



# ECCAS

## ECCAS: Current Path

Tumi Mkhize-Malebo

Last updated 03 December 2024 using IFs v8.22

## ECCAS: Current Path

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

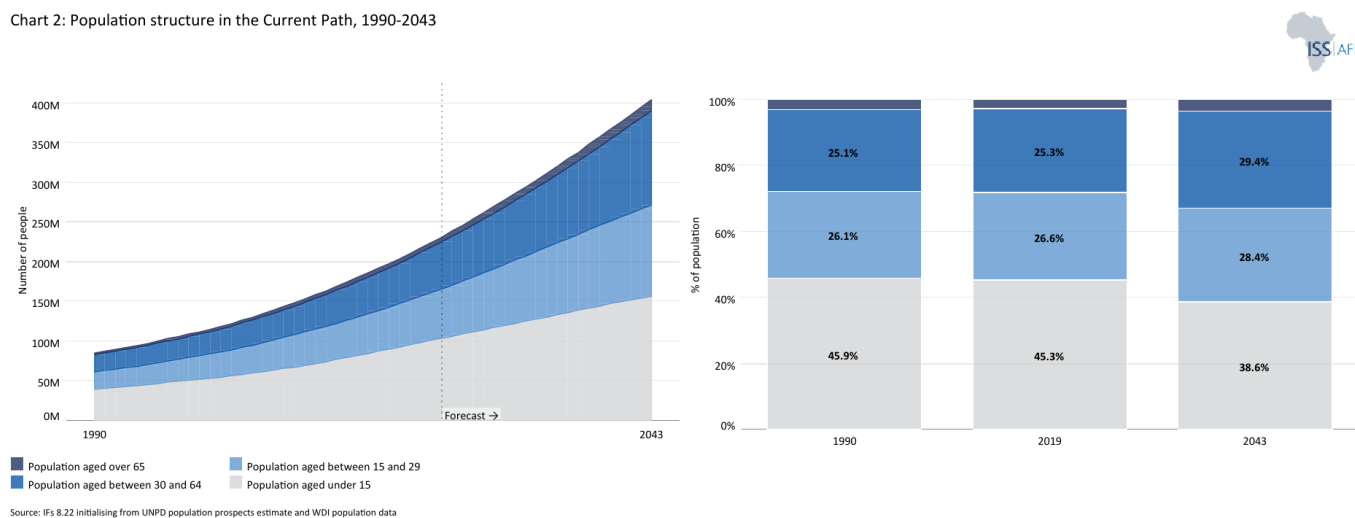


Chart 2 presents the Current Path of the population structure, from 2019 to 2043.

The total population of ECCAS has increased from 84.6 million people in 1990 to 231.1 million in 2023 and will grow to 404.5 million by 2043. DR Congo, with a population of 103.3 million people in 2023, is the most populous member state, accounting for 45% of the region's total population. Angola follows with 36.8 million people (16%), and Cameroon with 28.8 million people (12%). At the end of the spectrum, Equatorial Guinea (1.8 million) and São Tomé and Príncipe (229 000) have the smallest populations, each constituting less than 1% of the total population.

Average 2023 fertility rates in the DR Congo (6 children) and Rwanda (3.7 children) were coming down more rapidly than for other countries in the Community. Chad and Angola have the highest fertility rates across the forecast horizon. By 2043, these will remain high at 3.6 and 4.8 children per woman, respectively. However, by 2038, Burundi will surpass Angola, becoming the country with the second-highest fertility rate in ECCAS after Chad.

