



# Gambia

## Gambia: Current Path

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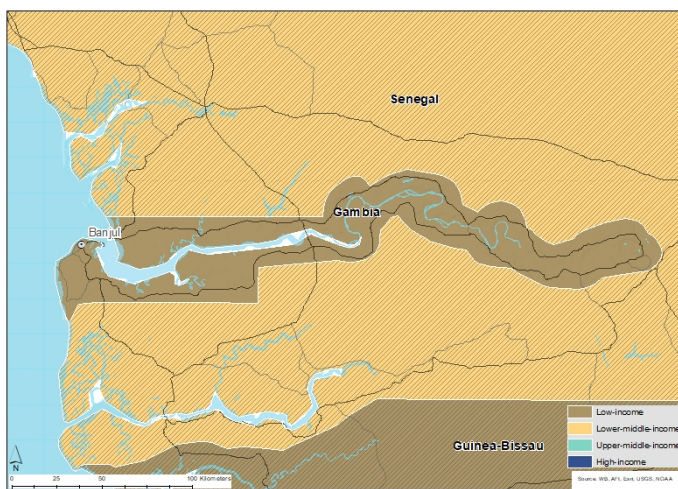
## Gambia: Current Path

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### Gambia: Current Path forecast

Chart 1: Political map of The Gambia



This page provides an overview of the key characteristics of The Gambia 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.

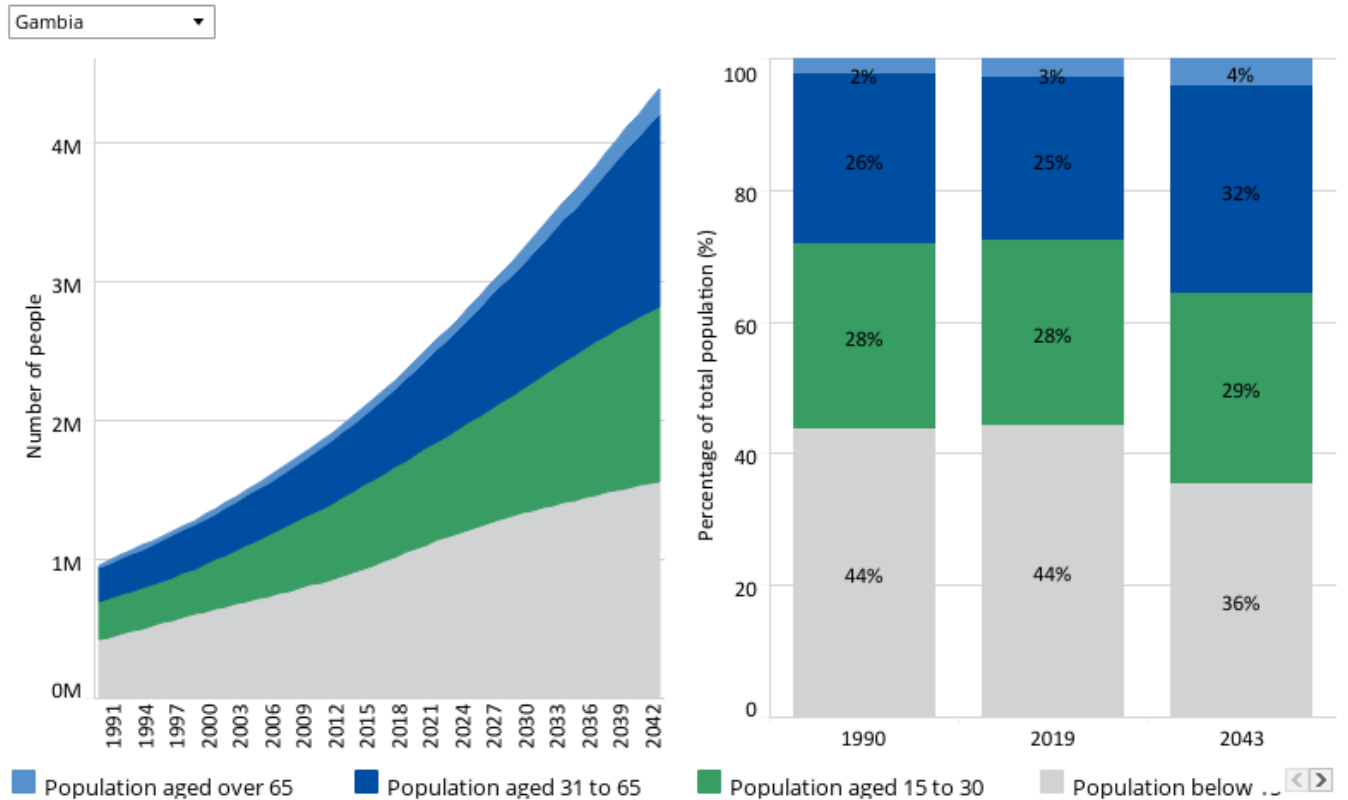
The Gambia is one of 23 low-income countries in Africa. It is the smallest mainland African country and is surrounded by Senegal, except for its western coast on the Atlantic Ocean. The Gambia is a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and has a total area of 11,295 km<sup>2</sup> and is less than 50 km<sup>2</sup> wide. The climate is generally of a tropical nature, like in the neighbouring country of Senegal, with a hot and rainy season and a cooler but drier season. The Gambia contains three terrestrial ecoregions: Guinean forest-savanna mosaic, West Sudanian savanna and Guinean mangroves. Administratively, The Gambia is divided into eight local government areas, including the national capital, Banjul. The local government areas are further subdivided into 48 districts. Although Banjul is the capital city of the country, the largest cities are Serekunda and Brikama. The current estimate of the total population of The Gambia is around 2.4 million people. The country is blessed with some natural resources including fish, clay, silica sand, titanium (rutile and ilmenite), tin and zircon. It also exports some agricultural products like peanuts, fish, cashew nuts, mango, various vegetables and sesame. The Gambia River, which passes through the country, is one of the most important waterways in Africa, and it is the only river in Africa that is navigable by ocean-going vessels all year round. The Gambia River is also an important fishing ground for Gambians, enabling oyster harvesting.



