



Cameroon

Cameroon: Current Path

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

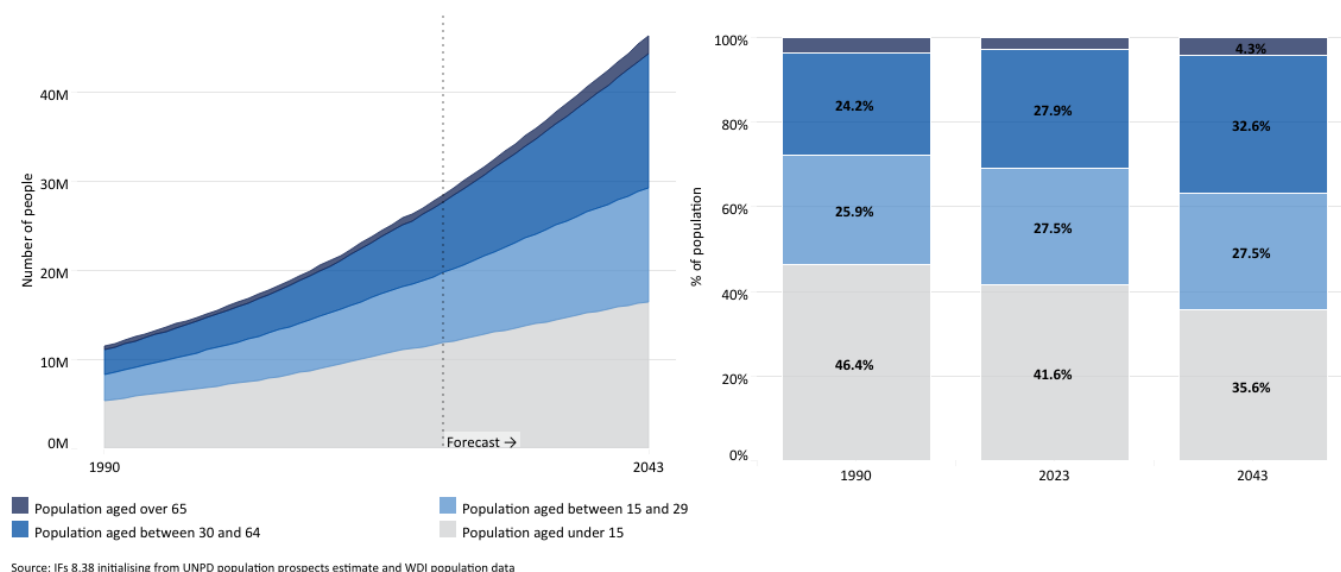


Chart 2 presents the Current Path of the population structure, from 1990 to 2043.

Cameroon's population has expanded steadily over the past three decades, increasing from 11.3 million in 1990 to approximately 28.4 million in 2023, an increase of roughly 151%. Under the Current Path, the population will reach 46.2 million by 2043. This sustained demographic expansion will significantly shape labour markets, infrastructure demand and public service delivery over the next two decades.

The share of the working-age population (15–64 years) has risen from 50.5% in 1990 to 55.5% in 2023 and will increase further to 60.1% by 2043. At the same time, the proportion of children under 15 has declined from 46.8% in 1990 to 41.6% in 2023 and will fall to 35.6% by 2043. Although the elderly population (65+) declined from 3.6% to 2.9% over the same period, it is projected to increase modestly to 4.3% by 2043.

With a median age of 18.8 years in 2023, projected to rise to 22.4 years by 2043, Cameroon remains a predominantly youthful society. This demographic structure presents a potential demographic dividend, but only if accompanied by sustained investment in education, skills development and employment-intensive sectors. Otherwise, rapid labour force expansion could intensify unemployment and social pressures.

The decline in the share of children reflects a gradual fertility transition. Cameroon's total fertility rate fell from 6.4 births per woman in 1990 to 4.4 in 2023, though it remains above the lower-middle-income African average (3.9) and the continental average (4.1). Structural factors, including socio-cultural norms, economic insecurity and uneven access to reproductive health services, continue to sustain relatively high fertility. Under the Current Path, fertility will decline further to 3.4 births per woman by 2043.

As a result, the total dependency ratio will fall from 0.80:1 in 2023 to 0.66:1 by 2043, signalling a gradual easing of demographic pressures. However, realising the benefits of this transition will depend on the country's ability to accelerate structural transformation, expand formal employment and enhance human capital to absorb a rapidly growing workforce.

