Central African Republic

Central African Republic: Current Path

Enoch Randy Aikins

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Central African Republic: Current Path forecast

Chart 1: Political map of Central African Republic
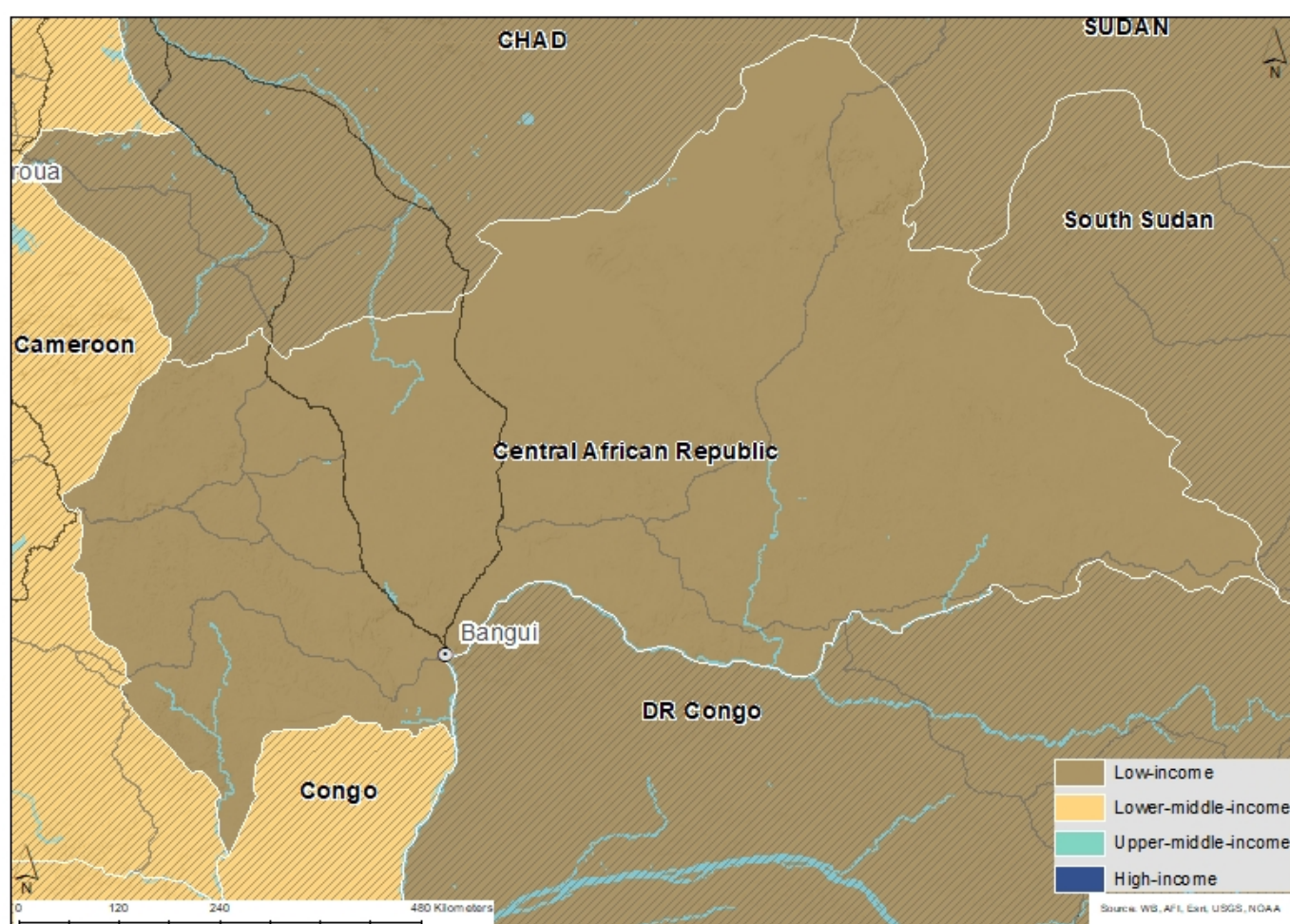
This page provides an overview of the key characteristics of the Central African Republic along its likely (or Current Path) development trajectory. The Current Path forecast from the International Futures forecasting (IFs) platform is a dynamic scenario that imitates the continuation of current policies and environmental conditions. The Current Path is therefore in congruence with historical patterns and produces a series of dynamic forecasts endogenised in relationships across crucial global systems. We use 2019 as a standard reference year and the forecasts generally extend to 2043 to coincide with the end of the third ten-year implementation plan of the African Union's Agenda 2063 long-term development vision.

The Central African Republic is a landlocked country in Central Africa. It borders Chad to the north, Sudan to the

north-east, South Sudan to the south-east, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the south, the Republic of the Congo to the south-west, and Cameroon to the west.

The Central African Republic covers a land area of approximately 620 000 km2. As of 2018, the country had an estimated population of around 4.8 million people. Most of the Central African Republic consists of Sudano-Guinean savannas, but the country also has a Sahelo-Sudanian zone in the north and an equatorial forest zone in the south. Two-thirds of the country lies within the Ubangi River basin that flows into the Congo. The other third is located in the basin of the Chari which flows into Lake Chad.

The country's current borders were drawn by France during colonial times. The Central African Republic was a French colony from the late 19th century and only gained independence in 1960. Since then, the country has been ruled by a series of autocratic leaders. The first multiparty democratic elections took place in 1993. Ange-Félix Patassé became president, but was later removed by General François Bozizé in the 2003 coup. The Central African Republic Bush War began in 2004 and, despite several attempts to implement peace treaties (in 2007 and in 2011), civil war resumed in 2012.

The Central African Republic is a resource-rich country with significant mineral deposits and other resources, such as uranium reserves, crude oil, gold, diamonds, cobalt, lumber, and hydropower. It also has significant quantities of arable land. Regardless, as of 2019, the country ranks last in the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI).

The Central African Republic is a member of the United Nations, the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie and the Non-Aligned Movement.

