DR Congo

DR Congo: Current Path

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Chart 2: Population structure in Current Path, 1990-2043

Source: IFs 8.20 initialising from UNPD population prospects estimate and WDI population data
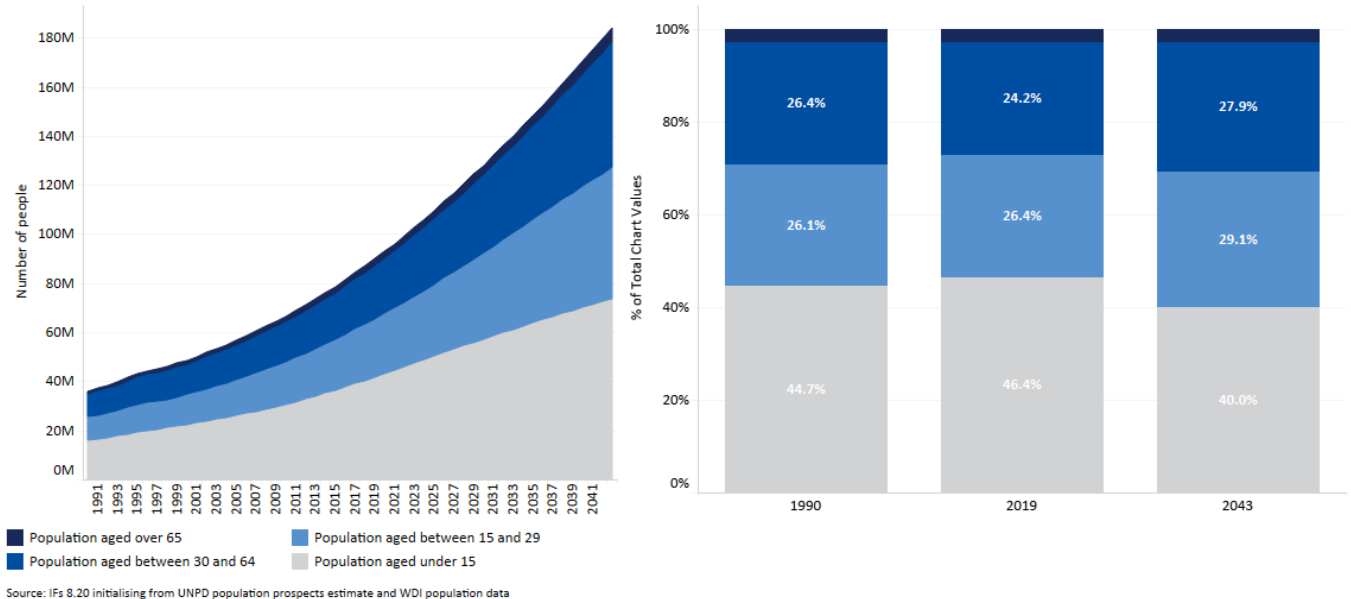
Chart 2 presents the population structure to 2043 in the Current Path forecast.

The DR Congo is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with about 215 distinct ethnic and linguistic groups. French, introduced by Belgian colonists, is the DR Congo's official language. However, most Congolese people are fluent in other languages such as Swahili, Lingala, Kikongo and Tshiluba. The majority of the population in the DR Congo is Christian, with nearly 70% of the population belonging to various denominations, followed by African religions, Islam and other beliefs.

With an estimated population of about 95.9 million in 2021, the DR Congo is the fourth most populated country in Africa and the 15th most in the world, after India, China, United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, **Nigeria**, Brazil, Bangladesh, Russia, Mexico, **Ethiopia**, Japan, Philippines and **Egypt**, respectively. The country has one of the fastest growing populations in Africa and globally, with an annual population increase of 3.3% in 2022. This is above the average population growth rate for low-income Africa (2.4%), Africa (2.5%) and the world (0.8%) in the same year.