Chart 3: Population distribution map, 2023

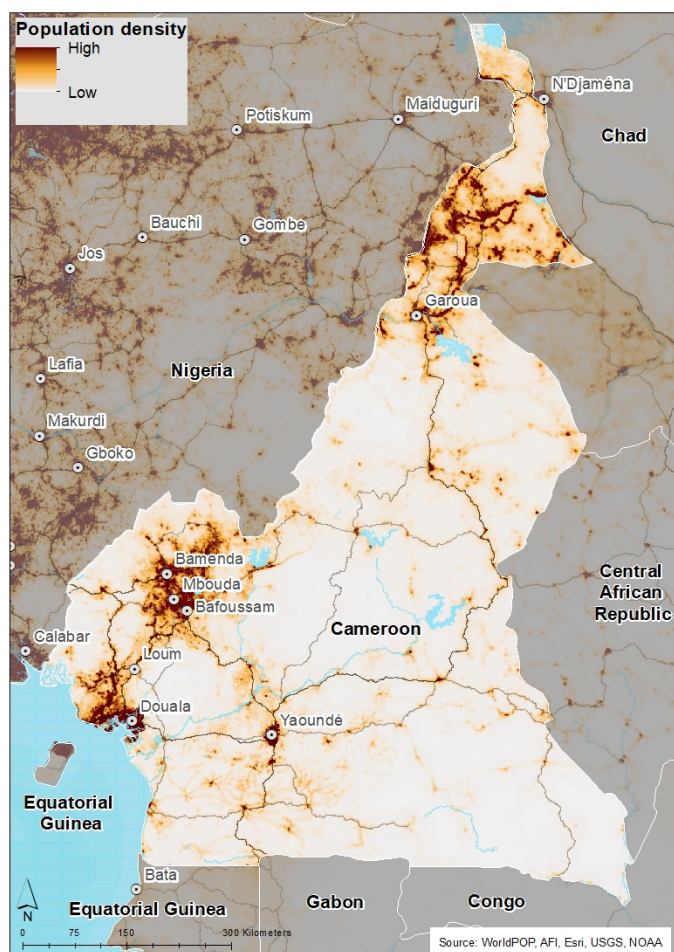


Chart 3 presents a population distribution map for 2023.

In 2023, Cameroon’s average population density stood at 0.60 persons per hectare, below the lower-middle-income African average of 0.80. Despite sustained demographic growth, overall density remains moderate by regional standards. However, national averages mask significant spatial disparities that have important policy implications.

Population distribution is highly uneven. The central and littoral regions, particularly Yaoundé and Douala, host a large share of the population, driven by internal migration linked to employment opportunities, access to education, and infrastructure availability. Parts of the West, North-West and South-West are also relatively dense due to fertile soils and active agricultural and commercial economies.

By contrast, the East, Adamawa and Far North, though geographically extensive, remain sparsely populated, reflecting geographic remoteness, lower levels of urbanisation and, in some areas, persistent security challenges. These imbalances contribute to unequal access to services, infrastructure gaps and divergent development outcomes.

Under the Current Path, population density will rise to 0.98 persons per hectare by 2043, still below the projected LMIC African average of 1.21 persons per hectare. This trajectory suggests continued rural-to-urban migration and spatial concentration of economic activity, reinforcing the need for targeted regional development strategies, improved connectivity and balanced territorial planning to reduce disparities and manage urban expansion effectively.