The country is divided into 16 administrative prefectures which are divided into 71 sub-prefectures. It is ethnically very diverse with multiple languages being spoken. The largest ethnic groups are the Baggara Arabs, Baka, Banda, Bayaka, Fula, Gbaya, Kara, Kresh, Mbaka, Mandja, Ngbandi, Sara, Vidiri, Wodaabe, Yakoma, Yulu and Zande.
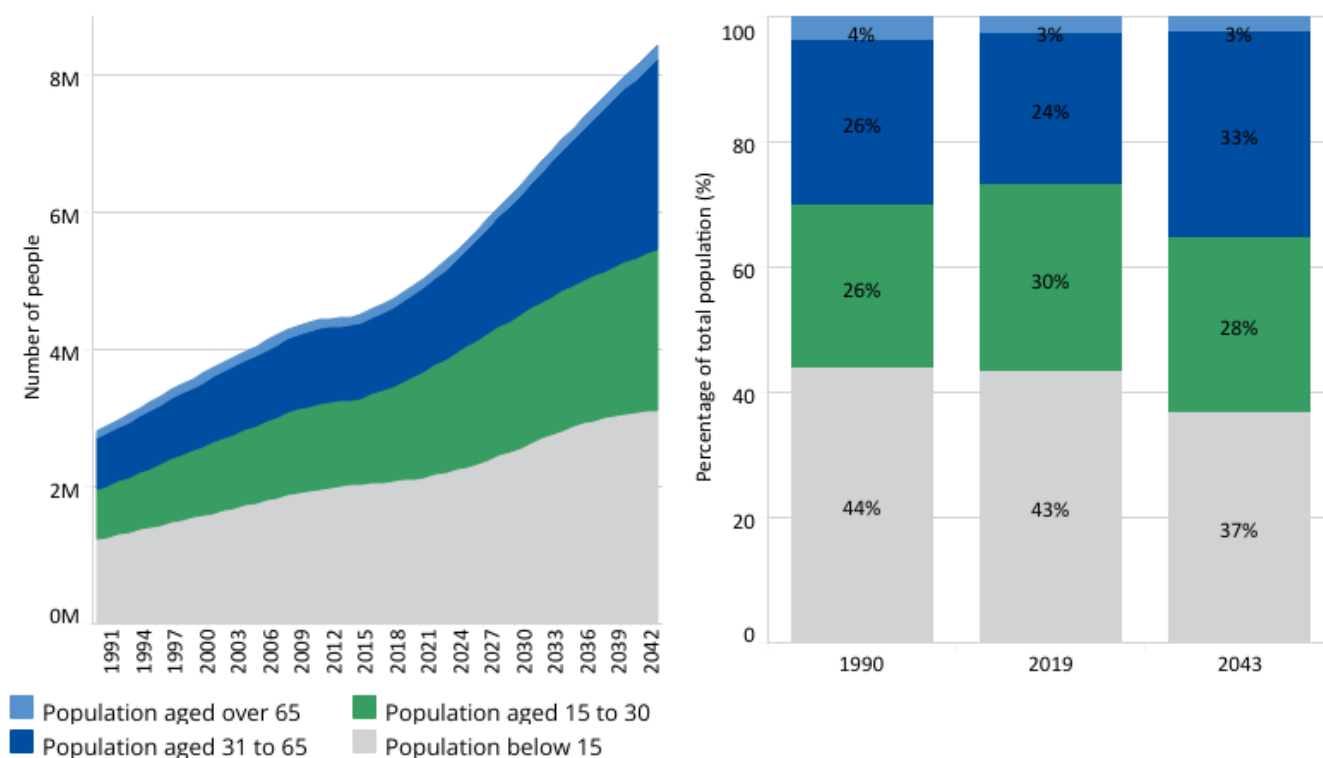
Chart 2: Population structure in CP, 1990–2043
By cohort and % of population

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Legend:
- Population aged over 65
- Population aged 31 to 65
- Population aged 15 to 30
- Population below 15

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Population Division Population Prospects estimate and World Development Indicators population data
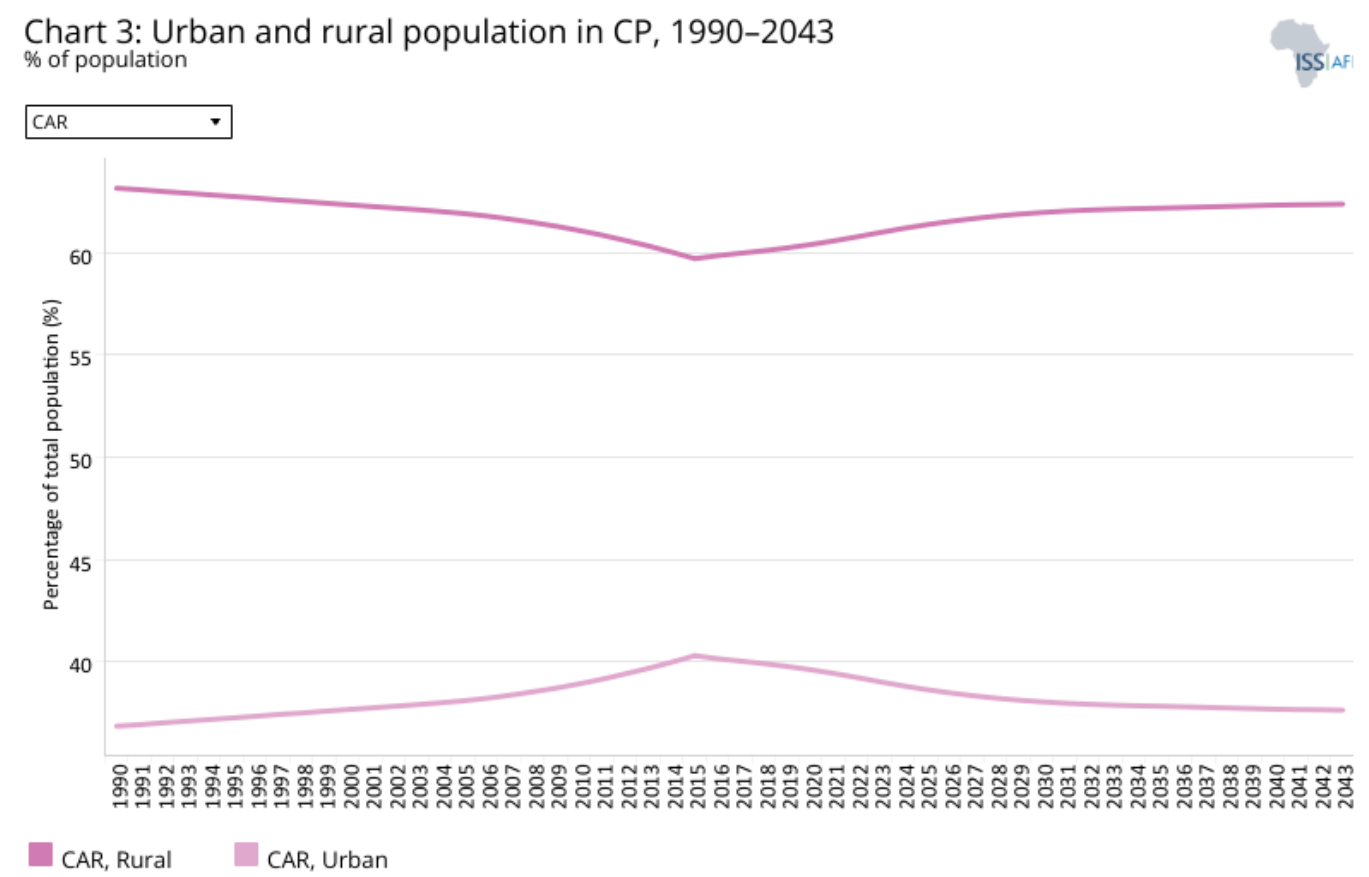
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The Central African Republic has a young and fast-growing population. Coming from a baseline of about 2.8 million people in 1990, by 2019 its population had increased to 4.7 million people — an increase of more than 70%. Over the coming two decades, the country's population is expected to increase by another 75%, reaching 8.4 million people in 2043. In 2019, the average yearly population growth rate stood at 2.1%, which is rather low compared to its low-income peer economies on the continent. In fact, the Central African Republic had the third lowest population growth rate in that group in 2019.