In 2023, the median age for the Community was 17.4 years, ranging from 22.7 years in Gabon to 16.2 years in the Central African Republic. By 2043, the overall median age will rise to 20.3 years. ECCAS, therefore, has an exceptionally young population, with 48.5% of its adult population in the age group 15 to 29 years of age in 2023, which is typically considered to constitute its youth bulge. Even by 2043, 46.3% of its adult population will still be in this bulge, implying considerable momentum towards social turbulence without very rapid expansion of services and opportunities. Because only 52.4% of its population was in the general working-age bracket (15 to 64 years of age) in 2023, ECCAS will likely only benefit from a demographic dividend during the second half of the century if governments provide appropriate education, jobs and healthcare. The large proportion of youth poses immediate challenges by placing a heavy demand on education and job creation, while the growing elderly population will increase the need for social services and pensions. However, if the young population is well educated and gainfully employed, they can boost economic productivity, providing the resources needed to support an aging population in the long term. Therefore, effective planning for both age groups is crucial for sustainable long-term development.

The 2023 average life expectancy for the ECCAS group was 65.5 years, significantly lower than the African average of 66.4 years. In the region, São Tomé and Príncipe had the highest life expectancy at 72.1 years, while the Central African Republic had the lowest at 53.9 years. By 2043, the average life expectancy in ECCAS will increase to 70.6 years, with the

gap between males and females widening from 4.6 years in 2023 to 5 years in 2043. By then, São Tomé and Príncipe will maintain the highest life expectancy at 75.5 years, while the Central African Republic will continue to have the lowest at 60.5 years.

Chart 3: Population distribution map, 2023

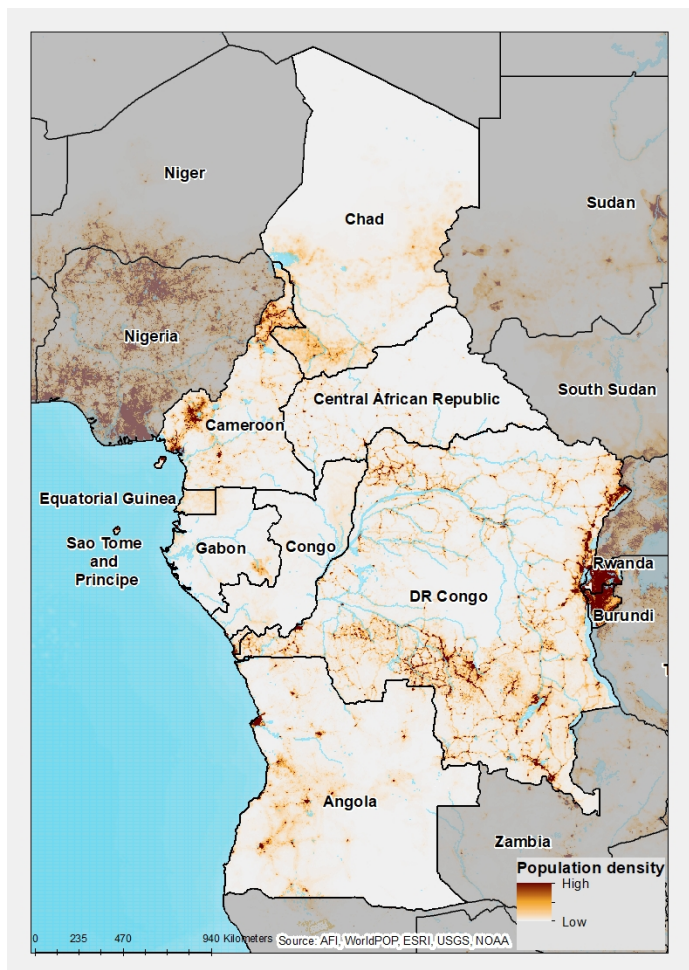


Chart 3 presents a population density map.

The population of ECCAS is settled on a total land area of 6.67 million km<sup>2</sup>, accounting for 20.4% of Africa's land area. The REC's population density was 0.35 people per hectare in 2023, below the average for Africa of 0.50 people per hectare. Compared to most other RECs, such as the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), ECCAS has a relatively low average population density.

Intraregional migration dominates in West and Central Africa, with over 11 million international migrants residing within the subregion. Among ECCAS member states, DR Congo and the Central African Republic are major sources of refugees and asylum-seekers. In 2022, DR Congo was the origin of over 900 000 refugees, making it the second-largest source on the continent, while the Central African Republic accounted for more than 748 000 refugees. DR Congo also experienced significant internal displacement of over 4 million people, largely due to conflict and violence, consistent with trends in sub-Saharan Africa.