Chart 4: Urban and rural population in the Current Path, 1990-2043

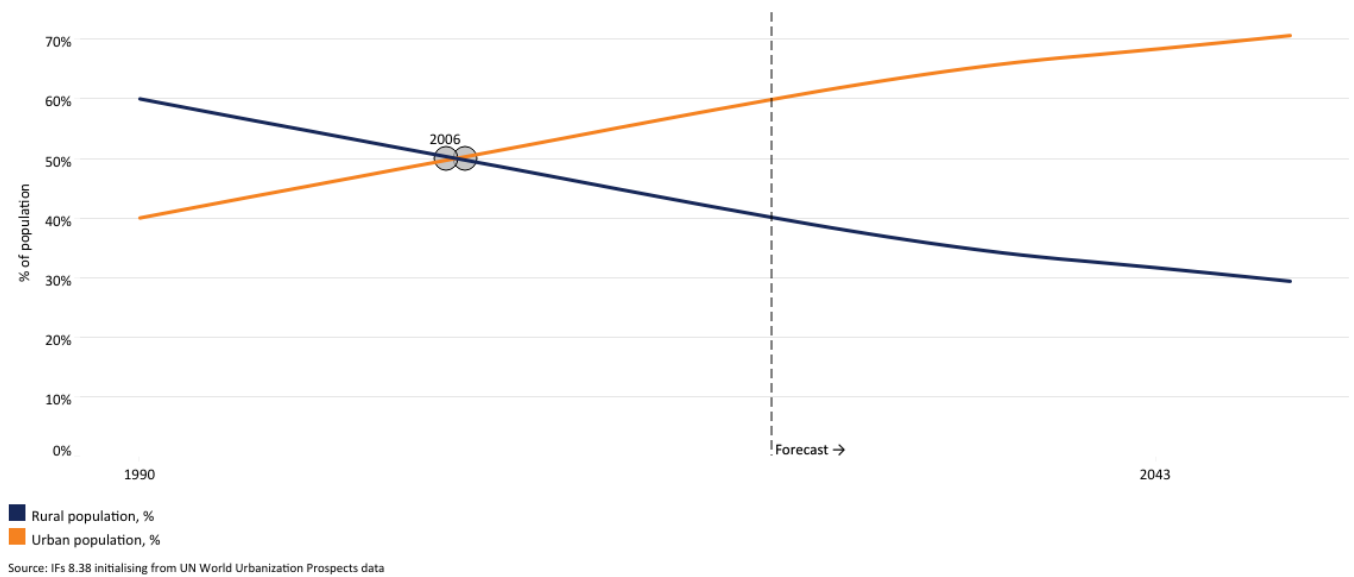


Chart 4 presents the urban and rural population in the Current Path, from 1990 to 2043.

Since 1990, Cameroon has undergone rapid urbanisation, with the share of the urban population rising from 40% to nearly 60% in 2023, an increase of 20 percentage points over three decades. This places the country well above the 2023 lower-middle-income African average of 49.2%. Urban–rural parity was reached as early as 2007, ahead of many regional peers.

Under the Current Path, urbanisation is projected to intensify, with 68.4% of the population, about 31.6 million people, living in urban areas by 2043, compared to 31.6% (14.6 million people) in rural areas. This far exceeds the projected LMIC African average of roughly 58% for the same year.

Urban growth has been driven by natural population increase and sustained rural–urban migration toward major centres such as Douala and Yaoundé, where economic activity and public services are concentrated. While urbanisation can enhance productivity through agglomeration economies and industrial clustering, it also creates mounting pressure on housing, transport systems, sanitation, energy supply and basic service provision, particularly in informal and peri-urban settlements.

Although the rural population’s share is declining, its absolute size will still increase from 11.3 million in 2023 to 14.6 million by 2043. This dual dynamic, rapid urban expansion alongside continued rural population growth, calls for integrated urban planning, strengthened municipal governance and targeted rural development strategies. Managing urbanisation effectively will be central to transforming demographic change into sustained economic growth and inclusive structural transformation.