The country's rapid population growth has a significant impact on the well-being of its people, exacerbating its high rate of malnutrition, poor education and healthcare services. With a growing population and a very high number of dependants (people younger than 15 years old and older than 65) versus working-age people (15–64 years old), social conditions like poverty and hunger will increase as the effects of rapid population growth hit the poorest first and GDP per capita is reduced. The state's negligible provision of medical care — along with poverty, violence and endemic disease—has led to low life expectancy at 62.9 years in 2022. This is below the averages for low-income African countries (64.8 years) and Africa (66.5 years). The DR Congo also has a very large youth bulge, with around 49% of its adult population aged 15 to 29 in 2022. By 2043, the proportion will only have declined to about 45%. Generally, a youth bulge above 40% is indicative of potential for instability.

The IFs Current Path forecast estimates that by 2043, the population of the DR Congo will increase by 60.6% over the next 20 years (2024–2043) to reach 164 million. The working population (age 15–64 years old) will account for about 60% of the population in 2043. This can be a potential source of growth provided the labour force is well-trained and sufficient jobs

are created. The population 15 years old and younger is expected to decline, constituting about 36.9% of the population in 2043, while the share of elderly people (65+ years) is projected to be 3.8%.

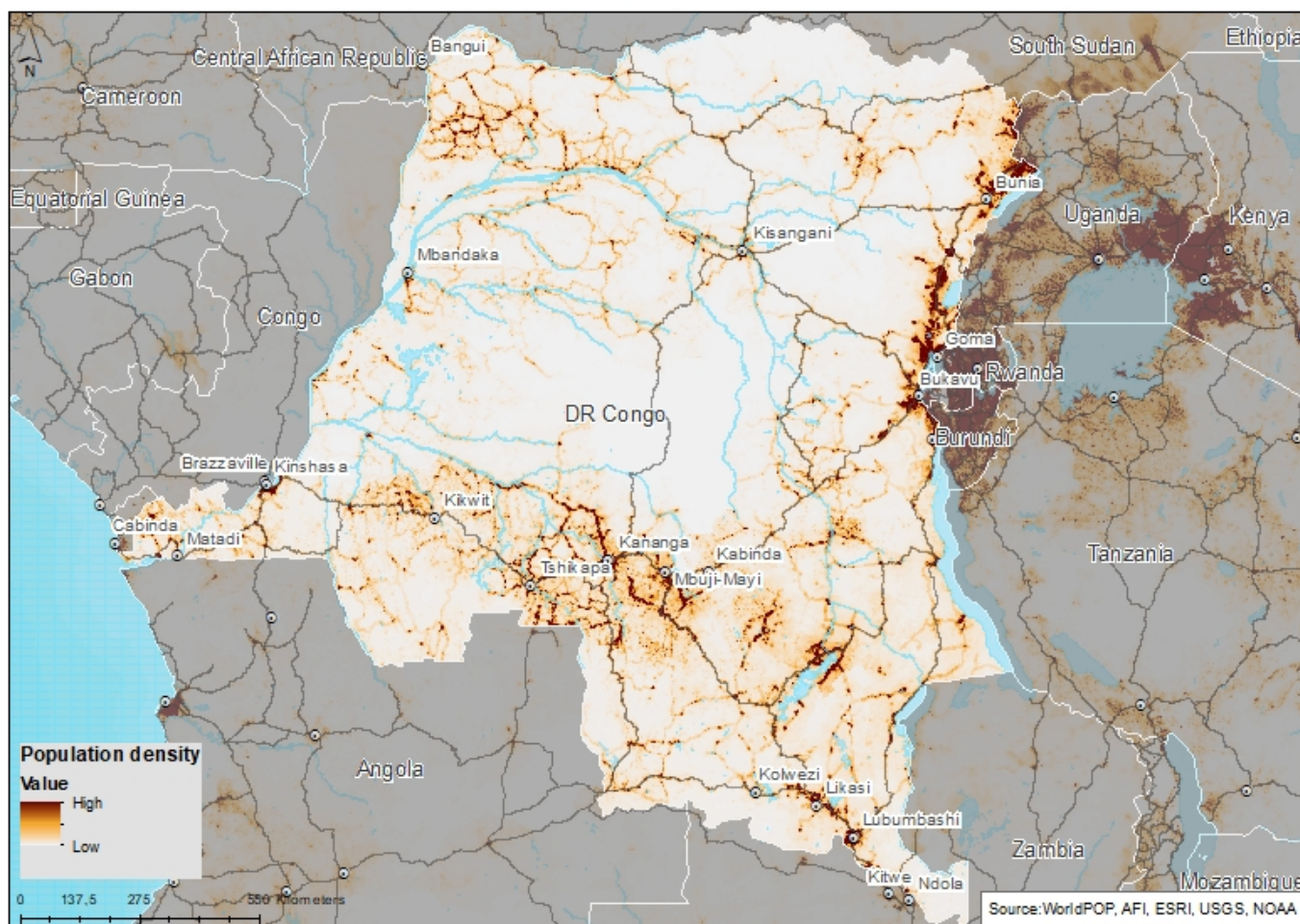**Chart 3: Population distribution map, 2022**