The Central African Republic's population is young with a youth bulge of 52.7% in 2019. The country's median age is 17.6 which is in line with the average median age of 17.9 years for the group of Africa's low-income economies. In 2019, 43.4% of it was younger than 15 years old. The youthful population can be a powerful source for economic growth in the Central African Republic if it is educated, trained and adequate employment opportunities are created. However, it can also worsen the already existing instability in the country, especially when the youth are unemployed, idle or unskilled.

On the Current Path, the Central African Republic's demographic structure is expected to change only slowly. Total fertility stood at 4.7 births per woman in 2019, slightly below the average of 4.96 for its low-income peer group. By 2043, the country's fertility rate is expected to drop to 3.2 births per woman. As a consequence, the median age is projected to increase to 21.2 years, the seventh highest out of 23 African low-income economies. Also, the share of the working-age population will increase from 54% in 2019 to 58% in 2043 on the Current Path, although its aged population remains static at 3% over the forecast period.

By 2043, the country's working-age population is expected to account for about 60.6% of the population compared to 54% in 2019. Indeed, the ratio of people of working age relative to the dependent population is improving but not fast enough. On the Current Path, the Central African Republic is expected to reach the peak of its demographic 'sweet spot' only from 2063 (from 1.17 in 2019 to 2.1 in 2063), more or less in line with the average of its low-income peer group and at the global bottom.

Chart 3: Urban and rural population in CP, 1990–2043
% of population

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN World Urbanization Prospects estimate

The Central African Republic is predominantly rural although less so than many of its low-income peer economies. In 2019, 60% of its population lived in rural areas as opposed to the 63.2% in 1990, signifying slower urbanisation. The country is above the average for Africa's low-income countries with a rural–urban split of 69% versus 31% in 2019. On the Current Path, the Central African Republic's rate of urbanisation will increase to 37.6% by 2043 slightly below the average of 40.7% for low-income countries in Africa. The slow urbanisation in the country can be attributed to the recurring cycle of violence and instability in the country that has so far displaced about 630 834 people with over 600 000 people fleeing to neighbouring countries as refugees.

Chart 4: Population density map for 2019
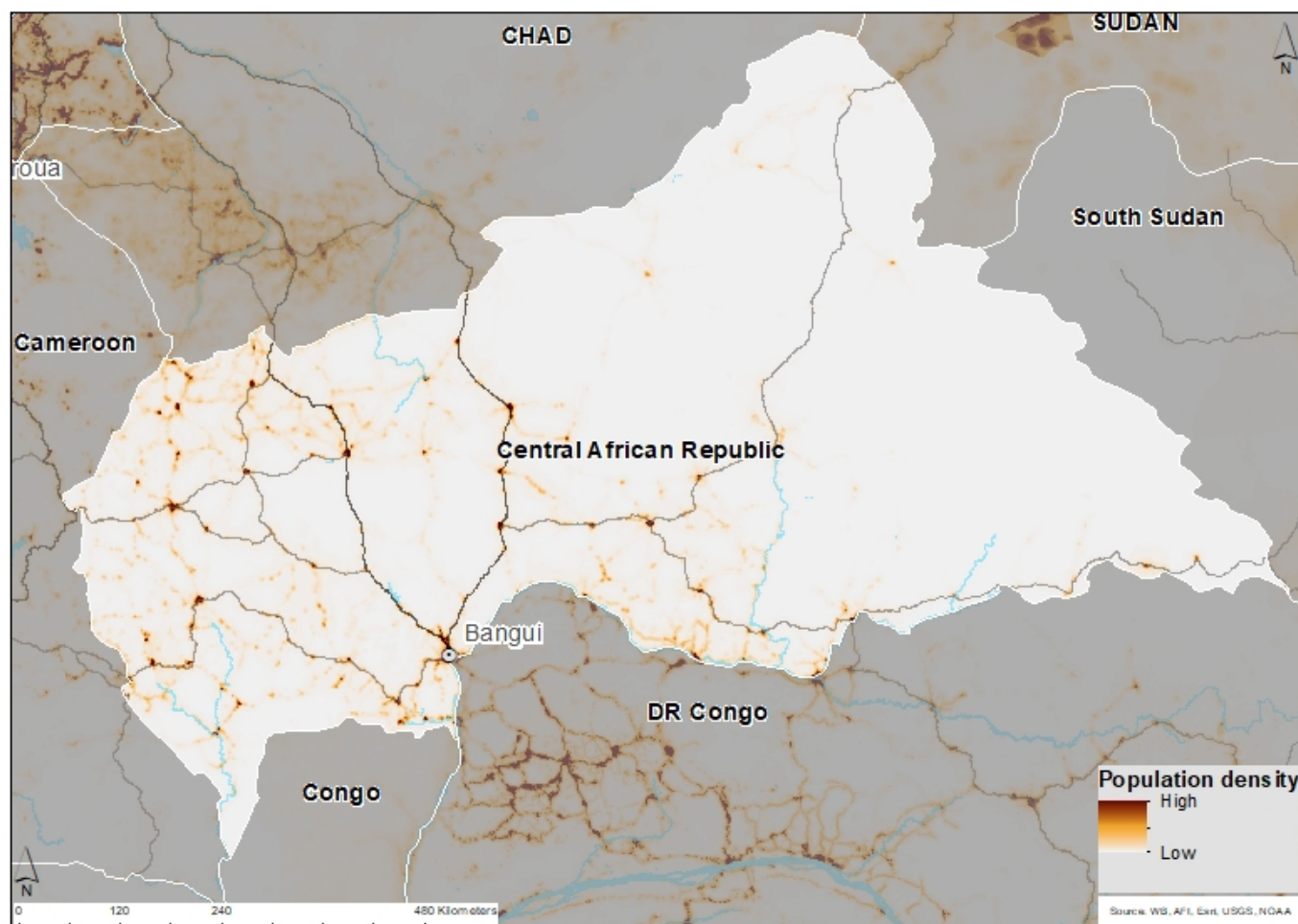
Population density of 0.77 people per hectare in the Central African Republic was only higher than Mauritania, Botswana, Libya and Namibia in Africa in 2019. The majority of the population of 4.8 million people lives in the country's rural areas, with the most important agricultural areas being Bossangoa and Bambari. Bangui, Berbérati, Bangassou and Bossangoa are the most densely populated urban centres. The capital city, Bangui, is situated on the southern border. Bimo and Berbérati are the second and third largest towns, respectively.