Chart 5: GDP (MER) and growth in the Current Path, 1990-2043

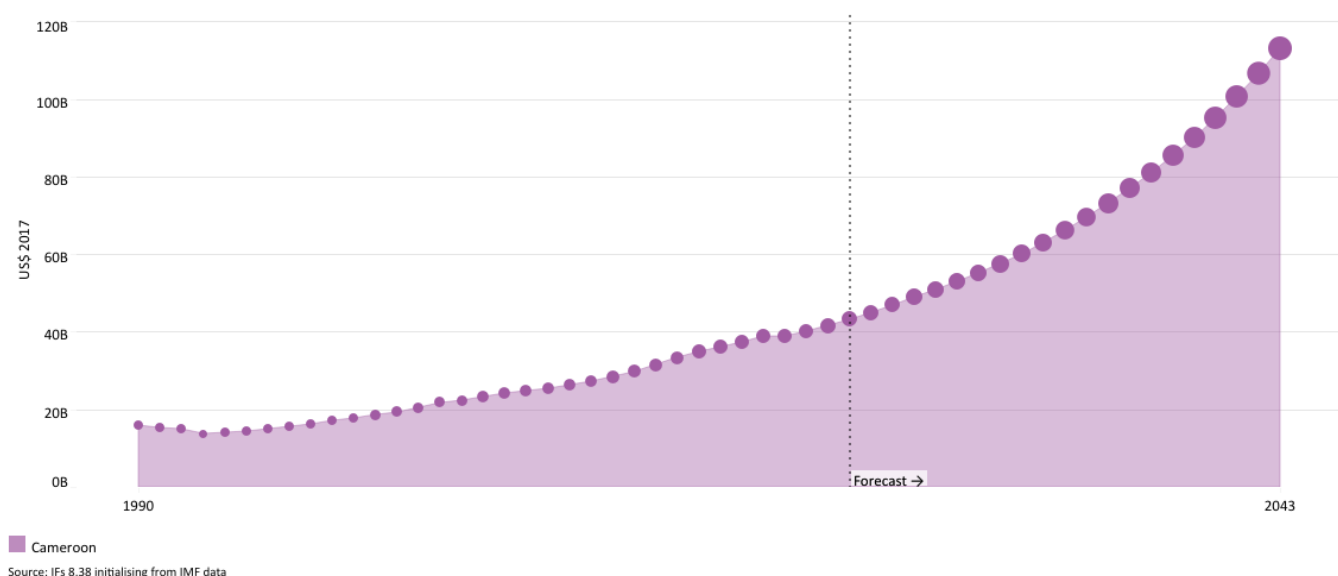


Chart 5 presents GDP in market exchange rates (MER) and growth rate in the Current Path, from 1990 to 2043.

Despite substantial natural resource endowments, including oil, gas, timber and minerals, Cameroon remains a lower-middle-income economy characterised by persistent poverty and limited structural transformation. While the economy has gradually diversified, it still relies heavily on primary commodities. GDP at market exchange rates (MER) increased from approximately US\$16.0 billion in 1990 to US\$43.3 billion in 2023, reflecting sustained but moderate expansion over three decades.

Several structural weaknesses, including inadequate infrastructure, limited industrial development, inefficient institutions and vulnerability to external commodity price fluctuations, have hindered economic growth. The economy's reliance on exports such as crude oil, timber and cocoa makes it susceptible to global market volatility. Additionally, climate variability, especially droughts in the northern region and irregular rainfall, has negatively impacted agricultural output, which is vital for employment and livelihoods.

A shallow financial system, with limited long-term credit and constrained capital markets, has also restricted private-sector development and productivity growth. Although efforts toward diversification, such as agro-industrial development and digital innovation, are underway, they require stronger coordination, scaling and sustained investment.

Through the National Development Strategy 2020–2030 (SND30), Cameroon aims to accelerate industrialisation, digital transformation, human capital development and regional equity within a strengthened governance framework. In the Current Path, GDP will reach approximately US\$113 billion by 2043, growing at an average annual rate of 4.7%, supported by infrastructure expansion (including hydropower projects such as Lom Pangar and Nachtigal), regional trade integration and business climate reforms.

However, key constraints remain, including uneven electricity access, particularly in rural areas, high youth unemployment, fragility in conflict-affected regions and limited access to international capital markets. Achieving faster, more resilient growth will require deeper structural reforms, strengthened institutional capacity, expanded access to finance and energy, and closer regional cooperation within CEMAC to enhance competitiveness and reduce external vulnerability.