Rwanda, Burundi and São Tomé and Príncipe have the greatest population densities, at 5.7, 5.2, and 2.4 people per hectare. The countries with the lowest population densities in the region are the Central African Republic (0.09 people per

hectare), Gabon (0.1 people per hectare) and Chad (0.15 people per hectare).

The population of Central Africa is unevenly distributed across the region. Densely populated areas include the Congo Basin, the world's second-largest tropical rainforest, which benefits from fertile soil and abundant rainfall, making it ideal for agriculture. Coastal regions such as Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon also have high population densities, driven by economic activities like fishing, trade and oil extraction. Similarly, the regions along the Congo and Ubangi rivers support high population densities due to the availability of water for irrigation and transportation. In contrast, sparsely populated areas like northern Chad, characterised by arid and semi-arid conditions, and the northern Central African Republic, with its harsh climate and limited economic opportunities, face significant challenges for agriculture and development.

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

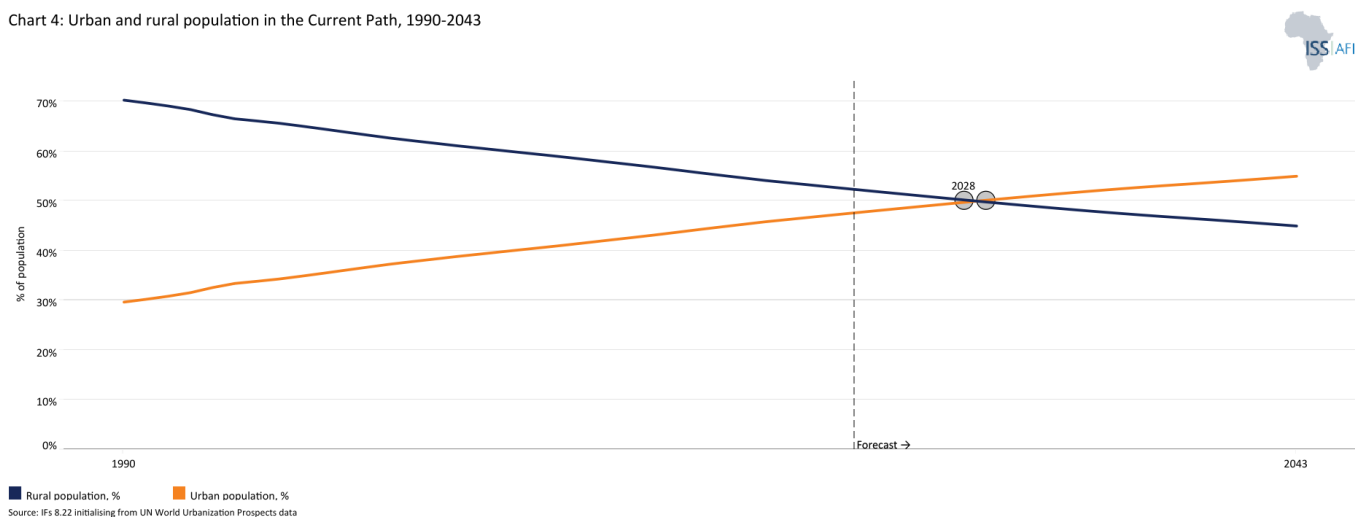


Chart 4 presents the proportion of the population living in urban and rural areas between 1990 and 2043.

ECCAS remains predominantly rural, with an average of 52.4% of the population living in rural areas in 2023. However, urbanisation rates vary significantly among member states. Gabon has the highest urbanisation rate in Africa, with over 90% of its population living in urban areas as of 2019, while Burundi has one of the lowest, with only 13% of its population residing in urban areas. Even by 2043, only 20.9% of Burundi's population will be urban.