Chart 5: GDP in CP, 1990–2043
Market exchange rates
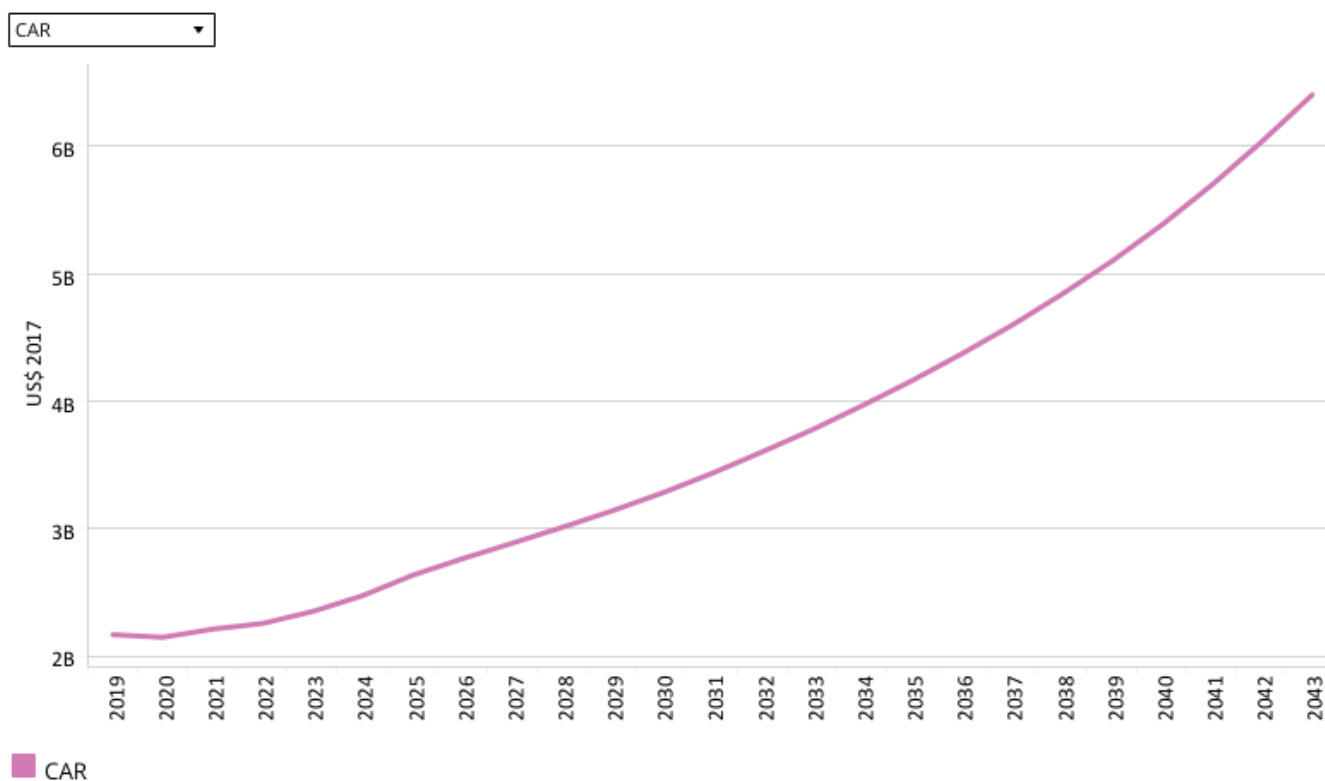
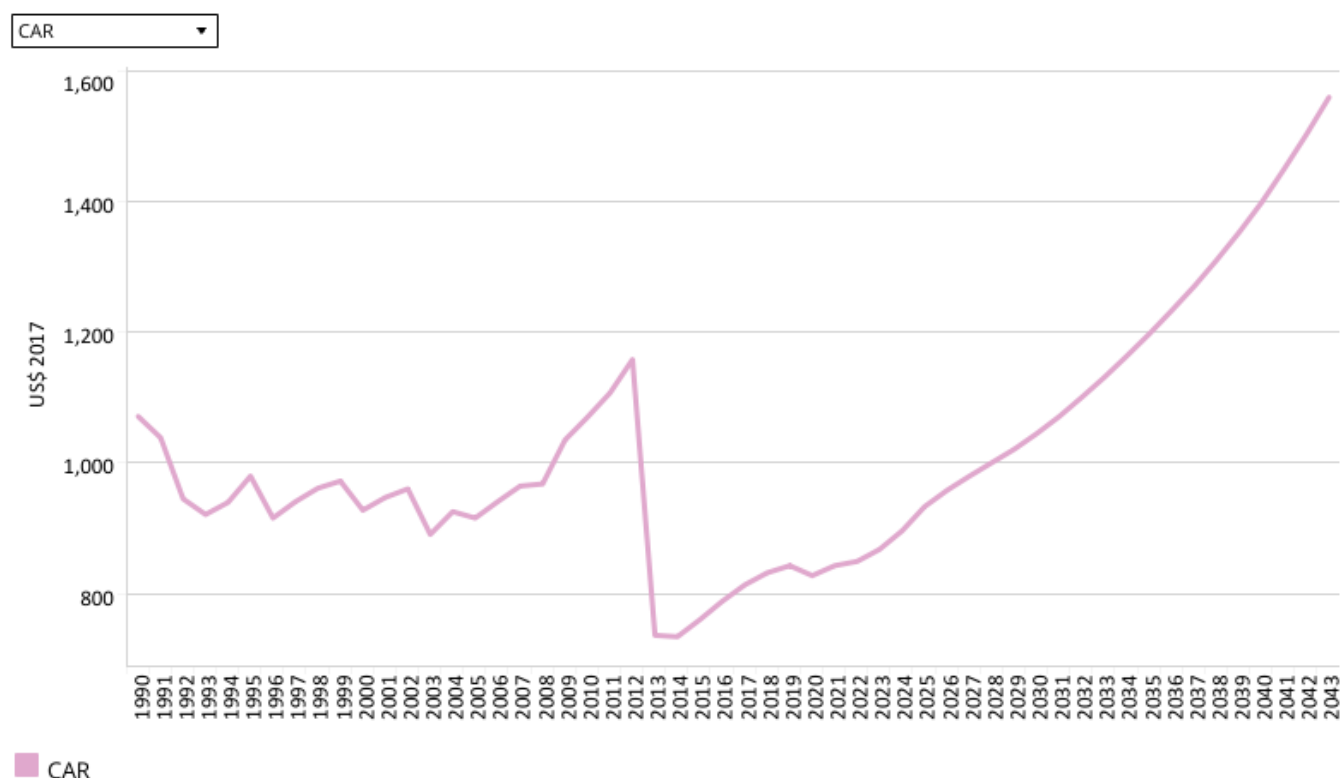Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook database