Chart 6: Size of the informal economy in the Current Path, 2020-2043

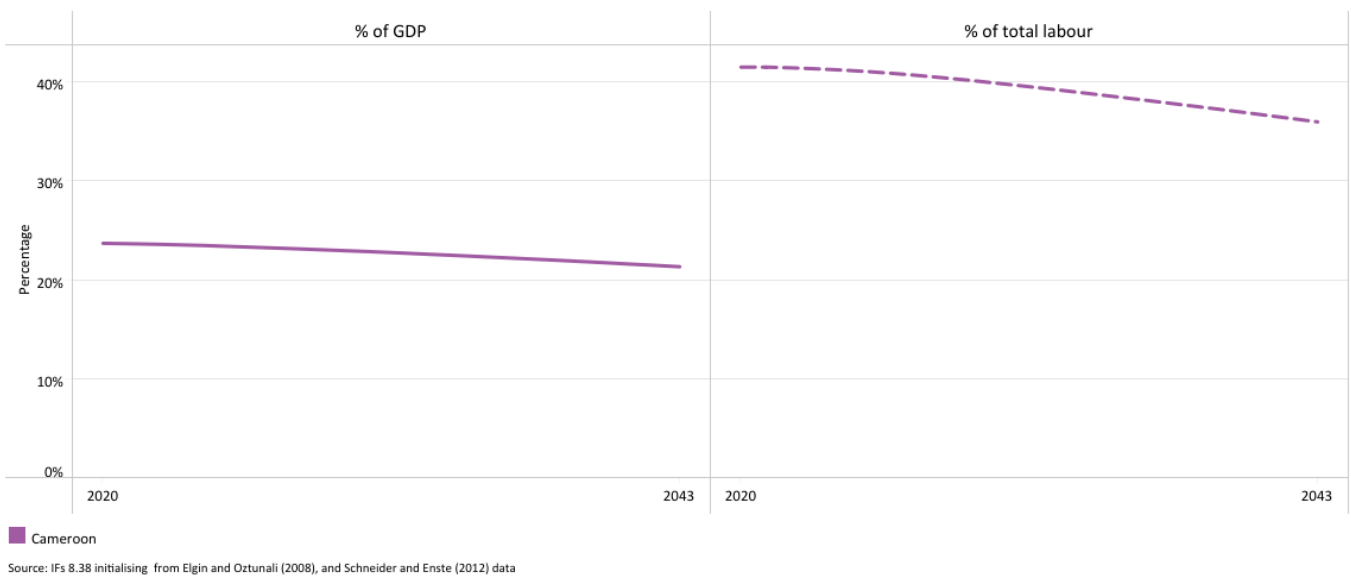


Chart 6 presents the size of the informal economy as per cent of GDP and per cent of total labour (non-agriculture), from 2020 to 2043. The data used in our modelling are largely estimates and may therefore differ from other sources.

The informal economy comprises activities that have market value and would add to tax revenue and GDP if they were recorded. According to the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#), informal employment is often associated with income insecurity, unsafe work conditions and limited access to the rights and benefits accorded to the formal sector. Countries with high informality face a host of development challenges, including higher poverty, lower per capita incomes, greater inequality, and weaker productivity investment, among others.

In line with trends across much of sub-Saharan Africa, the informal sector represents a substantial share of Cameroon's economy, particularly in urban areas. In 2023, the informal sector in Cameroon accounted for 23.5% of GDP, compared with the average of 30.6% for LMICs in Africa. While this apparent under-representation might reflect modelling assumptions, it also highlights the under-recorded nature of informal production activities and the dominance of agriculture, which is excluded from these estimates in many rural regions.

The primary non-agricultural informal activities in Cameroon occur in retail trade, repair services, informal transportation, tailoring, small-scale manufacturing and domestic work. A considerable proportion of these businesses operate without licenses, lack access to financial services and depend on manual labour and outdated technologies, factors that undermine productivity and income stability. According to Cameroon's Informal Sector Survey, over 60% of informal operators have no formal education or have only completed primary schooling, a barrier to upscaling their operations.

Recognising the scale and significance of the informal sector, the Cameroonian government has launched various initiatives to facilitate progressive formalisation. These include the Plan de Formalisation de l'Economie Informelle (PFEI) and support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) through financing mechanisms like the National Credit Fund and digital business registration platforms. In addition, tax administration reforms, including the deployment of mobile tax payment systems, aim to widen the tax base while reducing compliance burdens.

In the Current Path, Cameroon's informal sector will decline gradually to 21.3% of GDP by 2043, remaining far below the 27.0% average for LMICs in Africa. While this reduction may reflect increasing formalisation, it also indicates significant uncertainty in estimation methods, particularly in capturing informal value-added in rapidly evolving urban economies.

Regarding the labour force, about 41.3% was informal in 2023, compared to the average of 57.6% across LMICs in Africa. Informal labour continues to dominate in urban and peri-urban areas, especially among youth, women and those with limited formal education. In the Current Path, the size of the informal labour force will decline to 36.0% of total labour in 2043, forecast to remain below the average of 54.2% for LMICs in Africa in that same year.

Men accounted for 33.7% of informal labour, and women for 49.6%. Female participation in the informal economy is particularly high in Cameroon, especially in petty trade and market vending, which serve as survivalist strategies in the absence of wage employment. The lack of decent work in the formal sector continues to push large segments of the population into informal activities, with significant implications for income inequality and social protection coverage.

Persistent challenges constrain the productivity and sustainability of informal enterprises, including limited access to finance, low capital investment, insecure tenure for business premises and poor integration into formal value chains. Addressing these issues will require a coordinated approach involving financial inclusion strategies, skills development and inclusive urban planning that recognises the economic value of informal labour while offering pathways to formalisation.

