



Liberia

Liberia: Current Path

Enoch Randy Aikins

Last updated 13 December 2023 using IFs v7.63

Table of contents

Liberia: Current Path	3
Liberia: Current Path forecast	3
Demographics: Current Path	5
Economics: Current Path	8
Poverty: Current Path	13
Carbon Emissions/Energy: Current Path	15
Endnotes	17
Donors and Sponsors	17
Reuse our work	17
Cite this research	17

Liberia: Current Path

- [Liberia: Current Path forecast](#)
- [Demographics: Current Path](#)
- [Economics: Current Path](#)
- [Poverty: Current Path](#)
- [Carbon Emissions/Energy: Current Path](#)



Liberia: Current Path forecast

Chart 1: Political map of Liberia



This page provides an overview of the key characteristics of Liberia 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.

Liberia is a low-income country in Africa, bordered by Sierra Leone to the northwest, Guinea to the north, Ivory Coast to

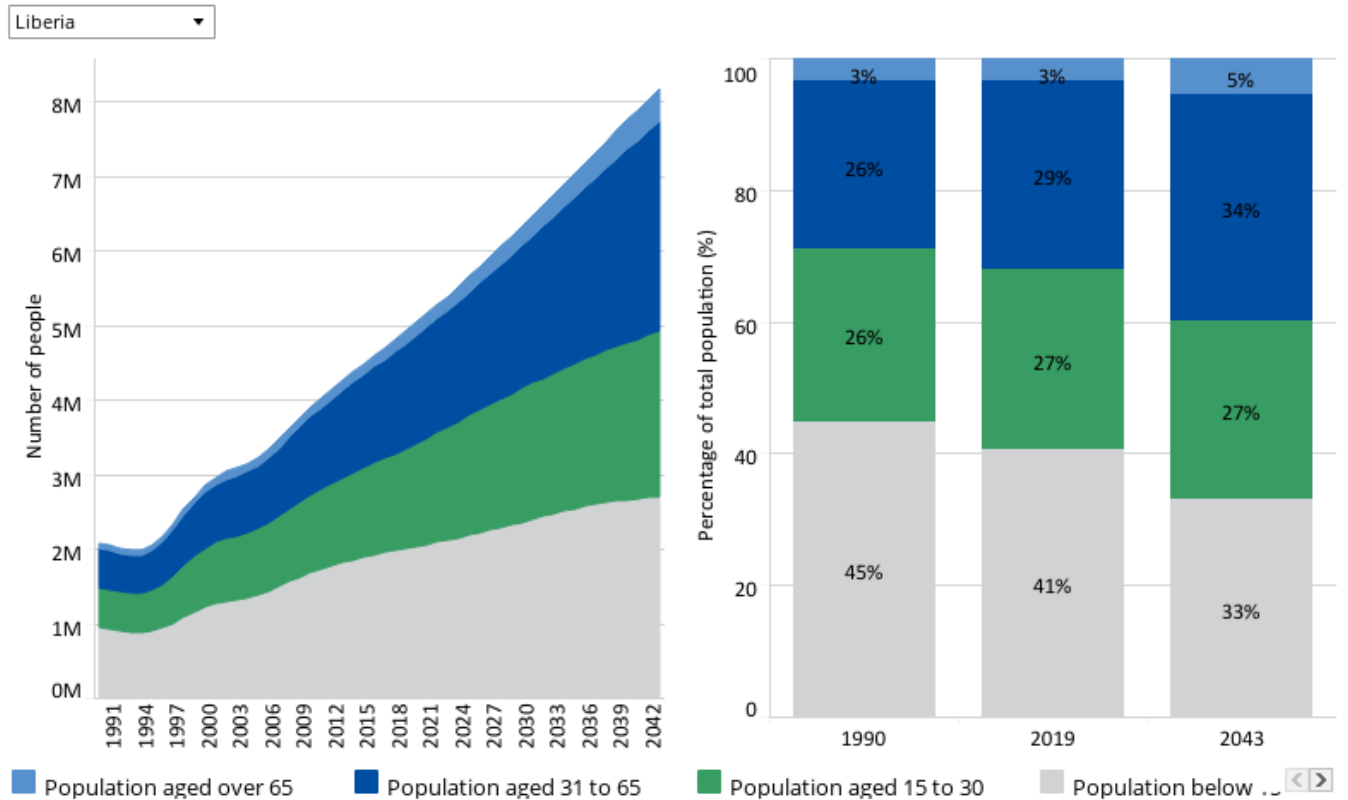
the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the southwest. Liberia is a member of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) as well as the regional and political union of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The capital city is Monrovia, and though English is the official language of the country, there is significant ethnic diversity with over 20 other indigenous languages spoken. Geographically, Liberia covers an area of 111 369 km² and as of 2021, is estimated to have a population of a little over 5.2 million. In terms of climate, Liberia has an equatorial climate, with high year-round temperatures and generally heavy rainfall from May to October. Between November and March, however, harmattan winds are predominant. Four terrestrial ecoregions lie within Liberia's borders: Guinean montane forests, Western Guinean lowland forests, Guinean forest-savanna mosaic, and Guinean mangroves. Administratively, Liberia is divided into 15 counties, which in turn are subdivided into a total of 90 districts. Although Liberia produces natural rubber, rice, cassava, bananas and palm oil, it is one of the poorest countries in the world and relies heavily on foreign direct investments and foreign aid. Among its mineral deposits, gold, diamonds and iron ore are significant. [1] Timber is also an important export product of the country.