On average, the Community will become predominantly urban in 2030, with 50.6% of the population to live in urban areas. It will continue to experience urbanisation but at a slower rate compared to other RECs. By 2043, 222 million people, or 55% of the population, will live in urban areas compared to 182 million in rural areas. To address the challenges that come with rapid urbanisation, ECCAS member states will likely face issues such as overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure and the rise of informal settlements. As urban populations grow, many cities may struggle to provide essential services like housing, clean water, sanitation and public transportation. Overcrowding can lead to strained healthcare systems, increased pollution and greater pressure on employment opportunities. Informal settlements, often lacking basic amenities and legal protections, may expand, further exacerbating social inequalities and hindering sustainable development across the region. Addressing these challenges will require comprehensive urban planning and targeted investments in infrastructure.

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

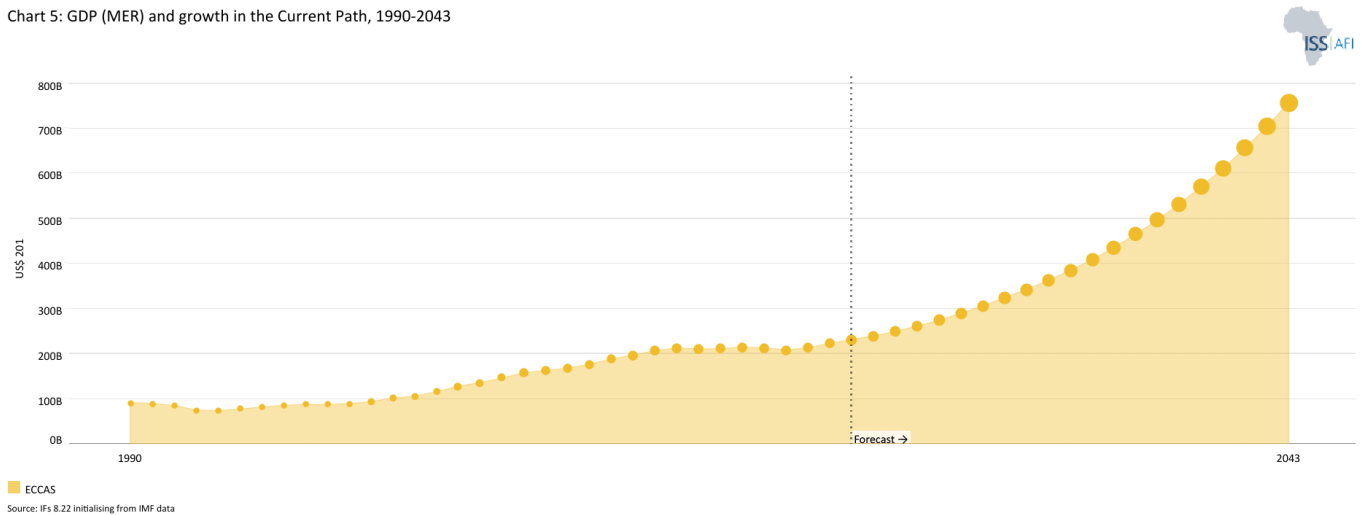


Chart 5 presents a stacked area graph that includes each country in the ECCAS economy from 1990 to 2043, including the associated growth rate.