The Central African Republic is one of the smallest economies in Africa. Economic growth has fluctuated in the past due to the recurring conflict. The country's economy is primarily based on subsistence farming.

In 2019, the Central African Republic's GDP stood at US$2.2 billion, and the country ranks 21st out of 23 African low-income economies, only bigger than Sudan and Ethiopia. On the Current Path, the Central African Republic's GDP is forecast to be US$6.4 billion in 2043, almost three times as large as in 2019. In other words, the economy is expected to expand, but this expansion will be insufficient to allow for significant progress in human development.

Chart 6: GDP per capita in CP, 1990–2043
Purchasing power parity

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Population Division World Population Prospects and World Development Indicators data

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 Central African Republic.

In 2019, at a value of US$843, the Central African Republic's GDP per capita ranked second to last out of 23 African low-income economies. Only Burundi in East Africa had a lower GDP per capita. On the Current Path, the Central African Republic's per capita income is expected to increase to US$1 561 by 2043, remaining in 22nd place within its peer group. The average GDP per capita of its peer group is expected to reach USD$3 790 in 2043, 2.5 times as high.

Chart 7: Informal sector value in CP, 2015–2043
% of GDP
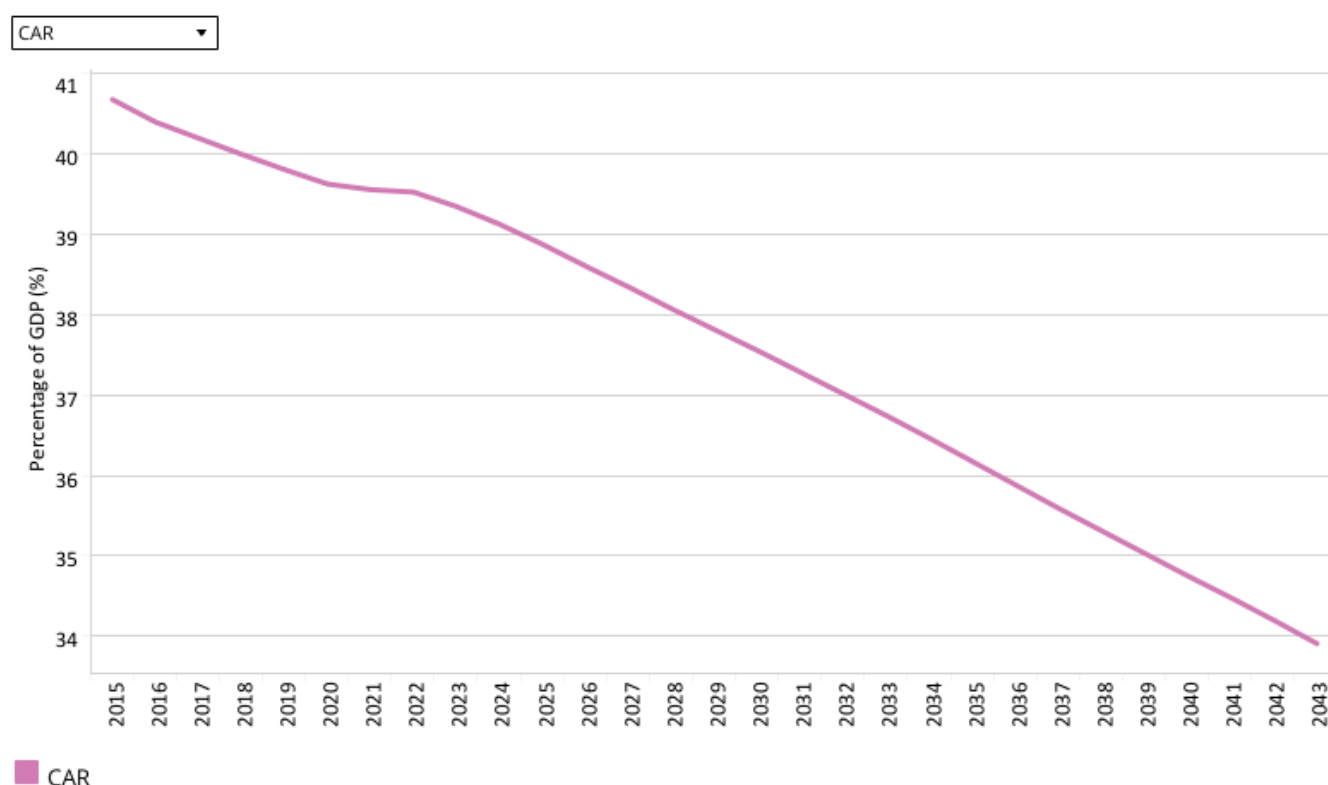
Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Economic Commission for Europe [2008]; Elgin and Oztunali [2012]; Schneider and Enste [2012]
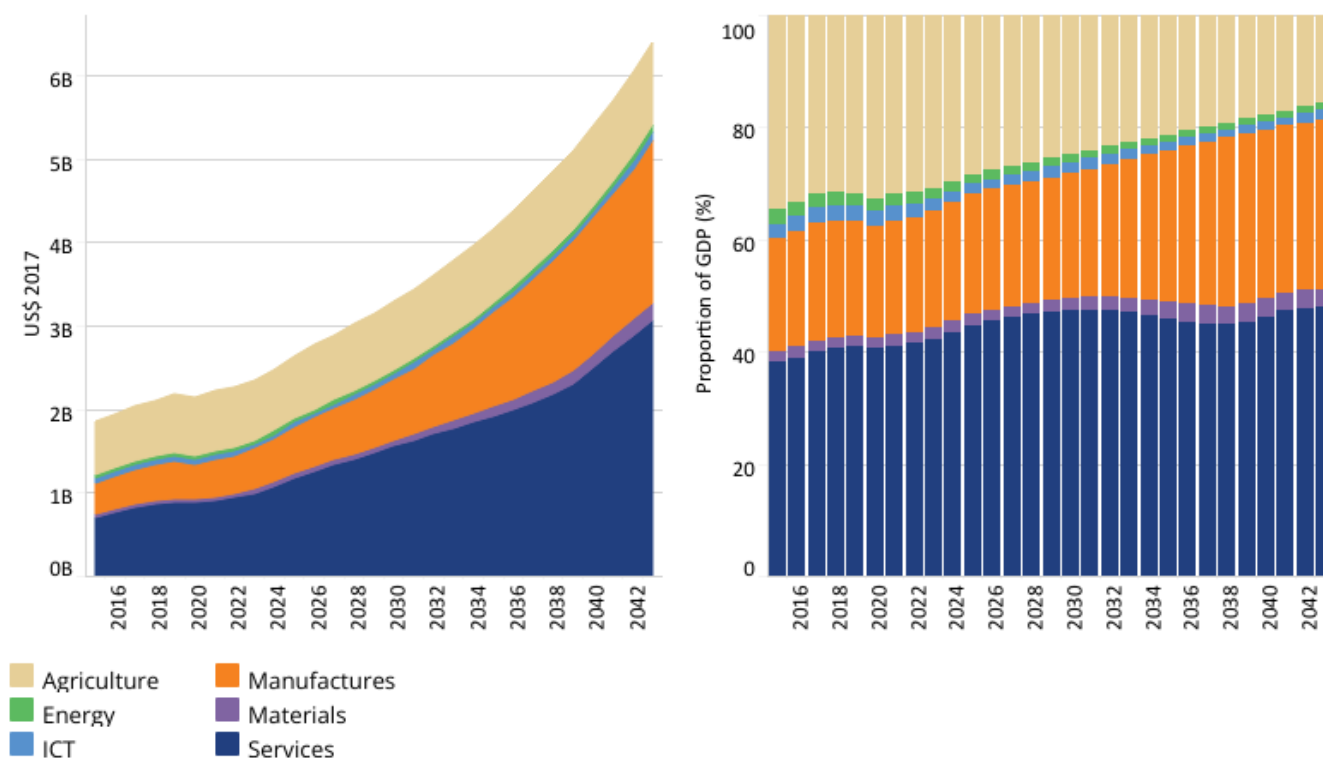
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In 2019, the Central African Republic's informal sector accounted for approximately 40% of GDP compared to an average share of 30.1% in Africa's low-income economies. By 2043, the country's informal sector is forecast to account for about 34% of GDP, likely reflecting improvements in overall state capacity. Informal labour accounted for 90% of total labour force in the country and was projected to decline to 72.5% by 2043. Therefore, it is not surprising that the level of informality reflected in the size of the economy declines within the same period.