Chart 7: GDP per capita in Current Path, 1990-2043

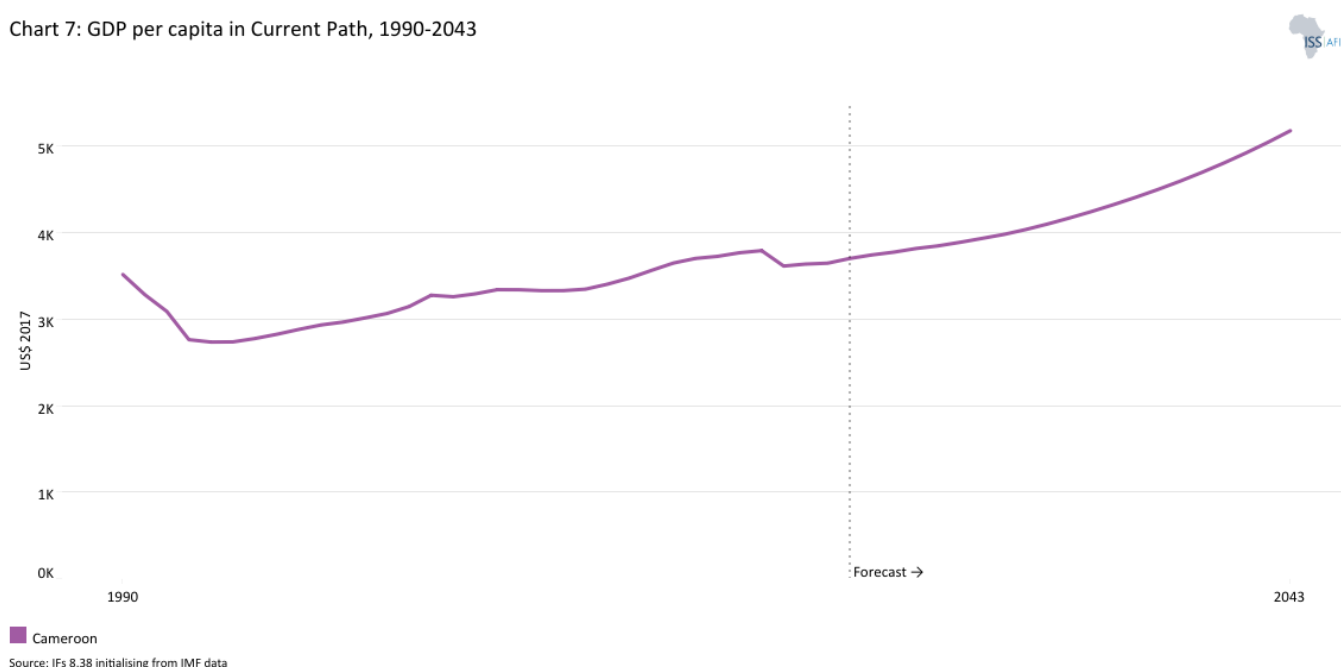


Chart 7 presents GDP per capita in the Current Path, from 1990 to 2043, compared with the average for the Africa income group.

Cameroon’s GDP per capita has recorded a slow yet steady rise over the past three decades, rising from US\$3 520 in 1990 to roughly US\$3 700 in 2023. This level remained below the average of African lower-middle-income countries, which during the same period rose from US\$3 850 to US\$7 800.

Looking ahead, projections in the Current Path suggest that Cameroon’s GDP per capita will reach US\$5 180 by 2043, an improvement of 35.9% over the next two decades. Yet, the country will continue to trail the regional benchmark, with LMICs in Africa expected to reach an average of US\$7 800 by the same year. This persistent gap highlights the limitations of Cameroon’s growth model in generating broad-based and sustained improvements in living conditions.

Moreover, GDP per capita figures often obscure deep-seated development challenges. In Cameroon’s case, these include

limited investment in human capital, persistent regional and income inequality, vulnerability to climate shocks and a constrained business climate. The country also **faces** challenges in domestic revenue mobilisation, the effectiveness of social policy and the high prevalence of informal employment, which together restrict the scope for equitable and sustainable development. Addressing these structural weaknesses is essential to translating economic growth into real, inclusive gains in citizens' welfare.