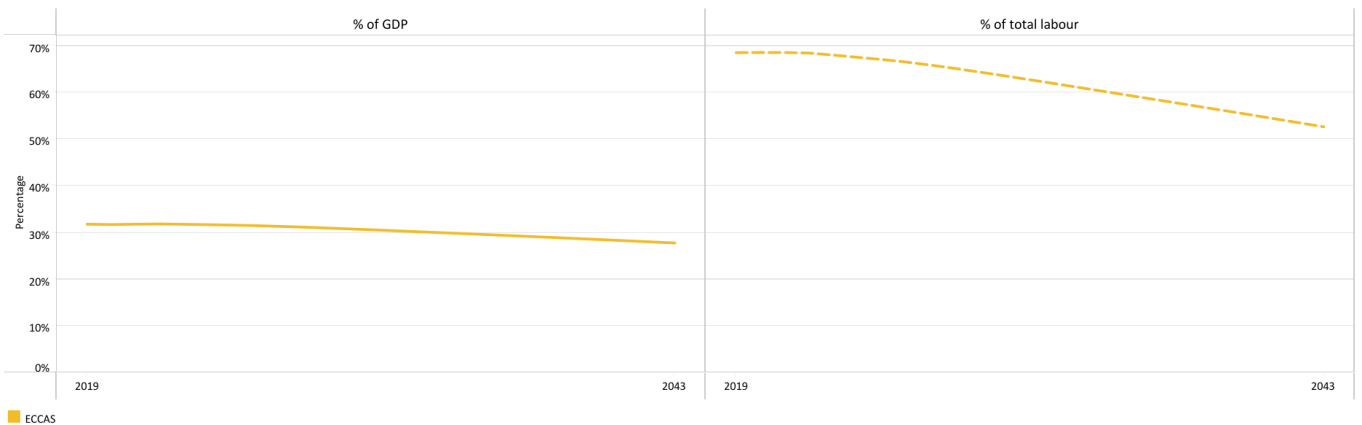
The region's GDP structure is largely shaped by the dominance of the oil sector as six of the eleven ECCAS member states (Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Chad) are major oil exporters, while DR Congo produces a smaller quantity of oil. As of 2023, the region's proven oil reserves were **estimated** at 31.3 billion barrels, accounting for 28% of Africa's total reserves. Agriculture is another key sector in the ECCAS region, with vast agro-ecological potential for a wide range of crops, including cocoa, coffee, cotton and palm oil. It plays an important role in the economies of many member states, serving as a cornerstone for both food security and rural development.

The combined GDP of ECCAS has nearly tripled from US\$89 billion in 1990 to US\$235.6 billion in 2023. It is projected to reach US\$757.4 billion by 2043. In 2023, ECCAS accounted for 8.8% of Africa's economy, and by 2043, it is expected to constitute 11.6%, driven primarily by rapid growth in Angola and, to a lesser extent, in DR Congo, as their youthful populations contribute to expanding economies.

ECCAS is largely dominated by Angola, which contributes approximately 30.9% of the Community's GDP, followed by DR Congo and Cameroon, each accounting for about 18–22%. By 2043, DR Congo's share will rise significantly from 22.7% in 2023 to 33%, surpassing Angola as the largest contributor. The next group of countries, including Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of the Congo and Chad, each contribute around 5–7% to the ECCAS economy. In contrast, the economies of Burundi, the Central African Republic, and São Tomé and Príncipe are much smaller, each making up 1% or less of the Community's total GDP.

In 2023, Angola had the largest economy in ECCAS, with a GDP of US\$71.4 billion, followed by DR Congo at US\$52.5 billion and Cameroon at US\$43.3 billion. By 2043, DR Congo's economy will grow to US\$253.8 billion, surpassing Angola, which will reach US\$211.6 billion, while Cameroon is anticipated to expand to US\$117.6 billion.

Chart 6: Size of the informal economy in the Current Path, 2019-2043



Source: IFS 8.22 initialising from Elgin and Oztunali (2008), and Schneider and Enste (2012) data

Chart 6 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 non-agriculture labour involved in the informal economy, from 2019 to 2043.

In 2023, estimates of the informal sector's contribution to GDP varied significantly, with DR Congo at 42% and Equatorial Guinea at 13%. By 2043, these figures will decrease to 34% and 11%, respectively.

With this, the informal sector contributes the largest portion of GDP in DR Congo and the smallest in Equatorial Guinea, though the latter's data may be inaccurate due to skewed income distribution. As the largest economy in ECCAS, Angola also had the biggest informal sector, valued at US\$21.4 billion in 2023.

In 2023, the overall informal sector in ECCAS represented 31.7% of GDP (approximately US\$100 billion), which was about five percentage points higher than the average for Africa (26.2%). This underscores the significant reliance of a large portion of the population on this sector for survival. By 2043, the GDP share of the informal sector will decline modestly to 27.8%, amounting to approximately US\$210.6 billion.