## Demographics: Current Path

### Chart 2: Population structure in CP, 1990–2043

By cohort and % of population



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

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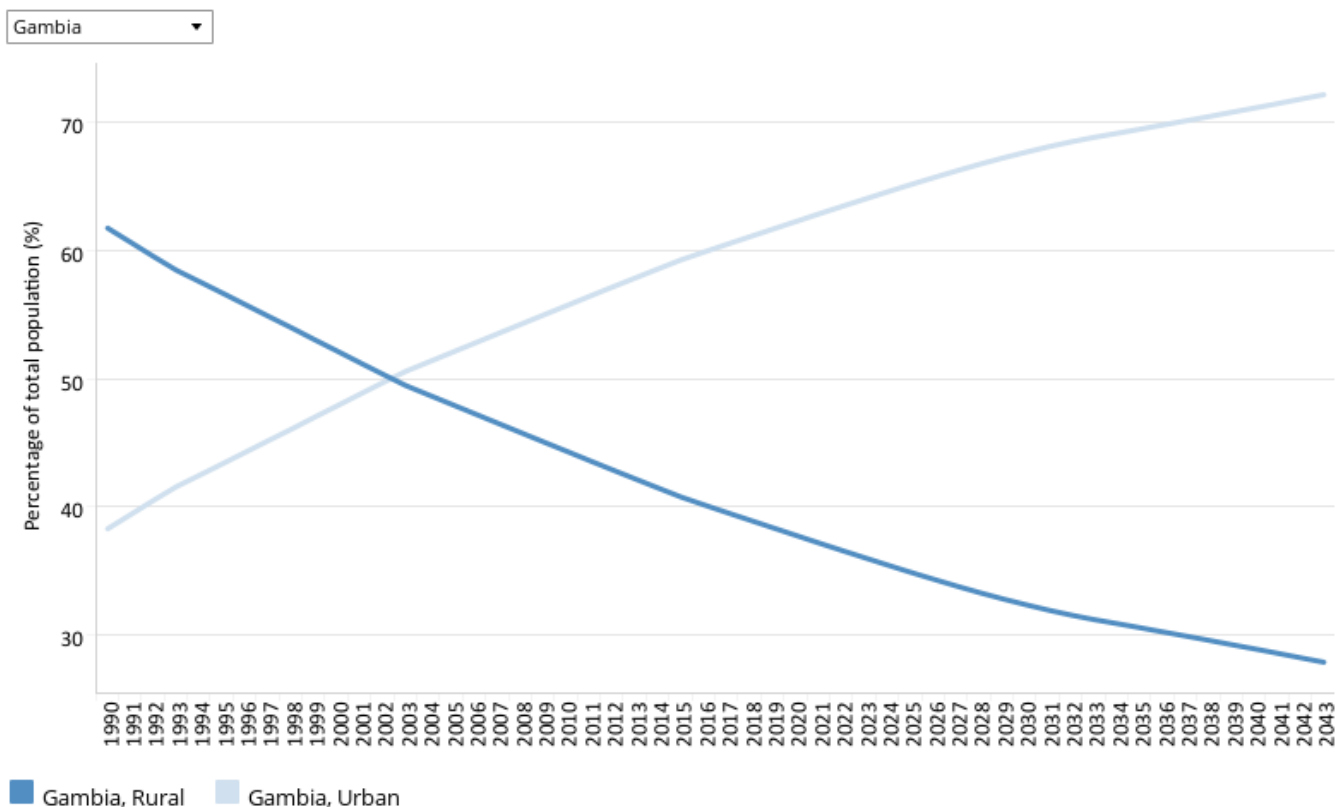
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The Gambia is the 14th most populous country in West Africa, and the 42nd most populous in Africa, with an estimated population of 2.4 million in 2019 from about 1 million in 1990. This represents an increase of 147% in the country's population over the past 29 years. In the Current Path forecast, the population of The Gambia is forecasted to increase to 4.4 million in 2043, representing an approximate increase of 85.9% within the 24-year period. The slower pace of the population growth rate within this period can be attributed to the adoption of improved birth control methods such as the use of contraceptives. The Gambia has a large youthful population with a youth bulge (defined as the ratio of the population between the ages of 15 and 29 to the total adult population) of 50.3% and a median age of 17.6 years in 2019. The youth bulge will remain above 40% in the Current Path forecast horizon. This large youth bulge raises concerns about youth unemployment in the country. Indeed, this is already evident as it is estimated that unemployment among youth aged 15–34 years is around 35%. It is significant to note, however, that there have been some efforts to address the issue; for instance, one of the strategic priorities of the National Development Plan 2018-2021 was youth empowerment through creating employment opportunities and entrepreneurial skills for Gambian youth. In the Tekki-Fi project, a number of vocational training institutes were improved to provide skill-based training to youths and to provide them initial seed money to start their own businesses.

In addition, 44.3% of the population is below the age of 15 years and 28% under the age of 30 years. The relatively large cohort of children under the age of 15 constrains the materialisation of the demographic dividend. With an expected decline in the fertility rate from 5.1 births per woman in 2019 to 3.6 births in 2043, it is projected that the proportion of people below the age of 15 years will fall to 35.5% over the next 24 years. This signals the likelihood of a more adult

population, increasing the share of people under the age of 64 years from 24.9% in 2019 to 31.6% in 2043 as well as raising the median age to 22 years. The average life expectancy in The Gambia was 68.9 years in 2019 but is estimated to increase to 75.2 years in 2043. The main causes of death in The Gambia are the high disease burden emanating from communicable and non-communicable diseases. With an expected decline in communicable diseases over the period, life expectancy is also projected to increase.

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

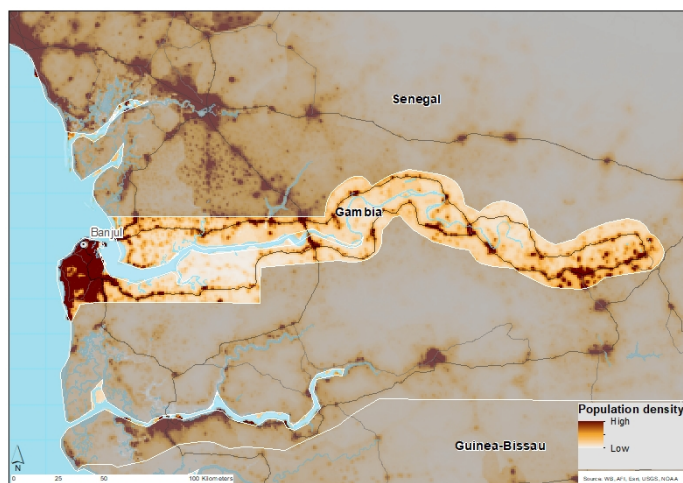


Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN World Urbanization Prospects estimate

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In 1990, the majority of Gambians (over 71% of the population) resided in rural areas. However, by 2003, the country had achieved parity in urban–rural settlement so that in 2019, the proportion of people that resided in rural areas increased to 61.6%, representing a 23.3 percentage point increase from the 1990 figures. The high rate of urbanisation in the country was largely due to young people migrating from the rural areas to the national capital and other urban centres in pursuit of work. The movement of many young women from rural areas in search of domestic work in urban centres could explain this trend. On the Current Path, it is projected that about 72.1% of the Gambian population will live in the urban areas by 2043. This will be far above the projected average of 40.7% for low-income African countries within the same period.