Chart 8: Extreme poverty in Current Path, 2020-2043

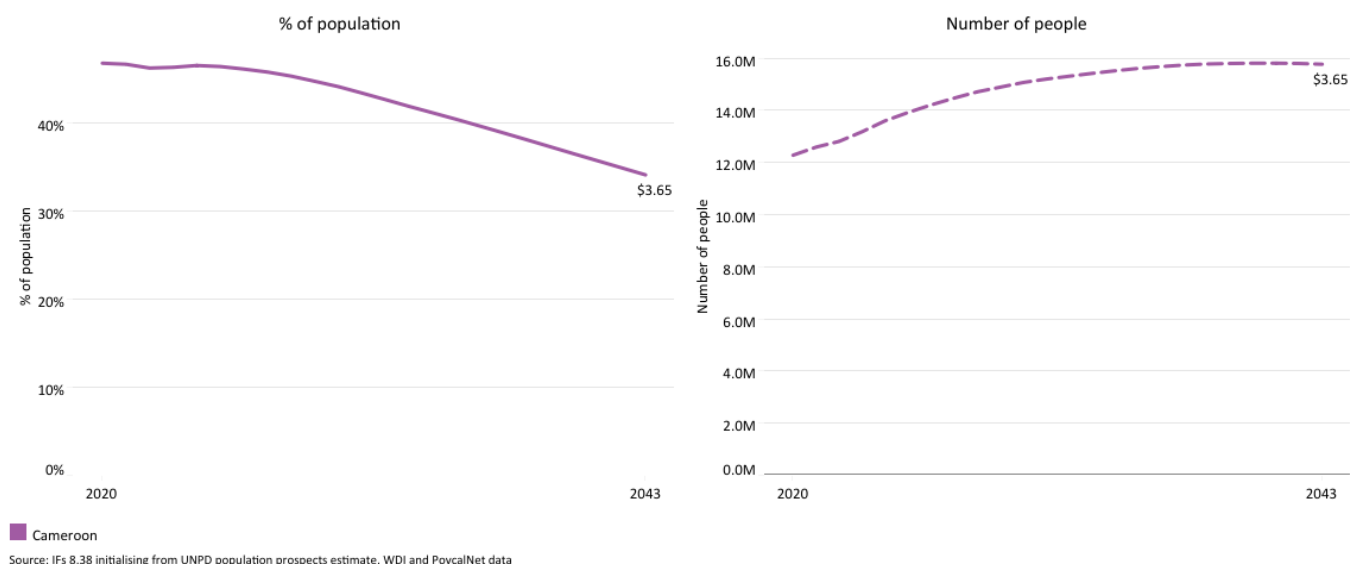


Chart 8 presents the rate and number of poor people in the Current Path from 2020 to 2043.

In 2022, the World Bank updated the poverty lines to 2017 constant dollar values as follows:

- The previous US\$1.90 extreme poverty line is now set at US\$2.15, also for use with low-income countries.
- US\$3.20 for lower-middle-income countries, now US\$3.65 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.

Monetary poverty only tells part of the story, however. In addition, the global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) measures acute multidimensional poverty by measuring each person's overlapping deprivations across 10 indicators in three equally weighted dimensions: health, education and standard of living. The MPI complements the international US\$ 2.15-a-day poverty rate by identifying who is multidimensionally poor and by showing the composition of multidimensional poverty. The headcount or incidence of multidimensional poverty is often several percentage points higher than that of monetary poverty. This implies that individuals living above the monetary poverty line may still suffer deprivations in health, education and/or **standard of living**.

In principle, poverty exists when part of the population is unable, by society's standards, to attain a level of well-being considered to be a minimum requirement. The minimum level of well-being can be defined by estimating one or more poverty lines. The definition of a poverty line is generally a function of consumption patterns and the cost of living in the

country's main regions or cities. In Cameroon, 43.6% of the population is multidimensionally poor, according to 2022 estimates. The multidimensional poverty index (MPI) value for the country is 0.23, reflecting the depth of deprivations in health, education and living standards, with an average deprivation intensity of 53.2% among the poor.

By utilising the lower-middle-income poverty line of US\$3.65 a day (in 2017 PPP), in 2023, 13.2 million people (representing 46.5% of the population) lived in poverty, slightly below the average of 49.1% for other LMICs. In the Current Path, the poverty rate in Cameroon will decline to 34.2%, remaining below the average of 34.8% for lower-middle-income African countries in 2043.