Chart 3 presents a population density map.

The population density of the DR Congo was 0.42 people per hectare in 2021, which is comparable to the averages of low-income African countries (0.44 people per hectare) and the continent (0.47 people per hectare). In the Current Path forecast, the country's population density is projected to remain below one inhabitant per hectare by 2043, which is on par with the projected averages for low-income African countries and the continent in the same year.

The country's population is concentrated on the plateaus, in the savannah near rivers and lakes. The north and the centre of the country, a domain of the jungle, are almost empty. The rural exodus, induced by factors such as avoiding conflict and its attendant risks as well as inadequate rural services, has swollen the population of the cities. The largest cities are Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Mbuji-Mayi, Kananga, Kisangani and Bukavu.

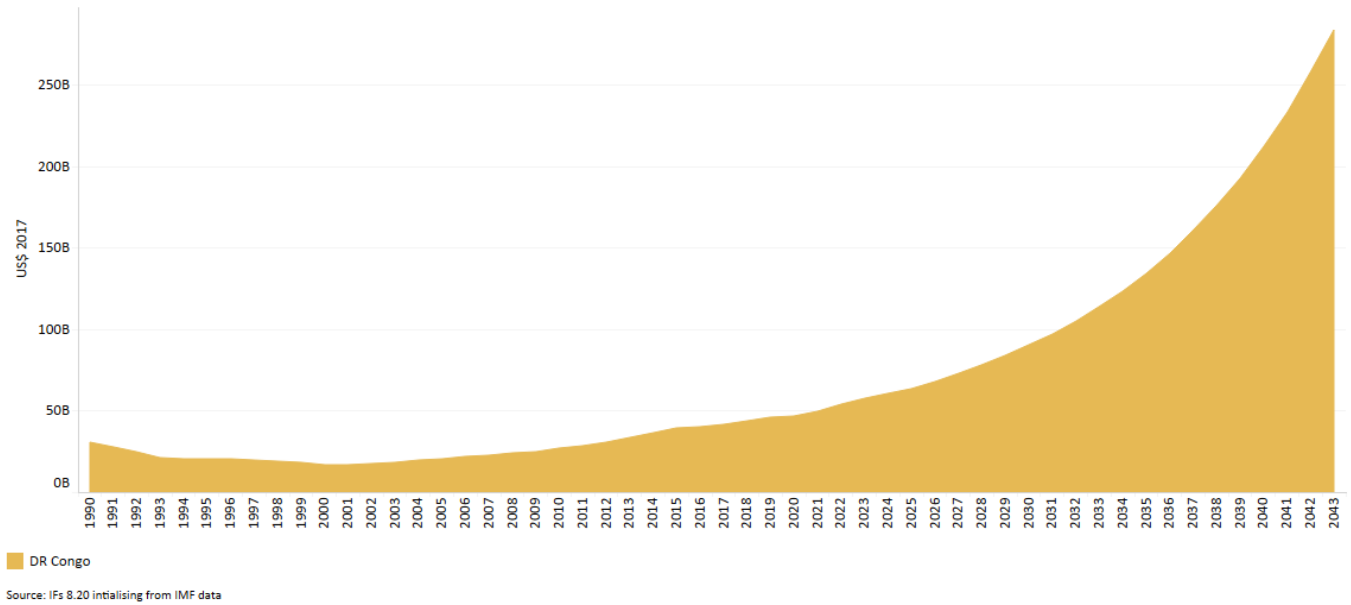Source: IFs 8.20 intialising from IMF data

Chart 4 presents the size of the DR Congo's economy from 1990 and includes a forecast to 2043 including the associated growth rate.