Chart 4: Population density map for 2019



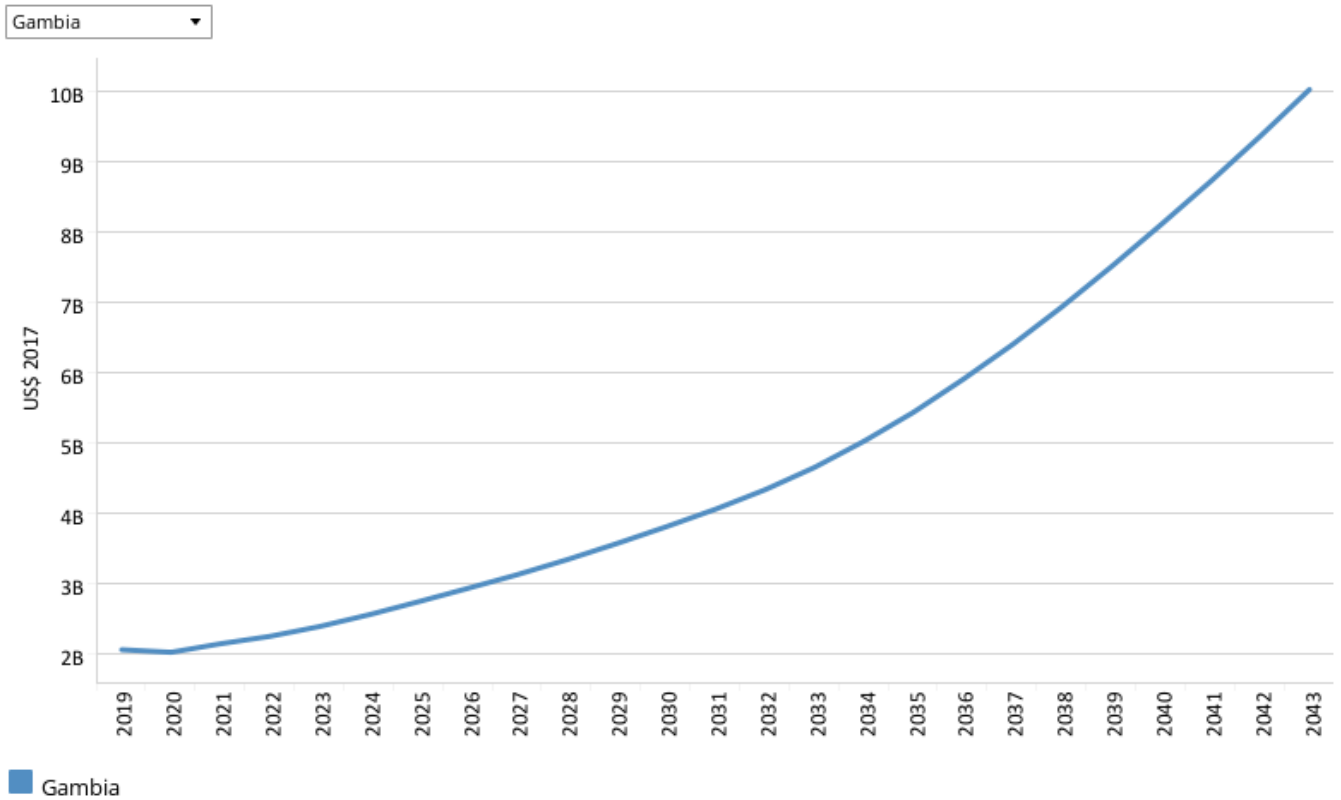
The entire population of The Gambia is settled on a total land area of approximately 11 295 km<sup>2</sup>. In 2019, The Gambia was the most densely populated country in West Africa and the 5th most densely populated country in Africa. The population density of The Gambia is estimated to be about 2.3 people per hectare, which is far higher than the average of 0.45 for Africa and 0.65 for West Africa. The population distribution of The Gambia is highly influenced by access to the capital city Banjul which is the hub for trade, commerce, education, healthcare and centre for government business. The areas that are most densely populated in the country are Banjul, Kanifing Municipal Council and Kombo North. Areas that are less densely populated include Kiang West in Lower River Division, Foni Bondali in Western Division and Sami in Central River Division.