However, the contribution of the informal sector to GDP does not correspond with the proportion of the total labour force engaged in it. On average, 68.6% of the labor force in ECCAS was employed in the informal sector, with the highest rates observed in DR Congo at 84%, followed by the Central African Republic at 82% and Burundi at approximately 73%. These figures reflect the elevated levels of extreme poverty in these nations. Additionally, high unemployment and underemployment have severely impacted young people in the region, with many unable to reach their full productive potential. As a result, many are forced into the informal sector, where incomes are low and irregular, working conditions are poor, and a lack of social protection prevails. This crisis, which has reached unprecedented levels, is driven by both demand and supply factors, including the collapse of the formal economy, low agricultural productivity, a decline in foreign investment and ongoing insecurity.

Conversely, the lowest proportions of labour in the informal sector were recorded in Equatorial Guinea at 19%, followed by Cameroon at 41% and São Tomé and Príncipe at 48.7%. By 2043, the share of the labour force employed in the informal sector in ECCAS will decline to 53.8%. The Central African Republic will have the highest informal employment rate at 75%, followed closely by Burundi at 63%, while Equatorial Guinea will have the lowest rate at 12.8%.

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

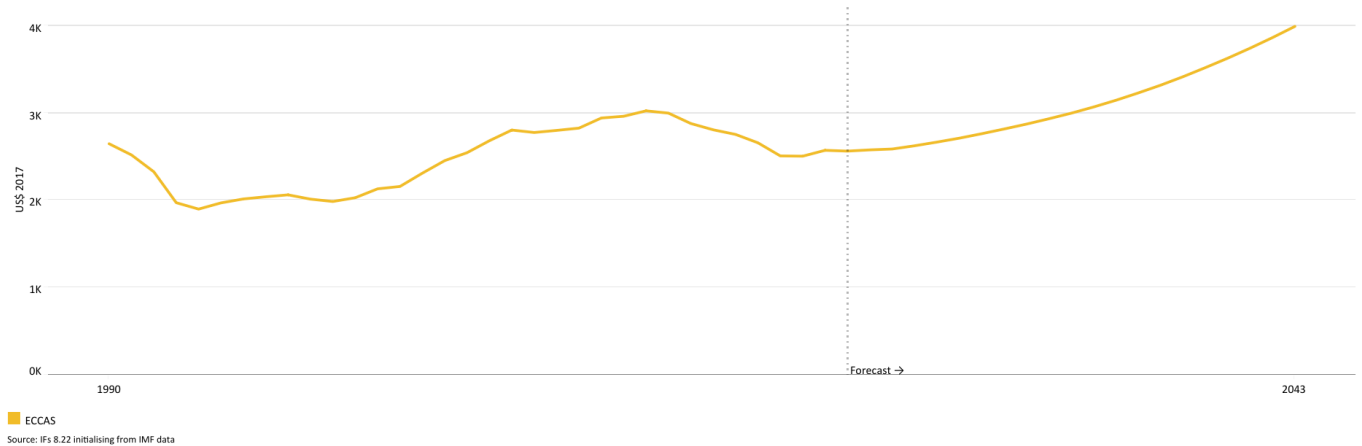


Chart 7 depicts GDP per capita in the Current Path from 1990 to 2043.

In 2023, the average GDP per capita for ECCAS was US\$2 568, just 54% of the African average, highlighting the Community's widespread poverty and low development levels. Due to their large oil reserves and smaller populations, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon had significantly higher GDP per capita than other ECCAS countries. In 2023, Equatorial Guinea's GDP per capita was US\$13 200 and Gabon's was US\$13 700, whereas the averages for DR Congo, the Central African Republic and Burundi were much lower at US\$1 142, US\$843 and US\$735, respectively. Based on these revenues, the World Bank classifies Equatorial Guinea and Gabon as upper-middle-income countries but the associated data for these two countries needs to be treated with care. Much of their population lives in extreme poverty with large disparities in income between a small elite and the general population. The wealth generated from oil has not been equitably distributed, leaving the majority without access to its benefits.