The Congolese economy was particularly hard hit by the series of violent conflicts in the 1990s. For instance, from 1990 to 2003, the size of the economy shrank by about 40%. The mining sector, which was the mainstay of the economy, collapsed.

Following the signing of an all-inclusive peace agreement in 2002, the transition government, led by Joseph Kabila, reengaged with international financial institutions leading to a resumption of support from the World Bank and the IMF. Several reforms and policies implemented under the auspices of the Bretton Woods Institutions, in conjunction with a rebound in post-war economic activity, served to control hyperinflation and revived economic growth. In 2002, after a recession that had lasted a decade, the country returned to growth.

Buoyed by rising commodity prices, the DR Congo recorded an average growth rate of 7.9% from 2010 to 2015, compared to an average of 4.3% for sub-Saharan Africa over the same period. However, the subsequent cyclical fluctuations in commodity prices slowed the average growth dynamics to 3.3% from 2016 to 2019 and revealed the country's high exposure to commodity price shocks. During the COVID-19 pandemic year (2020), the country recorded a growth rate of 1.7%—a 2.8 percentage point drop relative to 2019. Overall, the GDP in 2020 increased from US$44.9 billion in 2019 to US$45.7 billion. This was an increase of about US$784.8 million compared to an average increase of around US$1.9 billion between 2016 and 2019.

In 2021, the DR Congo's economy expanded by 6.2%, mainly driven by increased mining production and high global prices of commodity exports. The country is heavily dependent on commodity trade, particularly oils, copper, cobalt, tin, tungsten and tantalum. In the same year, the size of the economy was US$48.3 billion, up from US$29.7 billion in 1990. The hydrocarbon sector has dominated the economy. For the past 15 years, the share of the hydrocarbon sector has fluctuated around an average of 42% of GDP, the service sector about 33% of GDP, while agriculture, forestry and fishing represent 6% of GDP.

By 2043, the size of the DR Congo's economy is projected to grow to US$179.2 billion. The country's current extractive industry-driven growth model is fragile and holds little promise for improvements in livelihoods. Without a significant

structural transformation of the economy, economic growth will continue to be at the mercy of commodity price shocks. The underinvestment in education, healthcare and physical infrastructure, as well as weak governance institutions, have underscored the limits of extractive industry-driven growth and the importance of economic diversification in the DR Congo.[2] With the expected decline in demand for fossil fuels from the global transition to a lower carbon economy, the country's growth model may have a limited time frame.

Chart 5: Size of the informal economy, as per cent of GDP and per cent of total labour, 2019-2043
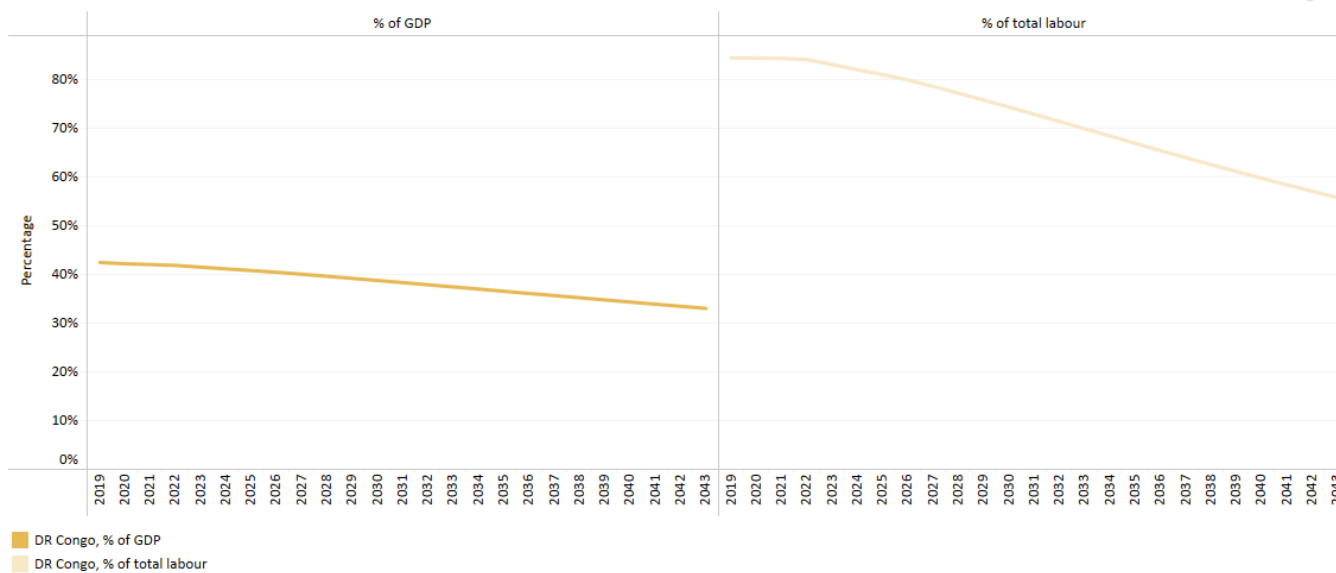
Source: IFs 8.20 initialising from Elgin and Oztunali (2008), and Schneider and Enste (2012) data