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

[View on Tableau Public](#)

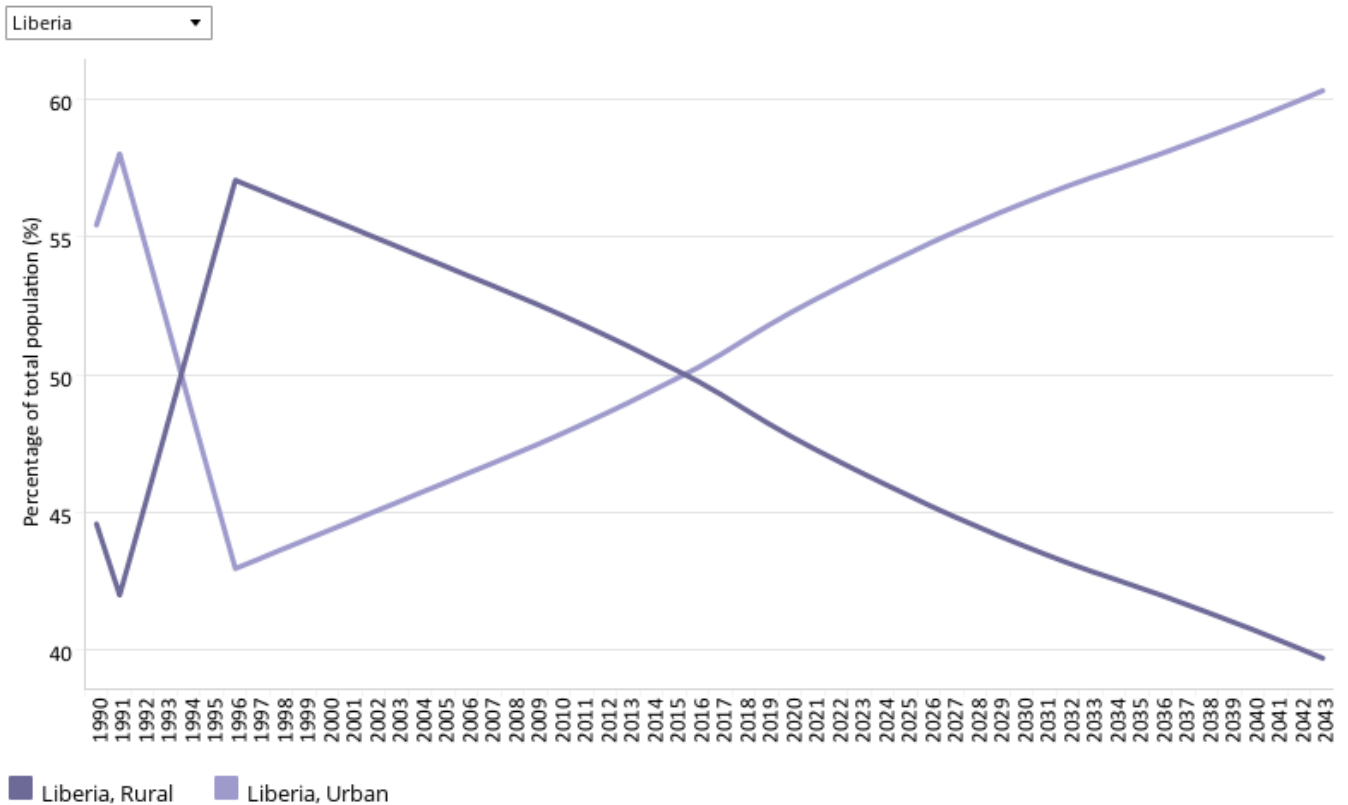
Navigation icons: back, forward, search, share, etc.