## Economics: Current Path

### Chart 5: GDP in CP, 1990–2043

Market exchange rates



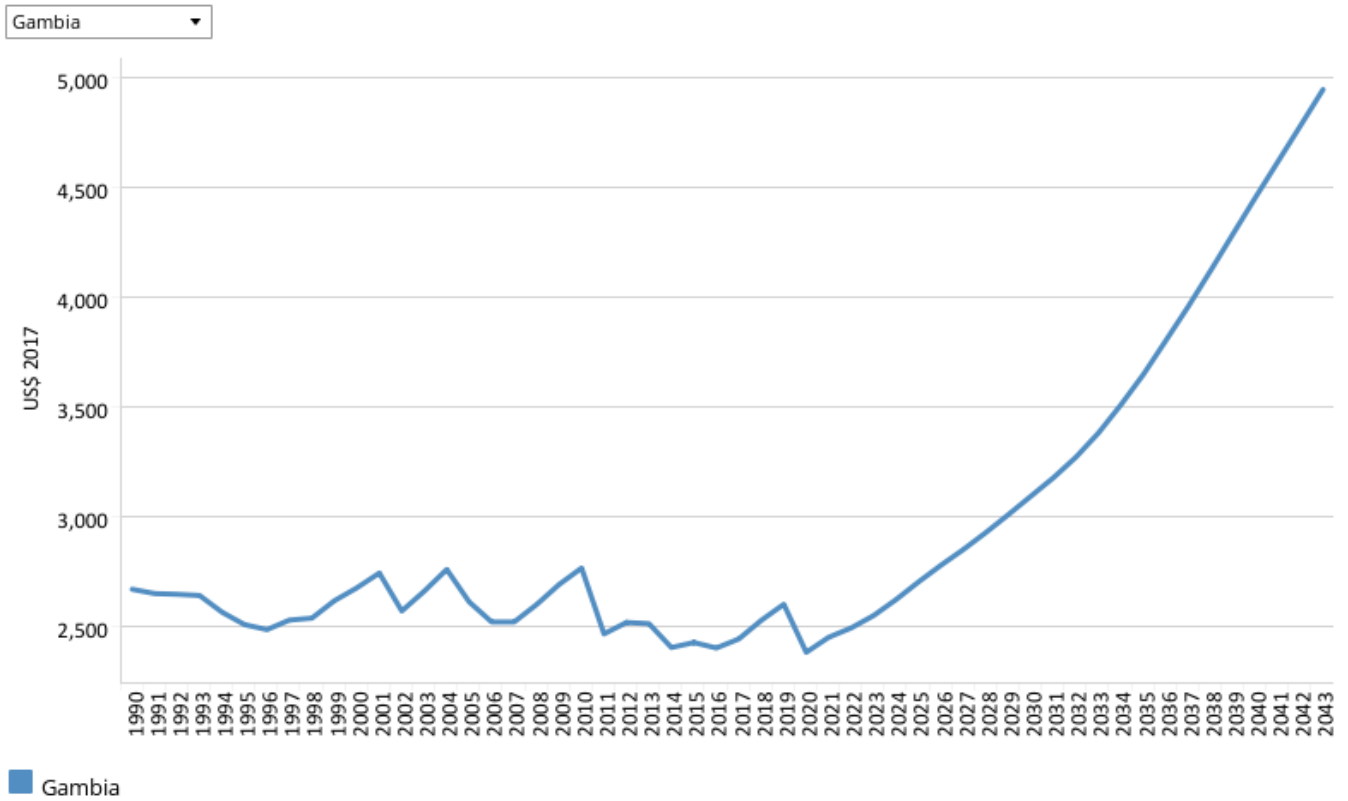
Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook database

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The main drivers of the Gambian economy are agriculture and tourism, which constitute the country's major sources of foreign exchange earnings. The GDP of The Gambia has increased by nearly US\$1.2 billion from US\$0.9 billion in 1990 to US\$2.1 billion in 2019, representing an increase of 133% over the 29-year period. The Gambia suffered years of economic mismanagement under the 22-year rule of their former leader, President Yahya Jammeh. Nonetheless, some positive economic gains were recorded during that era: from 2005 to 2010, the economy recorded steady positive economic growth with an average annual growth of 6%–7%. However, the period 2010 to 2016 witnessed a sharp deterioration of the Gambian economy due to multiple shocks. The average GDP growth within this period was about -1%. This was due, first, to the failure of the agriculture sector as a result of a drought that led to a slump in GDP growth in 2011. The GDP consequently fell to 3.3% in 2012. Second, the Ebola crisis negatively impacted The Gambia's tourism sector, which was a strong contributor to the GDP. Over the next 22 years, The Gambia's GDP is estimated to almost quintuple to US\$10 billion from the 2019 figure. The greater increase in the GDP reflects the higher economic growth expected to occur within the next 22 years compared to previous years.

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

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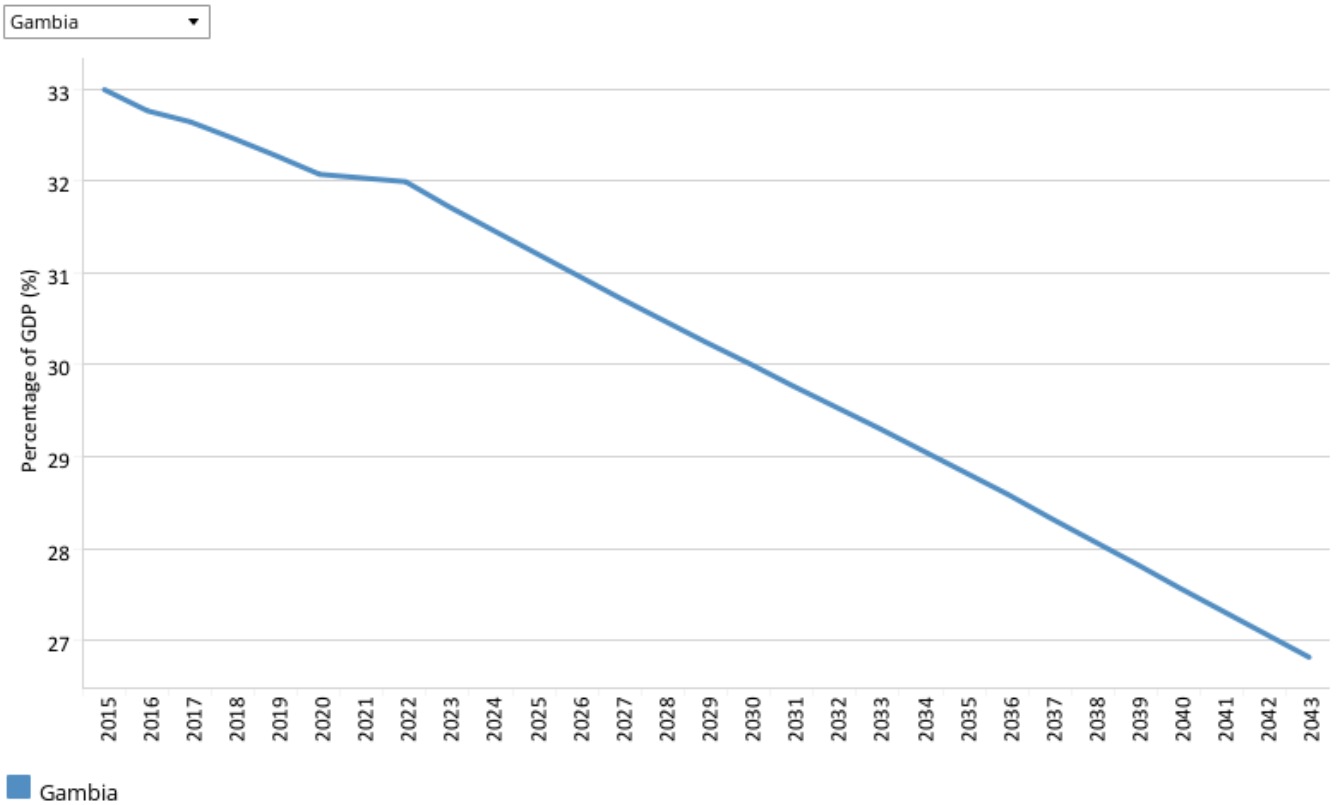
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Although many of the charts in the sectoral scenarios also include GDP per capita, this overview is an essential point of departure for interpreting the general economic outlook of [The Gambia].