Chart 5 presents the size of the informal economy as a per cent of GDP and in absolute terms, as well as the per cent of total labour involved in the informal economy.

The informal sector is a crucial lifeline for many people in the DR Congo. According to the country's Ministry of Labour, employment is dominated by the informal sector, which accounts for about 88.6% of total employment—59.7% in the agriculture sector and 28.9% in the non-agriculture activities.

In 2021, the size of the informal economy represented about 42.6% of the country's GDP, and by 2043 it is projected to decline significantly to 34.5%, which is above the averages of 26.6% and 24.3% for low-income African countries and Africa, respectively. Although the informal economy provides a safety net for the large and growing working-age population in the country, it impedes economic growth and hinders improved economic policies. Reducing informality will allow more people to benefit from better wages and redistributive measures. Therefore, the DR Congo needs to reduce the size of its informal economy with the least friction possible by reducing the hurdles to registering a business, tackling corruption and improving access to finance.

Chart 6: GDP per capita in Current Path forecast, 1990-2043

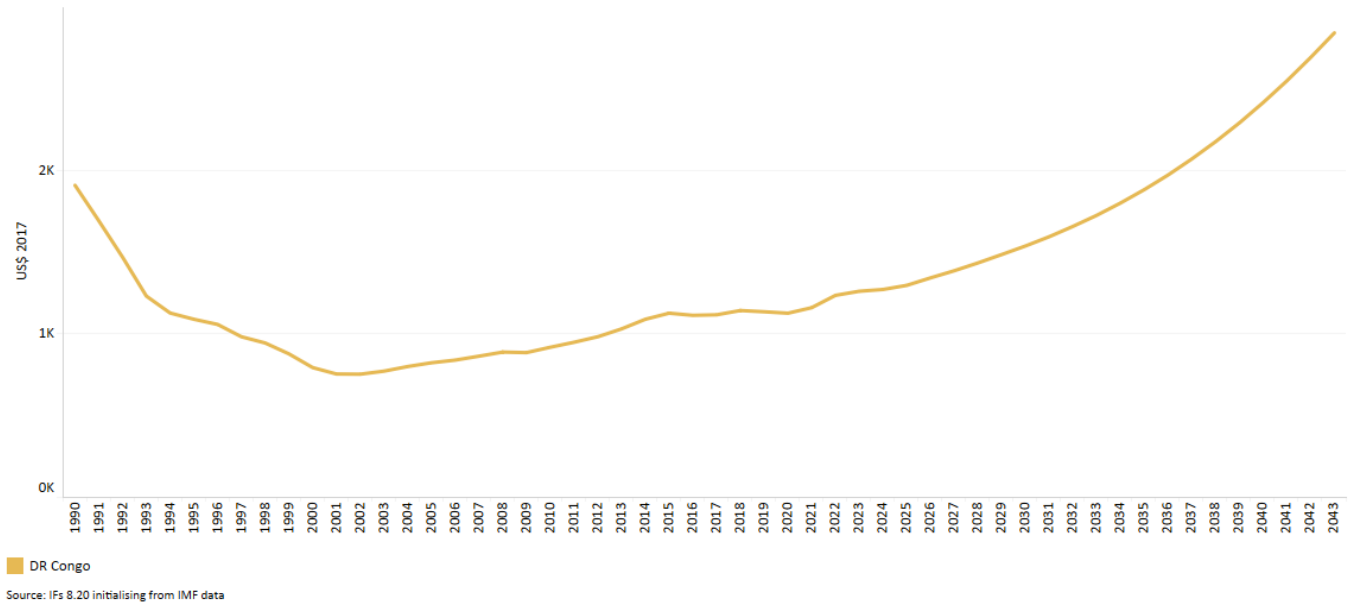Source: IFs 8.20 initialising from IMF data