Liberia is the 12th most populous country in West Africa and the 37th most populous in Africa, with an estimated population of 4.9 million in 2019, up from 2.1 million in 1990. This represents an increase of 133% in the country's population over the past 29 years. In the Current Path forecast, the population of Liberia is projected to increase to 8.1 million by 2043, representing an approximate increase of 65% in the next 23 years. This relatively low increase in the population growth rate can be attributed to the adoption of improved birth control methods such as the use of modern contraceptives. Fertility rates have dropped from seven births per woman in 1985 to 4.4 births in 2019. The percentage of fertile women who use modern contraceptives is projected to increase from 31.3 in 2019 to 52.9 in 2043 in the Current Path forecast. Liberia has a large young sector of the population, with a youth bulge of 46.1% and a median age of 19.2 years in 2019. The youth bulge, defined as the ratio of the population between the ages of 15 and 29 to the total adult population, will remain above 40% across the Current Path forecast horizon. This large youth bulge presents an opportunity for a large labour force and human capital growth as well as youth activism in the country. However, it can equally serve as an existential threat for the country especially if the urgent needs of youth, such as employment opportunities, remain unaddressed, serving as fertile ground for conflict and instability. The Liberian government has made some effort to solve youth unemployment, including the Youth Opportunities Project that has supported over 14 000 young people as of June 2021. These youths are being provided business and life-skills training as well as subsidies to engage in communal farming.

In addition, 40.6% of the population is under the age of 15 years and 27.4% is 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 the expected

decline in the fertility rate from 4.4 births per woman in 2019 to 3 births in 2043, it is projected that the proportion of people below the age of 15 years will fall to 33% over the next 24 years. This signals the likelihood of a demographic transition, increasing the share of people under the age of 65 years from 28.6% in 2019 to 34.5% in 2043. The average life expectancy in Liberia was 64.7 years in 2019 but is estimated to increase to 72.2 years in 2043. The relatively low life expectancy is mainly due to a high disease burden as a result of communicable and non-communicable diseases. With an expected decline in communicable diseases by 2043, life expectancy is projected to increase within the period. However, rise in non-communicable diseases is predicted to continue undermining the increase in life expectancy.

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



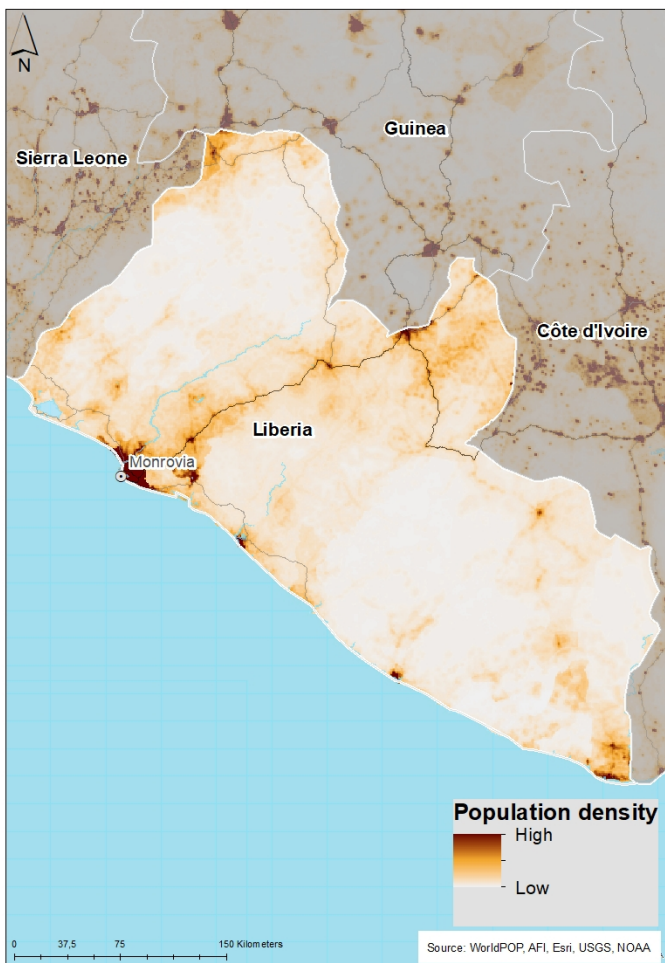
Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN World Urbanization Prospects estimate

[View on Tableau Public](#)

Navigation icons: back, forward, search, and share.