Chart 8: Value added by sector in CP, 2015–2043
Billions US$ 2017 and % of GDP

Agriculture   Manufactures
Energy   Materials
ICT   Services

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook database
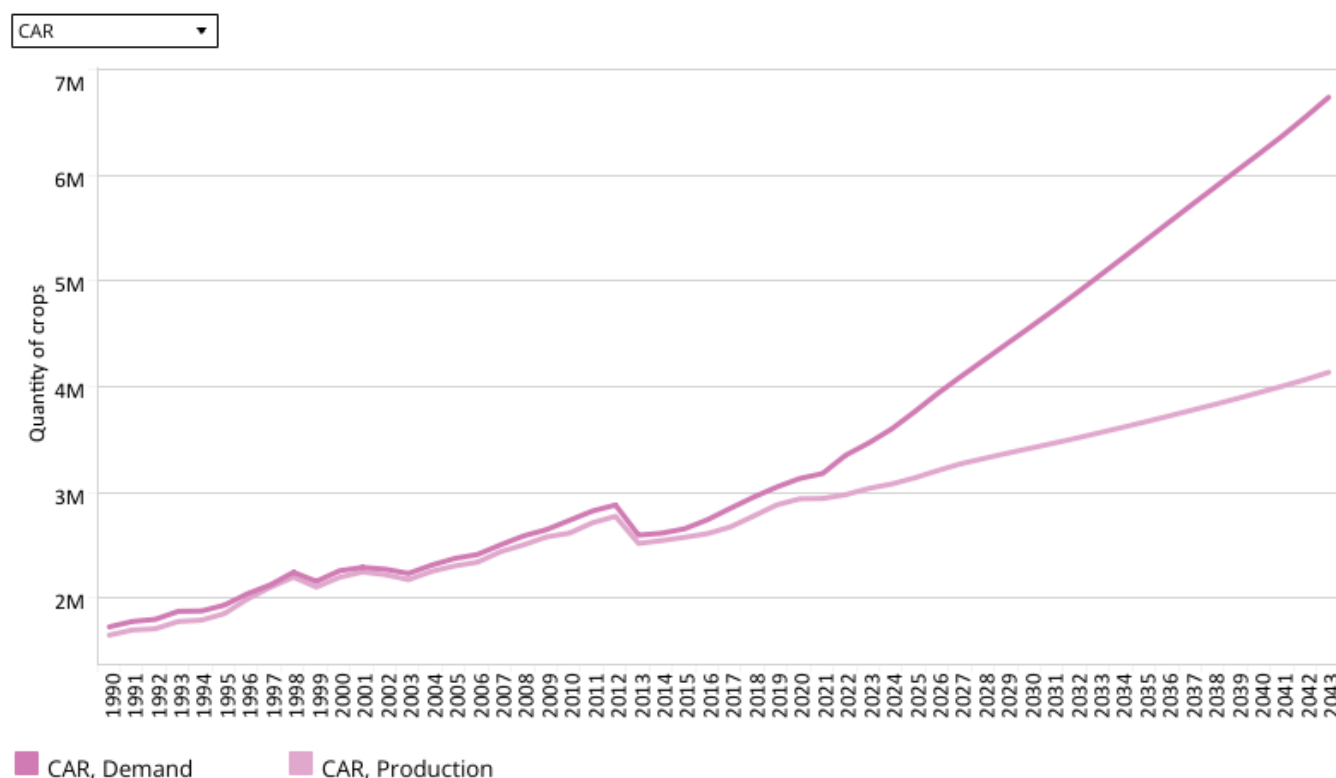
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The IFs platform uses data from the Global Trade and Analysis Project (GTAP) to classify economic activity into six sectors: agriculture, energy, materials (including mining), manufacturing, services and information and communication technologies (ICT). Most other sources use a threefold distinction between only agriculture, industry and services with the result that data may differ.