Chart 6 presents average GDP per capita from 1990 and includes the Current Path forecast to 2043.

Although many of the charts in the sectoral scenarios also include GDP per capita, this overview is an essential point of departure for interpreting the general economic outlook of the DR Congo. The country failed to fulfil any of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and remains a low-income country with one of the lowest GDP per capita in the world. The country ranks 179th of 191 countries on the 2021/2022 Human Development Index.

The series of violent conflicts in the 1990s have had a knock-on effect on economic growth and income. For instance, over the period 1990 to 2003, the GDP per capita declined to nearly 29% of its level at independence in 1960. In 2021, GDP per capita in the DR Congo amounted to US$903.6, equivalent to about 48.3% of African low-income countries average in the same year and about 55.1% less compared to its level in 1960.

The country's GDP per capita is forecast to increase to US$1 971.8 in 2043, equivalent to 60.2% of low-income African countries' projected average in the same year.

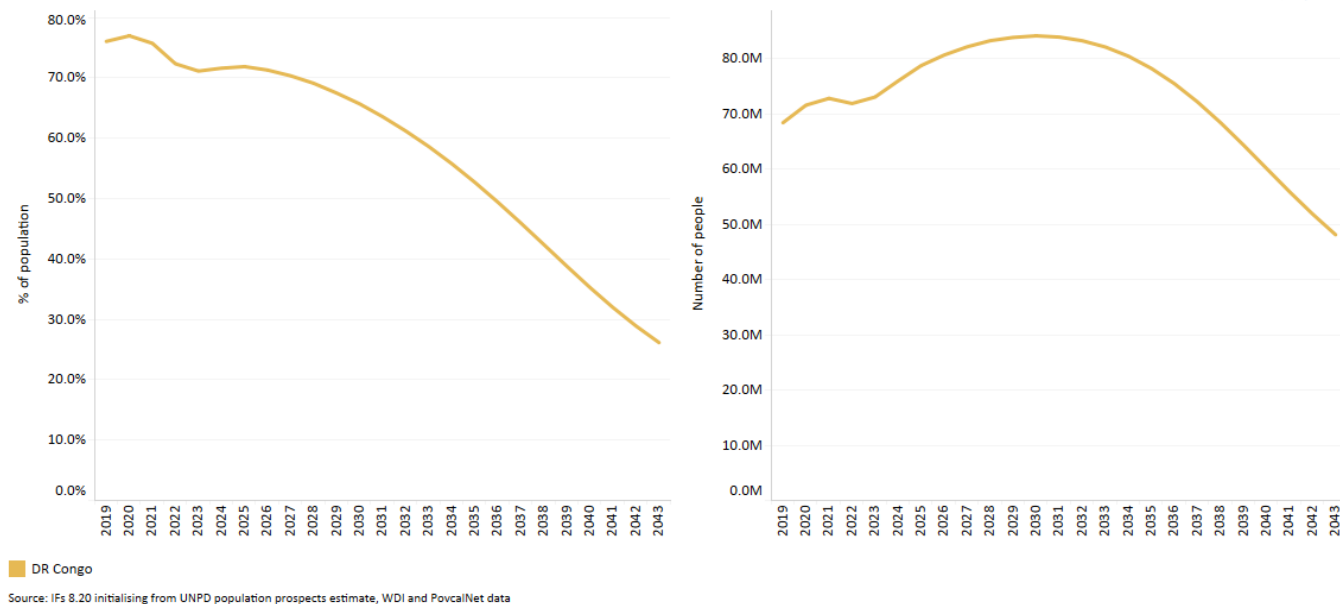Source: IFs 8.20 initialising from UNPD population prospects estimate, WDI and PovcalNet data

Chart 7 presents the number of people living in extreme poverty, also expressed as a per cent of the population.

