malnutrition, lack of clean water, health services, electricity or education are examples of poverty that go beyond the income considerations. The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)[5] which takes into account the multidimensional aspect of poverty shows that 64.5% of Congolese are multidimensionally poor with 36.8% of them in severe multidimensional poverty.[5]

In the Current Path forecast, about 69% of the population will live on less than US\$1.90 per day (extreme poverty) by 2030, and 34.5% in 2050 (Chart 6). This would imply that, on the current development trajectory, the DR Congo will not be able to achieve the headline goal of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) concerning the eradication of extreme poverty.

Chart 6: Trends in income poverty in DRC (< US\$1.90 per day)



Source: Forecast in IFs version 7.54; historical data from World Bank

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On the Current Path, about 86 million people will still be living in extreme poverty by 2030, and nearly 72 million by 2050. This is in line with the 2018 Goalkeepers report by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.[6] According to this report, by 2050, sub-Saharan Africa will be home to 86% of the people living in extreme poverty in the world, and this will be mainly driven by the large number of poor people in Nigeria and DR Congo. The report stated that by 2050, these two countries will be home to more than 40% of the world's poorest people.

The DR Congo had a relatively high level of income inequality (measured by the Gini index) at 42.1 in 2012 that might have contributed to the low elasticity of poverty to economic growth. The Current Path forecast in IFs puts the Gini index at 42.4 in 2019, below the average income inequality level for sub-Saharan Africa (43), and above the average for low-income countries globally (39.7) in the same year.

Overall, poverty is massive in the DR Congo regardless of the measures used (national or international standards). Factors such as armed conflicts, poor governance, high fertility rate, infrastructure shortage and low schooling, among others, are some of the root causes of the misery of millions of Congolese. Urgent action by all stakeholders is required to curb this alarming poverty trend.

## Endnotes

1. World Bank, Country profile, DR Congo, 2019.
2. World Bank, [Piecing together the poverty puzzle](#), *Poverty and shared prosperity*, 2018
3. World Bank, Democratic Republic of Congo, Systematic Country Diagnostic, Report No. 112733-ZR, 2018.
4. World Bank, Democratic Republic of Congo Urbanization Review: Productive and Inclusive Cities for an Emerging Congo, *Directions in Development: Environment and Sustainable Development*, Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018.
5. The MPI has three dimensions and 10 indicators: health (nutrition and child mortality); education (years of schooling and school attendance); and living standards (cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, assets).
6. B Gates and M French Gates, Goalkeepers, [The stories behind the data](#), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2018,

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Kouassi Yeboua (2024) Development pathways for the DRC to 2050. Published online at [futures.issafrica.org](https://futures.issafrica.org). Retrieved from <https://futures.issafrica.org/special-reports/country/drc/> [Online Resource] Updated 15 May 2023.

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Dr Kouassi Yeboua is a senior researcher in African Futures and Innovation programme in Pretoria. He recently served as lead author on ISS studies on the long-term development prospects of the DR Congo, the Horn of Africa, Nigeria and Malawi. Kouassi has published on various issues relating to foreign direct investment in Africa and is interested in development economics, macroeconomics, international economics, and economic modelling. He has a PhD in Economics.

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