The Gambia's GDP per capita in the past has been very unstable, fluctuating between US\$2 400 and US\$2 765 in the period 1990 to 2019. From 1990, the country's GDP per capita stood at US\$2 668 and eventually moved to a peak of US\$2 765 before declining to US\$2 600 in 2019. The marginal decline in GDP per capita represents the relatively slower growth rate of GDP compared to population over the period. However, with the anticipated increase in GDP and the decline in fertility rates, it is projected that GDP per capita will rise over the next 24 years, such that by 2043, The Gambia's GDP per capita will increase to US\$4 950, constituting a 90.4% increase over the period. Throughout the period under consideration, The Gambia's GDP per capita is higher than the projected average of US\$3 790 by 2043 for low-income countries in Africa. However, the gap in terms of GDP per capita between The Gambia and its income peers reduces from US\$1 535 in 1990 to US\$1 160 in 2043. This suggests that The Gambia either has a lower population growth rate or faster economic growth compared to the average low-income country in Africa.



Chart 7: Informal sector value in CP, 2015–2043  
% of GDP



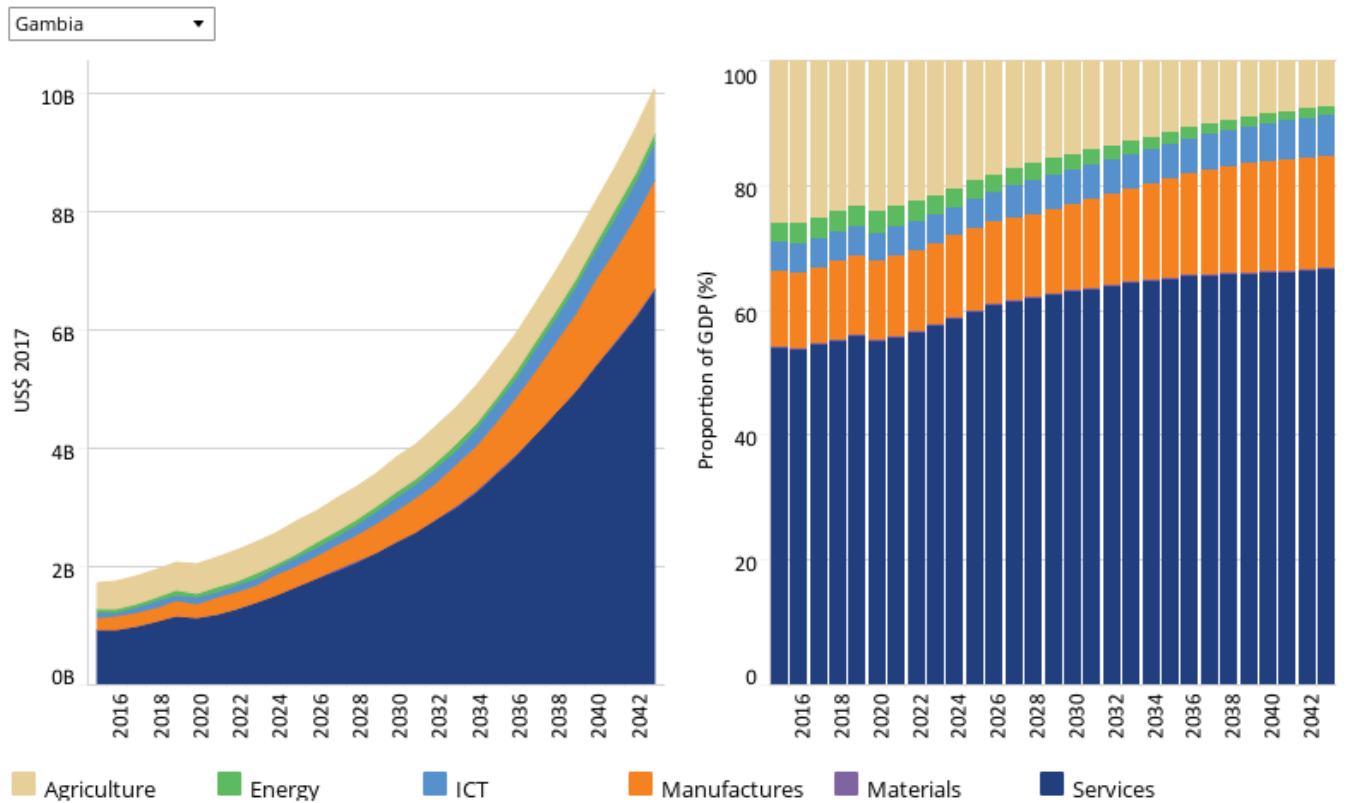
Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Economic Commission for Europe [2008]; Elgin and Oztunali [2012]; Schneider and Enste [2012]

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The size of the informal sector in The Gambia was equivalent to 32.3% of GDP in 2019, which was above the average of 30.1% for low-income countries in Africa. The majority of people employed within the informal sector in The Gambia are women, accounting for about 73.8% of the total workforce. The sector further accounts for 77% of all sole proprietorships in the country, with a significant number being micro, small, and medium enterprises. [1] The size of this economy is expected to decline to 26.8% by 2043, constituting a 5.5 percentage point decrease over the 24-year period. In 2019, the total number of people employed by the informal economy constituted 60.2% of the total labour force; this is however expected to decline to 49.1% in 2043. It is therefore not surprising that the level of informality will also decline within the same period.