In 2015, the World Bank adopted US$1.90 per person per day (in 2011 prices using GNI), also used to measure progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 of eradicating extreme poverty. In 2022, the World Bank updated the US$1.90 to US$2.15 in 2017 constant dollars. They are:

• US$3.20 for lower-middle-income countries, now US$65 in 2017 values.

• US$5.50 for upper-middle-income countries, now US$6.85 in 2017 values.

• US$22.70 for high-income countries. The Bank has not yet announced the new poverty line in 2017 US$ prices for high-income countries.

This website still uses US$1.90 and US$3.20.

The DR Congo is one of the top five countries in the world with the most people living in extreme poverty, living on less than US$1.90 (at 2011 prices) per day. In 2021, about 70.4% of the DR Congo's population, equivalent to 66.3 million people, lived in extreme poverty. Thus, approximately one out of four people who lived in extreme poverty in low-income African countries in 2021 lived in the DR Congo, and nearly one out of seven in sub-Saharan Africa lived in the DR Congo. The DR Congo has the second highest number of extremely poor people in Africa after Nigeria . Therefore, for the country to make significant progress towards the SDG target of reducing extreme poverty to less than 3% by 2030, a large reduction in poverty will be crucial. Ways for the DR Congo to reduce extreme poverty include educating children, ensuring basic healthcare, empowering woman and preventing child marriage.

In the Current Path forecast, in 2043, the DR Congo will be home to the highest number of extremely poor people in low-income Africa and remain the second highest in Africa, with 66.9 million people (about 40.8% of the population) living on the US$1.90 per day poverty line.

Factors such as armed conflicts, poor governance, high fertility rates, infrastructure shortages and low schooling

completion are some of the root causes of the poverty of millions of Congolese people. Policymakers in the DR Congo should make growth more inclusive by integrating the most vulnerable segments of the population, especially women, into the economy and enhancing human capital formation to meet the needs of the labour market and hence create more gainful jobs and accelerate poverty reduction.

National Development Plan

RÉPUBLIQUE DÉMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO

PLAN NATIONAL STRATÉGIQUE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT

2019-2023

The long-term development vision of the DR Congo is to build a diversified economy with inclusive growth to become a middle-income economy and overcome poverty. The overall aim of the National Development Plan (2019–2023)[1] is to overcome poverty.

The plan includes five pillars for improvement:

1. Human capital development, social and cultural development

2. Strengthening good governance, restoration of state authority and consolidation of peace

3. Consolidation of economic growth, diversification and transformation of the economy

4. Land use planning, reconstruction and modernisation of infrastructure

5. Environmental protection, fight against climate change, sustainable development and balance

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About the authors

Dr Blessing Chipanda joined the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme in January 2023. Before joining the ISS he worked as an assistant lecturer/ research assistant at the University of Pretoria, Department of Economics. He is particularly interested in tasks within the wider realm of international trade, development economics, public policy, monetary policy, and econometric modelling. Equally interested in economic and socio-economic activities that impact social welfare. Blessing has a PhD in economics from the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

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Scenarios and forecasting can help Africa identify and respond to opportunities and threats. The work of the African Futures & Innovation (AFI) program at the Institute for Security Studies aims to understand and address a widening gap between indices of wellbeing in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The AFI helps stakeholders understand likely future developments. Research findings and their policy implications are widely disseminated, often in collaboration with in-country partners. Forecasting tools inspire debate and provide insights into possible trajectories that inform planning, prioritisation and effective resource allocation. Africa's future depends on today's choices and actions by governments and their non-governmental and international partners. The AFI provides empirical data that informs short- and medium-term decisions with long-term implications. The AFI enhances Africa's capacity to prepare for and respond to future challenges. The program is headed by Dr Jakkie Cilliers.