In 2019, the Central African Republic's service sector accounted for 40.9% of GDP (US$900 million), followed by agriculture and manufacturing which represented about 31.7% (US$700 million) and 20.5% (US$400 million), respectively. In the future, the service sector will remain the most important contributor to the country's GDP. Its share is set to grow to 47.7%, equivalent to US$3.1 billion, by 2043 on the Current Path. At the same time, the contribution of the agriculture sector is forecast to drop to 15.6%, valued at US$1 billion. The share of the manufacturing sector, on the other hand, is forecast to increase by more than 9 percentage points to 30.2%, comparable to US$1.9 billion, in 2043.

The Central African Republic's expected trajectory roughly mirrors that of its low-income peer group with services representing both the current and future lion's share of contribution to GDP, followed by agriculture and manufacturing, which are expected to lose and gain ground, respectively. The contributions of the energy, ICT and materials sectors to GDP are negligible.

Chart 9: Agriculture production/demand in CP, 1990–2043
Crops million tons

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Legend: ■ CAR, Demand ■ CAR, Production

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from Food and Agriculture Organization Food Balance Sheets

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The data on agricultural production and demand in the IFs forecasting platform initialises from data provided on food balances by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). IFs contains data on numerous types of agriculture but aggregates its forecast into crops, meat and fish, presented in million metric tons. Chart 9 shows agricultural production and demand as a total of all three categories.

Just like most African countries, the Central African Republic has excess demand for agricultural products. At 2.9 million metric tons per hectare in 2019, the country's crop production is slightly higher than the average of Africa's low-income economies, which stood at 2.7 million metric tons per hectare. Rwanda, the frontrunner in this category, has a crop yield of 8.3 million metric tons per hectare, followed by Malawi with a yield of 7.2 million metric tons per hectare. By 2043, the Central African Republic's crop yield will increase to 4.1 million metric tons per hectare.

The lion's share of the country's agricultural output is crops. In 2019, crop production amounted to about 2.4 million metric tons compared to the average output of 13.8 million metric tons in its low-income peer group. This gap is projected to widen by 2043 with the Central African Republic expected to increase its output to 3.3 million metric tons versus the group's average output reaching 20.05 million metric tons.

The Central African Republic's agricultural production does not meet demand. In 2019, the gap between production and demand amounted to almost 0.2 million metric tons. By 2043, this gap is expected to be more than 15 times as large standing at 2.6 million metric tons. Population growth is increasing agricultural demand. In combination with low productivity, competition over scarce resources resulting in insecurity, as well as environmental degradation and high exposure to climate change-related risks, food insecurity is a significant risk.

Poverty: Current Path

Chart 10: Poverty in CP, 2015–2043
Millions of people and % of total population

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■ CAR

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Population Division Population Prospects estimate, World Development Indicators population data and PovcalNet World Bank data

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There are numerous methodologies for and approaches to defining poverty. We measure income poverty and use GDP per capita as a proxy. In 2015, the World Bank adopted the measure of US$1.90 per person per day (in 2011 international prices), also used to measure progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 of eradicating extreme poverty. To account for extreme poverty in richer countries occurring at slightly higher levels of income than in poor countries, the World Bank introduced three additional poverty lines in 2017:

- US$3.20 for lower middle-income countries

- US$5.50 for upper middle-income countries

- US$22.70 for high-income countries.

As a low-income country, the Central African Republic uses the US$1.90 benchmark to define extreme poverty. The country is the third poorest country in Africa, after South Sudan and Burundi, with a high poverty burden. In 2019, 73.9% of the population (3.56 million people) was living below the poverty line. This means that the Central African Republic's poverty rate lies more than 26.1% percentage points above the average of its low-income peer group on the continent (47.8%).

In the Current Path forecast, the number of people living in extreme poverty in the Central African Republic will increase to 5.8 million people by 2043. The country's poverty rate, however, is projected to decline to 68.3%. In 2019, the Central African Republic had the third highest poverty rate among Africa's low-income economies. By 2043, it will have the second highest rate.

Chart 11: Energy production by type in CP, 1990–2043
Barrels of oil equivalent and % of energy production