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



Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook database

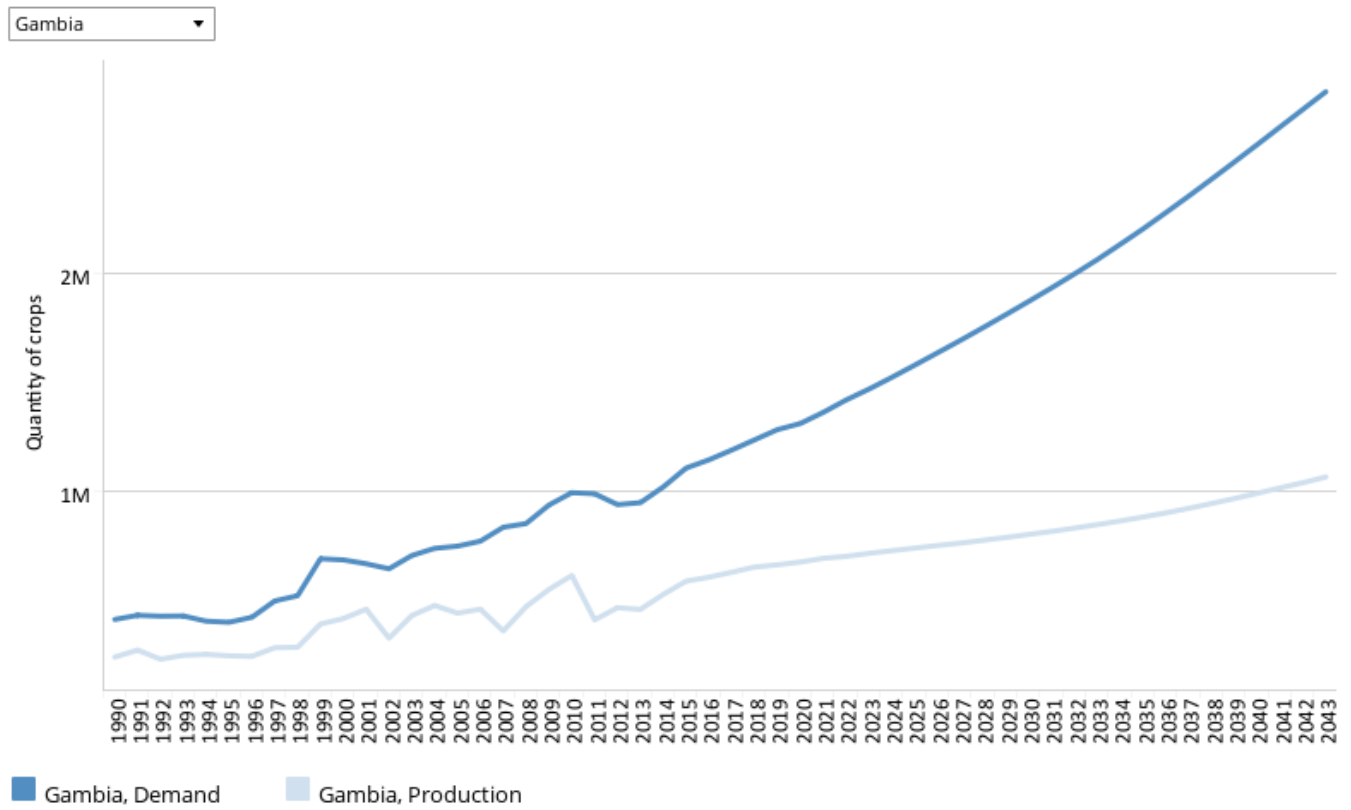
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The IFs platform uses data from the Global Trade and Analysis Project (GTAP) to classify economic activity into six sectors: agriculture, energy, materials (including mining), manufactures, services and information and communications technology (ICT). Most other sources use a threefold distinction between only agriculture, industry and services with the result that data may differ.

The three largest contributors to GDP in The Gambia are the service, agriculture and manufacturing sectors respectively. In 2019, the contribution of the service sector to GDP was about US\$1.2 billion, representing 56% of GDP, and it is expected to increase to US\$6.7 billion by 2043, representing 66.4% of GDP. The agricultural sector, which employs about 37.7% of the total labour force, is currently the second largest contributor to GDP with a share of 23.3%, constituting about US\$0.5 billion in 2019. Manufacturing is the third most significant contributor to GDP, with a share of 12.6%. However, it is expected that by 2032, the manufacturing sector will overtake the agricultural sector as the second largest contributor to GDP, so that by 2043, the manufacturing sector will contribute 10.6 percentage points more to GDP than agriculture, indicating the structural transformation of the economy.

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



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.

The average crop yield in The Gambia is very low: it was estimated at 1.2 metric tons per hectare in 2019. In 1990, The Gambia's demand for agricultural products outstripped domestic production by 0.17 million metric tons; this increased to 0.62 million metric tons in 2019. This can partly be attributed to the declining interest in the agricultural sector reflected in the falling share of total employment. From 1990 to 2019, the sector's share of total employment reduced significantly by 10 percentage points from 37.7% to 27.7%. The decline in interest in farming is due to lack of fertilisers and farming tools and the insufficient demand for farm produce. Farmers depend heavily on government supplies of fertilisers, tools and effective demand for their produce, and government failure to meet any of the two results in a failed season. Although the yield per hectare for crops is expected to increase from 1.2 metric tons in 2019 to 1.6 metric tons in 2043, the gap between demand and production will widen. By 2043, demand will outstrip domestic production by about 1.8 million metric tons, representing a 185% increase over the period, and growing concerns about food security.