In 2023, although Angola had the largest economy in ECCAS, its GDP per capita (US\$5 777) was only 42% of Gabon's (US\$13 700) primarily due to its overreliance on oil, significant income inequality and rapid population growth. Furthermore, Gabon's average was approximately US\$500 higher than that of Equatorial Guinea. Countries that produce oil and gas generally perform better than those without such resources. However, these nations are significantly impacted by fluctuations in global oil prices. For example, when oil prices rise, these countries may experience an overvaluation of their currencies, which can make it difficult to compete in international markets and diversify economies. For instance, Equatorial Guinea's GDP per capita has halved over the past decade, a phenomenon often referred to as the 'natural resource curse,' where countries rich in natural resources experience slower economic growth compared to those with fewer or no resources.

Each country has pursued distinct strategies for managing its oil reserves. Angola has implemented reforms to **transition** control from Sonangol to the ANPG, though declining revenues remain a challenge. Equatorial Guinea has focused on increasing **local content**, as evidenced by the recent transfer of ExxonMobil's, a US-based energy giant, assets to GEPetrol, the country's national oil company. Gabon, aiming for **diversification**, seeks to attract investment, strengthen its regulatory environment and reduce its reliance on oil. It is worth noting that of the three, Gabon has the highest GDP per capita, underscoring the importance of diversification as one of the critical strategies in turning the resource curse into a blessing.

In 2023, ECCAS member state Burundi recorded the lowest GDP per capita in Africa at US\$718, closely followed by another member state, the Central African Republic at US\$843, which had figures even lower than Somalia's GDP per capita of US\$1 484. DR Congo ranked third-lowest in average GDP per capita across the continent. By 2043, the Central African Republic will have the continent's lowest GDP per capita at US\$1 090, followed by Burundi (US\$1 221) and Chad (US\$1 702). Equatorial Guinea and Gabon will rank 6th and 8th, respectively, with GDP per capita of US\$16 760 and US\$15 420.

Chart 8: Extreme poverty in Current Path, 2019-2043

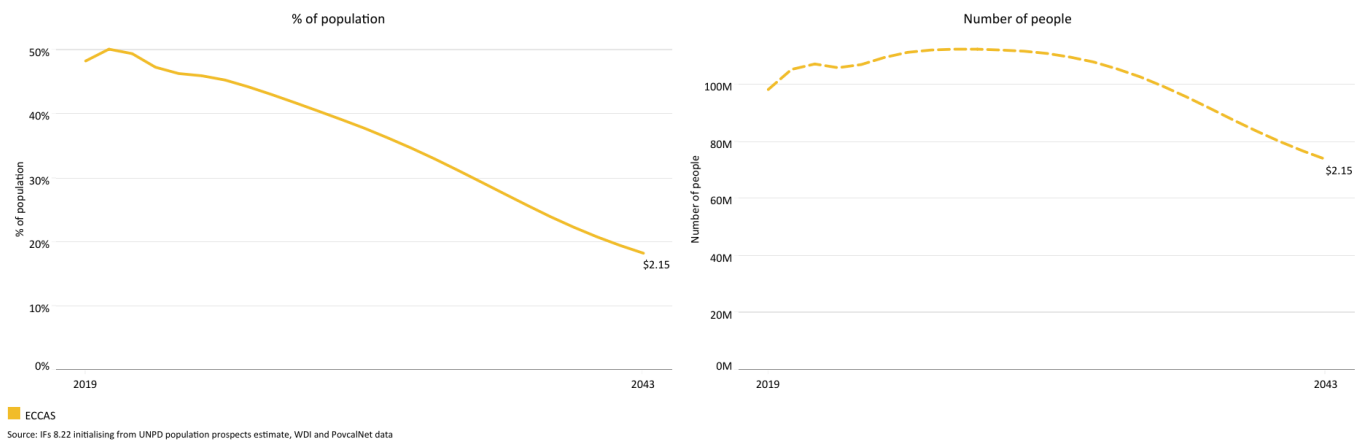


Chart 8 presents the Current Path for extreme poverty as per cent and total numbers of the population, from 2019 to 2043.