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Coal — Hydro — Oil
Gas — Nuclear — Other renewa...
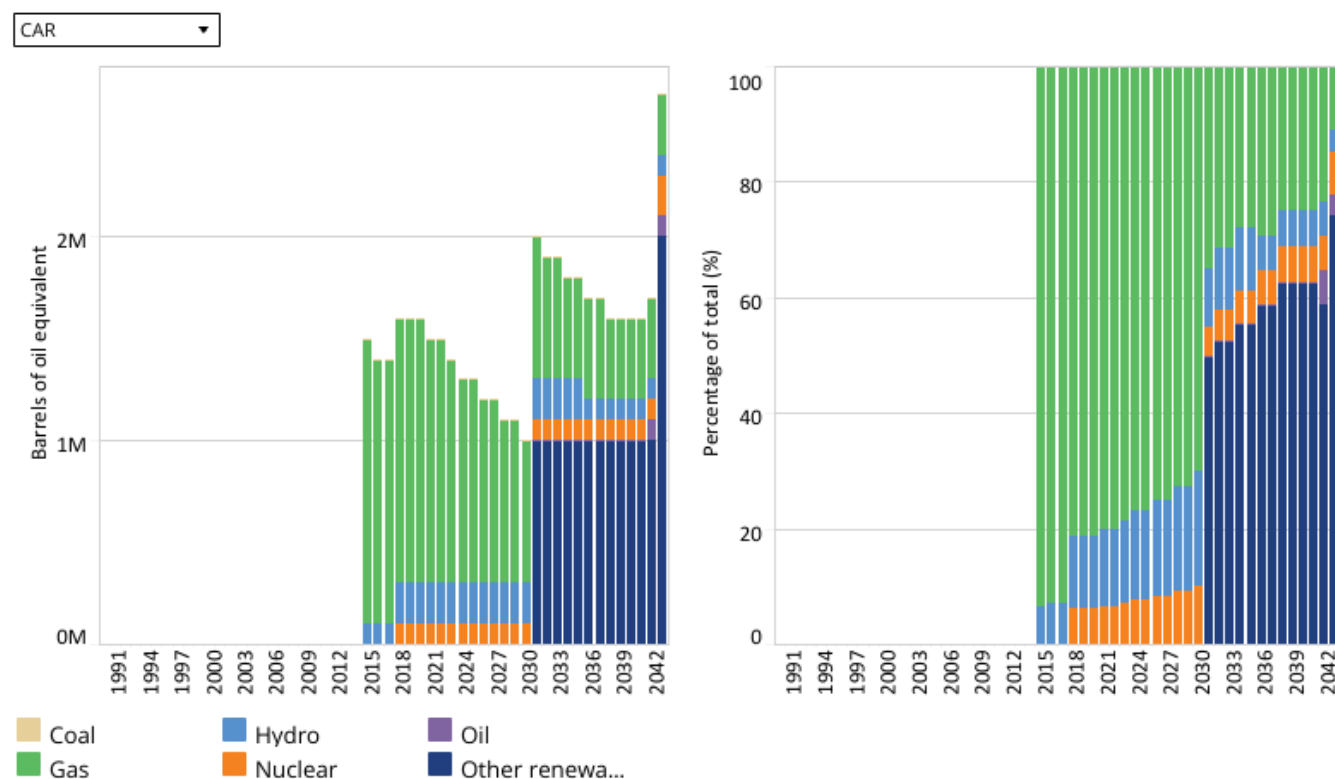
Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from World Energy Outlook data
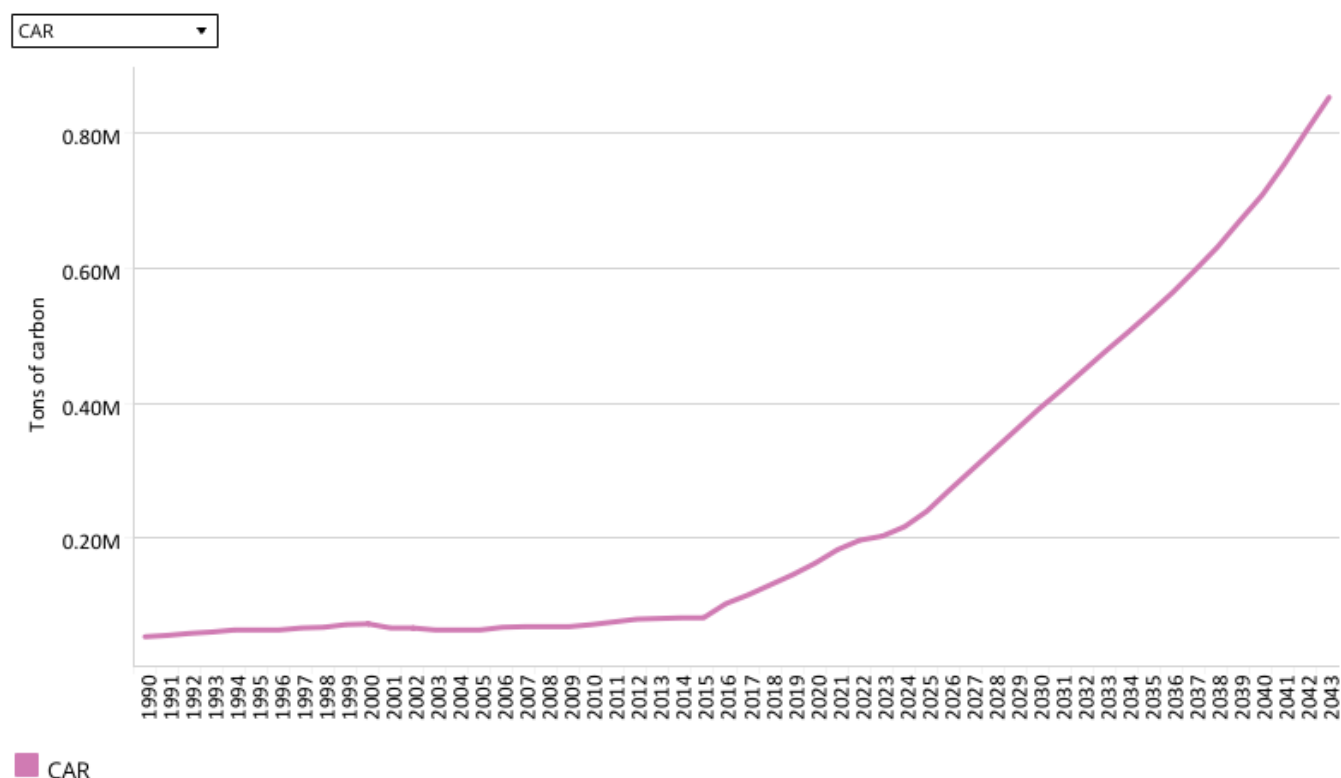
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The IFs platform forecasts six types of energy, namely oil, gas, coal, hydro, nuclear and other renewables. To allow comparisons between different types of energy, the data is converted into billion barrels of oil equivalent (BBOE). The energy contained in a barrel of oil is approximately 5.8 million British thermal units (MBTUs) or 1 700 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of energy.

There is no historical data for energy production in IFs for the Central African Republic. The IFs projections initialise from 2015 and as such the forecast presented here is provisional. In 2019, the Central African Republic's total energy production was about 0.013 million barrels of oil. By 2043, it is estimated to increase to 0.02 million barrels. The country's current energy mix is heavily reliant on gas which accounted for over 80% of total production in 2019. Gas was followed by hydro at 13%.

The Current Path forecast projects a gradual transition towards less gas and more renewables in the Central African Republic's energy mix in the future. By 2043, other renewables are expected to account for 74% of total energy production, hydro and oil are set to account for 4% each and nuclear is expected to account for 7%. Gas is set to drop to represent 11% of total production. The anticipated share of other renewables in the Central African Republic's energy production profile by far exceeds the average of 39% that is expected for Africa's low-income economies. This can be explained by the Central African Republic's significant renewable energy resources (mostly solar and wind) that can be exploited to power the growing economy.

Chart 12: Carbon emissions in CP, 1990–2043
Million tons of carbon (note, not CO_2 equivalent)

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Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center data

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Carbon is released in many ways, but the three most important contributors to greenhouse gases are carbon dioxide (CO2), carbon monoxide (CO) and methane (CH4). Since each has a different molecular weight, IFs uses carbon. Many other sites and calculations use CO2 equivalent.

The Central African Republic's carbon emissions stood at 0.1 million tons of carbon in 2019. They are forecast to increase ninefold to 0.9 million tons of carbon emissions by 2043.

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About the authors

Mr Enoch Randy Aikins joined the AFI in May 2021 as a Researcher. Before that, Enoch was a research and programmes officer at the Institute for Democratic Governance in Accra in charge of local governance reforms, poverty and inequality and public sector reforms. He also worked as a research assistant (economic division) with the Institute for Statistical Social and Economic Research at the University of Ghana. Enoch's interests include African politics and governance, economic development, public sector reform, poverty and inequality. Enoch is a Young African Fellow at the School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute in Florence and has an MPhil in economics from the University of Ghana, Legon.

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