Using the US\$2.15 poverty line, also referred to as the extreme poverty rate, 6.6 million people (representing 23.3% of the population) lived in poverty in 2023, also slightly below the average of 23.4% for other LMICs. In the Current Path, the extreme poverty rate in Cameroon will decline to 14.7%, roughly 1 percentage point above the average for LMICs in Africa.

Poverty remains widespread, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. National statistics reveal that eight out of ten poor people live in rural areas where infrastructure, public services and livelihoods remain limited. Furthermore, the spatial distribution of poverty reveals significant regional disparities, with the Extreme North, North, and East regions recording the highest poverty rates in the country.

To address these challenges, Cameroon has implemented multiple social protection interventions, most notably the Social Safety Nets Project (Projet de Filets Sociaux), supported by the World Bank. This program offers conditional and unconditional cash transfers to poor households and promotes human capital development through education and health-related incentives. Over 400 000 households have benefited since its inception, contributing to improved consumption, school attendance and resilience to shocks.

In 2023, Cameroon's Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.59, ranking 155th out of 191 countries in the Human Development Report data. This value shows a slight increase from the previous year and is below the global average of 0.74. In addition, Cameroon's overall vulnerability was high and growing due to multiple overlapping crises, including the North-West and South-West (NWSW) conflict, the Lake Chad basin conflict, and the Central African Republic (CAR) refugee crisis. This resulted in a humanitarian crisis where 4.7 million people required assistance.

Chart 9: National Development Plan of Cameroon



Chart 9 depicts the National Development Plan.

To promote its medium- and long-term development efforts, Cameroon adopted the [National Development Strategy 2020-2030](#) (SND30) in November 2020. The SND30 succeeds the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP 2010-2020). It constitutes the second phase of the country's long-term Vision 2035, which aims to make Cameroon “an emerging, democratic and united country in its diversity”. This strategy aligns with key international and regional commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the African Union Agenda 2063 and the CEMAC Regional Economic Programme.

The [SND30](#) aims to structurally transform the Cameroonian economy through various measures to achieve the country's emergence by 2035. The strategy focuses on industrialisation, modernisation of agriculture and improving infrastructure. In other words, the SND30 is rooted in a national vision titled “Cameroon We Want in 2035”, and promotes values such as social cohesion, inclusive development, good governance, peace, bilingualism and environmental sustainability. It aims to foster strong, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, reduce poverty and inequality, and improve citizens' well-being across the national territory. The strategy is built around four strategic levers, each addressing critical development challenges:

- **Strategic lever 1** aims to achieve strong, inclusive and sustainable growth through the structural transformation of the economy. It emphasises industrialisation, economic diversification, and the development of key sectors, such as agro-industry, mining and metallurgy, energy, forestry, and the digital economy. The objective is to raise manufacturing's share of GDP to **25%** by 2030 and significantly increase the volume of non-oil exports.

- **Strategic lever 2** focuses on human capital development, aiming to improve the quality and accessibility of education, healthcare, and basic social services, while promoting youth empowerment, gender equality and the resilience of vulnerable groups. The government also prioritises technical and vocational training as a driver of labour market integration.
- **Strategic lever 3** addresses employment promotion and economic inclusion. It supports job creation through entrepreneurship, supports small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and modernises agriculture. The aim is to create decent work opportunities and absorb the growing urban and rural labour force, particularly youth and women.
- **Strategic lever 4** aims to reinforce governance and institutional performance. This includes strengthening the rule of law, transparency and decentralisation, as well as improving economic planning, public finance management and accountability. The implementation of the decentralisation process, with regional councils now operational, is a key achievement in this regard.

Cameroon's National Development Strategy (NDS30) **aligns with** international goals, such as the SDGs and Agenda 2063, as well as regional commitments, through performance-based budgets and investments. Early results show progress in infrastructure expansion, access to basic services, digital transformation and macroeconomic stability, despite global challenges. The strategy integrates diverse stakeholders and operates through multi-annual budgets, public investment projects and ongoing evaluations to achieve Vision 2035.

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Dr Pierre Christian Tsopmo is a Research Consultant at AFI. He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Yaounde II-Soa. He is a Development Economist with keen interest in political economy analysis, African governance and politics of development, natural resource management, social cohesion, climate vulnerability, climate mitigation, climate governance, sectorial forecasting analysis, FDI, growth, institutions compliance, state fragility, illicit flows and tax literacy, among others.

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