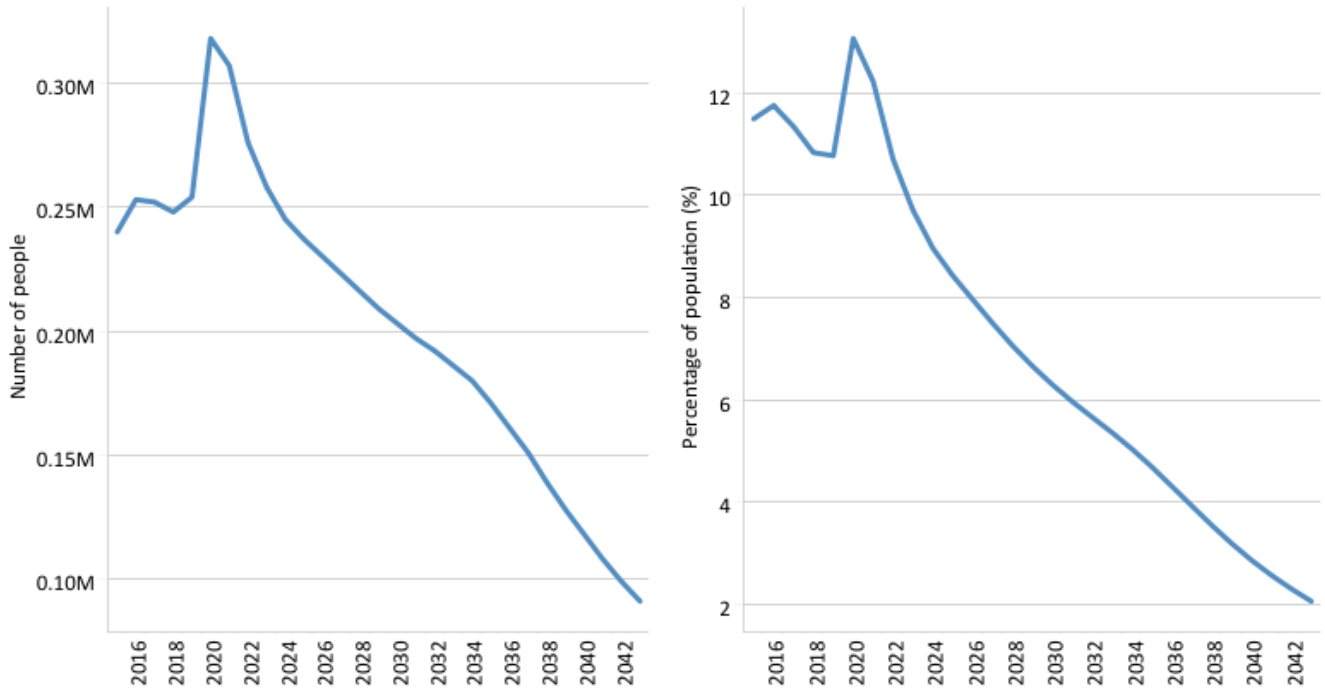


## Poverty: Current Path

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



Gambia \$1.90



Gambia

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 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 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 Gambia uses the US\$1.90 benchmark as the poverty line. As of 2019, there were over 0.25 million people, constituting about 10.8% of the Gambian population, who lived in extreme poverty. However, there are disparities in the poverty levels between rural and urban areas in the country. Poverty levels are higher in the rural areas compared to the urban centres. According to The Gambia Bureau of Statistics Integrated Household Survey of 2015/16, while urban poverty was about 8.4%, rural poverty was as high as 35.9%. Most poor people in rural areas work in the agricultural and fishery sectors, whereas most of the poor people in urban centres work in the informal sector; these

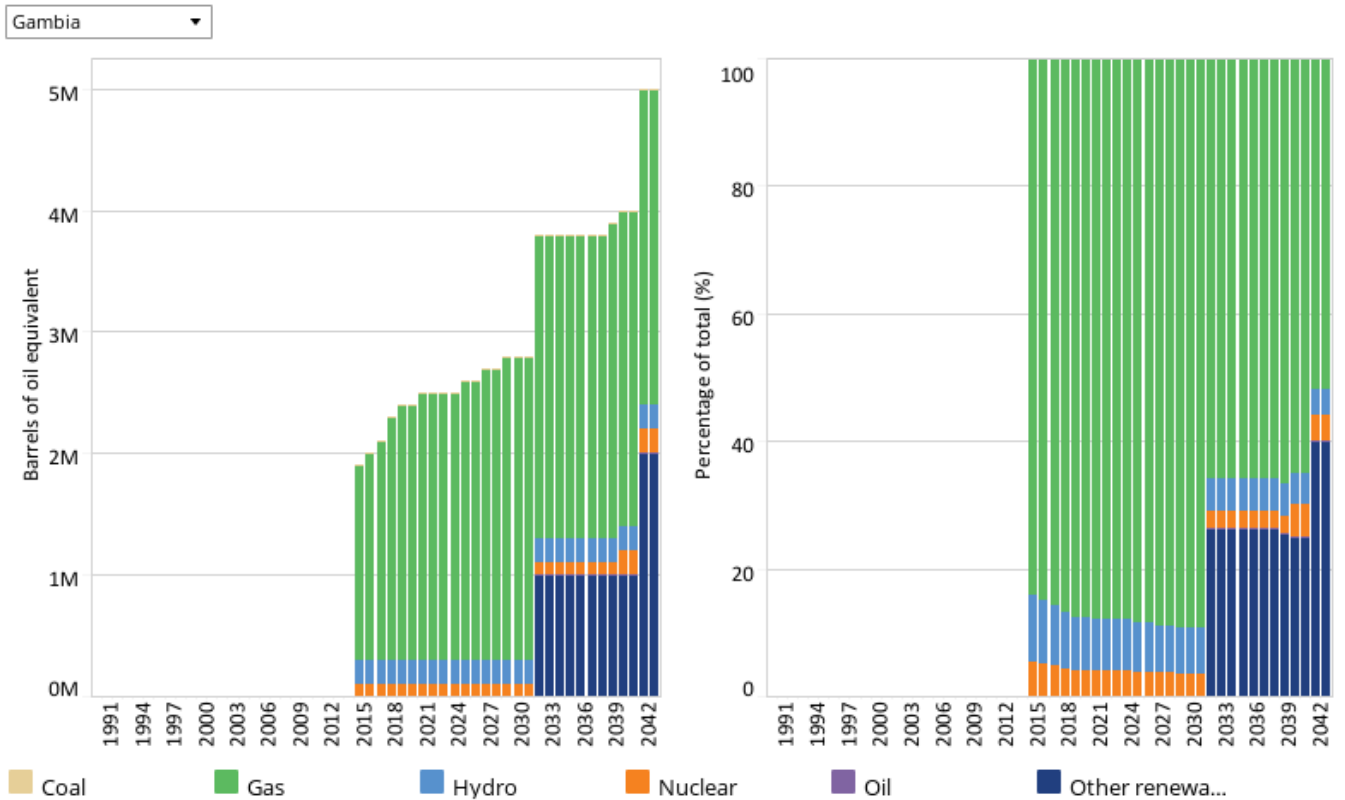


were also mostly concentrated in the local government area of Brikama. By 2030, the proportion of people in extreme poverty is projected to be 6.3% meaning that The Gambia will miss the SDG Goal 1 target of eliminating extreme poverty. On the Current Path, it is projected that the absolute number of poor people in The Gambia will decline to 90 000 people by 2043. This represents just about 2.1% of the population, meaning that the extreme poverty rate in Gambia will be 8.7 percentage points lower and the absolute number of poor people will be 0.16 million fewer than it was in 2019. Throughout the period under consideration (2019–2043), the proportion of poor people in The Gambia is far lower than the average for low-income countries in Africa such that by 2043, the extreme poverty rate in The Gambia will be 23.1 percentage points below the projected average for low-income countries in Africa. This relatively low level of poverty can partly be attributed to the implementation of several poverty reduction reforms such as the first Strategy for Poverty Alleviation (SPA I) in 1994, The Gambia Vision 2020, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, and the National Development Plan 2018–2021. These have contributed to the declining levels of poverty in the country.