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 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 \$2.15 a day poverty rate by identifying who is multidimensionally poor and also shows 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.<sup>[x]</sup>

According to the [2016 Multidimensional Poverty Assessment](#), about 10.8% of people considered multidimensionally poor in sub-Saharan Africa are living in Central Africa.

In 2023, approximately 107.6 million people, or 46.6% of the total ECCAS population, lived below the poverty line of US\$2.15. This figure is set to decline to 73.9 million by 2043, representing 18% of the total population.

Poverty levels vary significantly among member countries. Burundi has the highest extreme poverty rate in the region, with 71.9% of its citizens living below the poverty line. It is followed by the Central African Republic, where 65% of citizens



live in poverty, DR Congo with 62.9%, and the Republic of the Congo with 50%. These countries lag behind due to a variety of factors such as political instability, conflict, lack of infrastructure, limited access to education and healthcare, and dependence on natural resources. Gabon has the lowest poverty rate in the region at 1.7%, followed by Equatorial Guinea and São Tomé and Príncipe, with poverty rates of 8.5% and 17.5%, respectively. While the poverty forecasts for Equatorial Guinea and Gabon may not be entirely reliable, it is important to note that the World Bank classifies these two countries as upper-middle-income due to their oil and gas revenues. Despite this classification, their general development profiles are comparable to lower-middle-income or low-income countries.

By 2043, the Central African Republic will have the highest extreme poverty rate, with 65.3% living below the poverty line, followed by Burundi with 38.4% and Chad with 24.7%.

Chart 9: Regional Development Plan of ECCAS



« La CEEAC à la croisée des chemins : vers l'intégration de l'Afrique centrale »

PLAN STRATÉGIQUE INDICATIF À MOYEN TERME (2021-2025) DE LA COMMUNAUTÉ ÉCONOMIQUE DES ÉTATS DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE (CEEAC)



Chart 9 shows the Regional Development Plan.

ECCAS has undergone **institutional** reforms, elevating its main executive body to the status of a Commission in December 2019. The institution's vision is to *foster a peaceful, secure, and stable region through sustainable development, good governance, improved living conditions, freedom, and justice.*

The Community aims to foster cooperation and regional integration among its member states in Central Africa. Its objectives encompass political, security, economic, monetary, financial, social, cultural, scientific and technical spheres, striving for collective self-reliance, improved living standards, economic stability, peaceful relations and contributions to

African development.

To achieve these goals, it has prioritised six key areas for integration:

- Peace and Security
- Economic Integration
- Physical Connectivity
- Sustainable Development
- Social Welfare
- Institutional Reform

## Donors and sponsors



### Reuse our work

- All visualizations, data, and text produced by African Futures are completely open access under the [Creative Commons BY license](#). You have the permission to use, distribute, and reproduce these in any medium, provided the source and authors are credited.
- The data produced by third parties and made available by African Futures is subject to the license terms from the original third-party authors. We will always indicate the original source of the data in our documentation, so you should always check the license of any such third-party data before use and redistribution.
- All of our charts [can be embedded](#) in any site.

### Cite this research

Tumi Mkhize-Malebo (2025) ECCAS. Published online at [futures.issafrica.org](https://futures.issafrica.org). Retrieved from <https://futures.issafrica.org/geographic/recs/eccas/> [Online Resource] Updated 03 December 2024.



## About the authors

Ms Tumi Mkhize-Malebo is Research Officer in the AFI team. She joined the ISS in May 2023. Before that, Tumi worked as an operations intern at Uber. She holds a Bachelor's degree in economics and econometrics from the University of Johannesburg and an Honours degree in economics from the University of South Africa.

## About African Futures & Innovation

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.