## Carbon Emissions/Energy: Current Path

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



Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from World Energy Outlook data

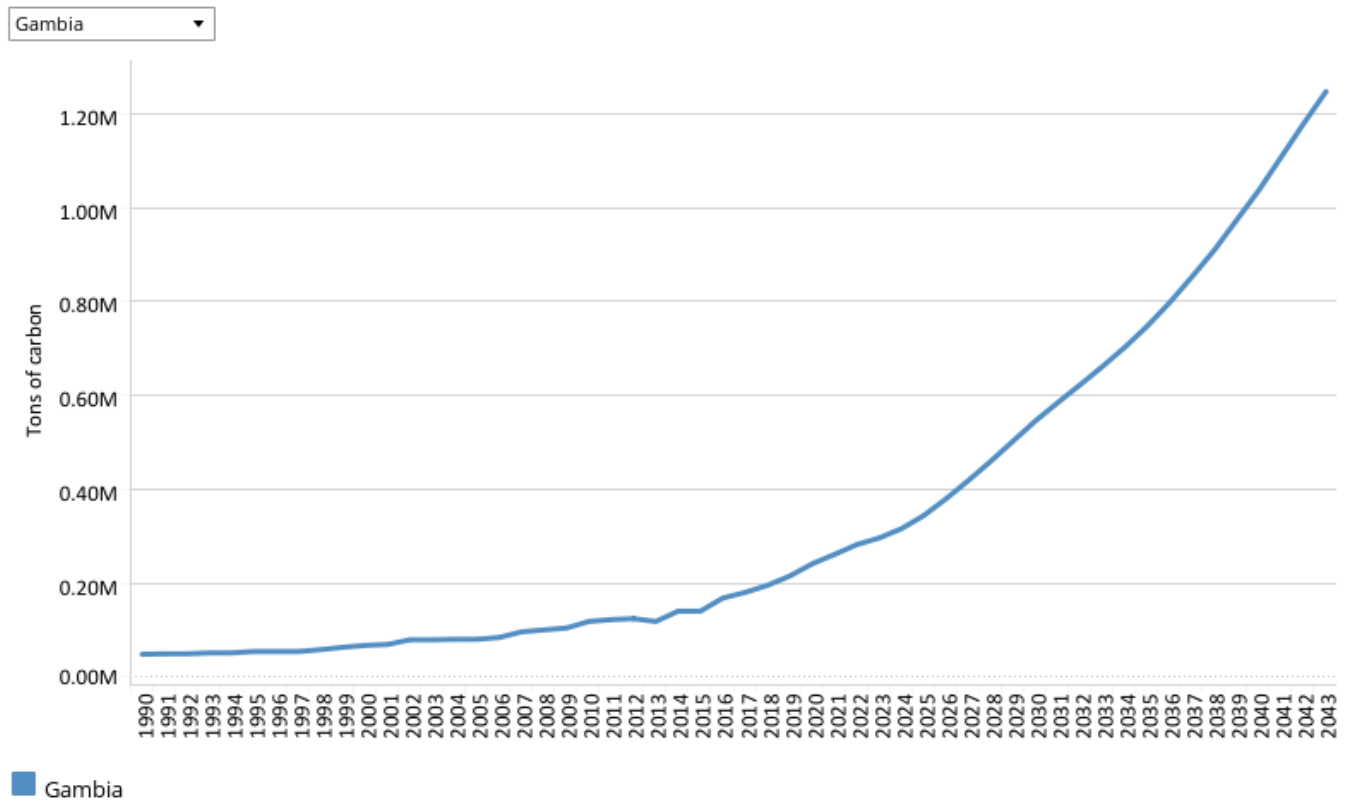
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The IFs platform forecasts six types of energy, namely oil, gas, coal, hydro, nuclear and other renewables. To allow comparisons between different types of energy, the data is converted into billion barrels of oil equivalent (BBOE). The energy contained in a barrel of oil is approximately 5.8 million British thermal units (MBTUs) or 1 700 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of energy.

Gas is the dominant energy produced in The Gambia. In 2019, total production of gas amounted to 2.5 million BOE, representing 87.5% of total energy production in the country. However, the share of gas in total energy production is estimated to decline to 52% in 2043. Likewise, the share of hydro in total energy production is projected to decline from 8.3% in 2019 to 4% in 2043. Although nuclear energy production in the country will marginally increase from 0.1 million BOE in 2019 to 0.2 million BOE in 2043, its share in total energy production will slightly decline from 4.2% to 4% within the same period. From 2032, it is expected that the country will begin production of other renewable energies such as solar and wind energies, which will constitute 40% of total energy production, amounting to 2 million BOE, in 2043.

**Chart 12: Carbon emissions in CP, 1990–2043**  
 Million tons of carbon (note, not CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent)



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 (CO<sub>2</sub>), carbon monoxide (CO) and methane (CH<sub>4</sub>). Since each has a different molecular weight, IFs uses carbon. Many other sites and calculations use CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent.

The Gambia is one of the countries in Africa with significantly low levels of carbon emissions. Regardless, carbon emissions are projected to increase steadily from nearly zero in 1990 to 1 million tons in 2043 on the Current Path. Lower levels of carbon emissions in the country may be as a result of measures taken by the Gambian government such as introducing agroforestry and improved soil management, adopting solar and wind energy for rural electrification, as well as recovering gases from composite waste and landfills. [2]

## Endnotes

1. The Republic of the Gambia, *Decent work country programme: The Gambia 2015–2017*
2. World Agroforestry, *Gambia takes a stand on reducing emissions*, 27 May 2015

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## About the authors

Mr Enoch Randy Aikins joined the AFI in May 2021. Before that, Enoch was a research and programmes officer at the Institute for Democratic Governance in Accra. 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. He has an MPhil in economics from the University of Ghana, Legon.

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