In 1990, over 55% of the population of Liberia resided in urban areas. The proportion of people residing in rural areas steadily declined from 64.8% in 1980 to 48.2% in 2019, achieving rural-urban parity in 2016. It is projected that by 2043, the percentage of people living in rural areas will decline even further to 39.7% of the population, signifying ongoing urbanisation. The increase in rural-urban migration is attributable to the over-concentration of infrastructure and social services in Monrovia, as the Liberian economy is Monrovia-centric. This has created large inequalities between Monrovia and other parts of the country regarding the provision of social amenities as well as employment and educational opportunities. The rapid rural to urban population growth in the country will put pressure on the existing social amenities and infrastructure in the capital and requires careful planning.

Chart 4: Population density map for 2019



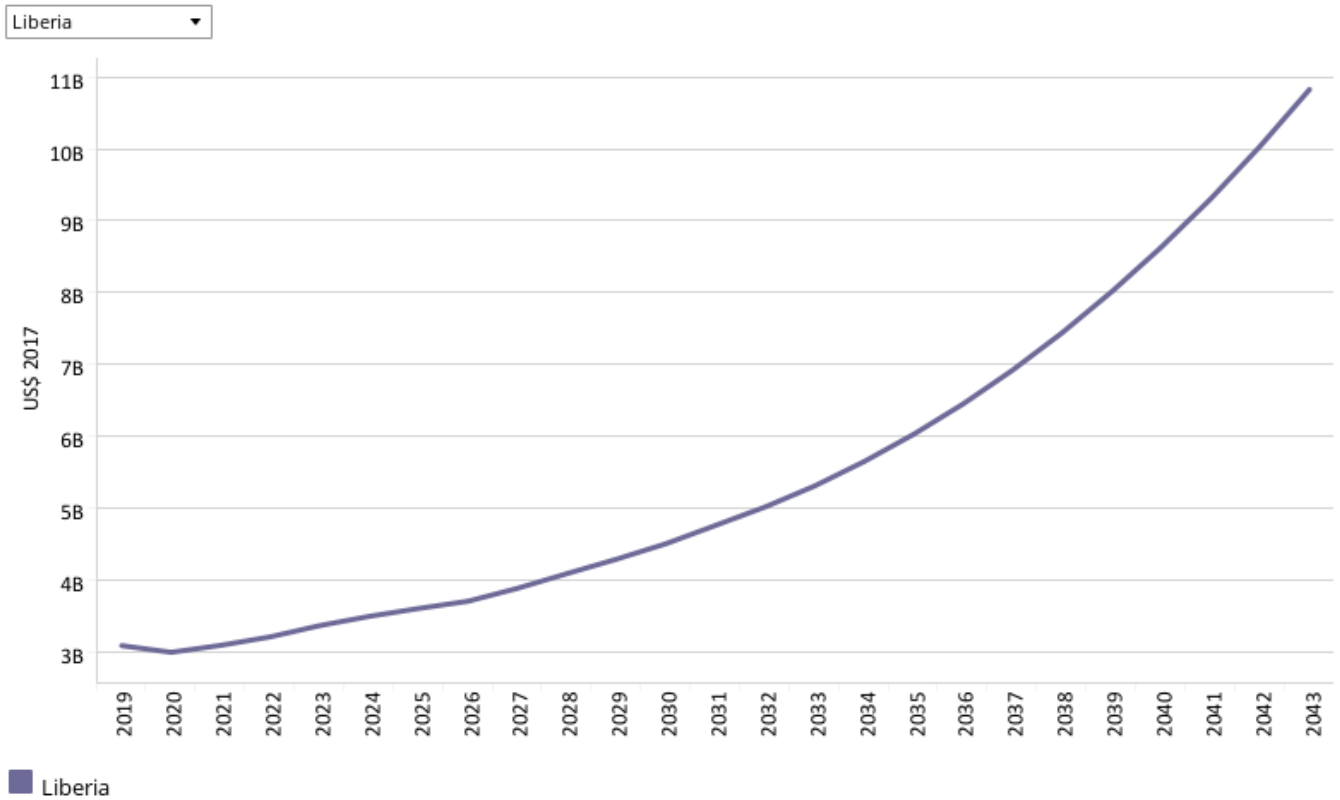
The vast majority of Liberia's population is sprawled throughout the Greater Monrovia District. Pockets of well-defined urban settlements are located next to the coast, including Greenville, Buchanan and Harper as well as next to the main road corridor leading from the coastal capital of Monrovia to Ganta on the border of Guinea. The country is just over 111 000 km² with an average density of 0.5 people per hectare. However, the density ranges from 28 people per hectare in densely built up areas to 1 person per hectare in the sparsely populated areas in the south. In the Current Path forecast, population density is likely to increase to 0.8 people per hectare.



Economics: Current Path

Chart 5: GDP in CP, 1990–2043

Market exchange rates



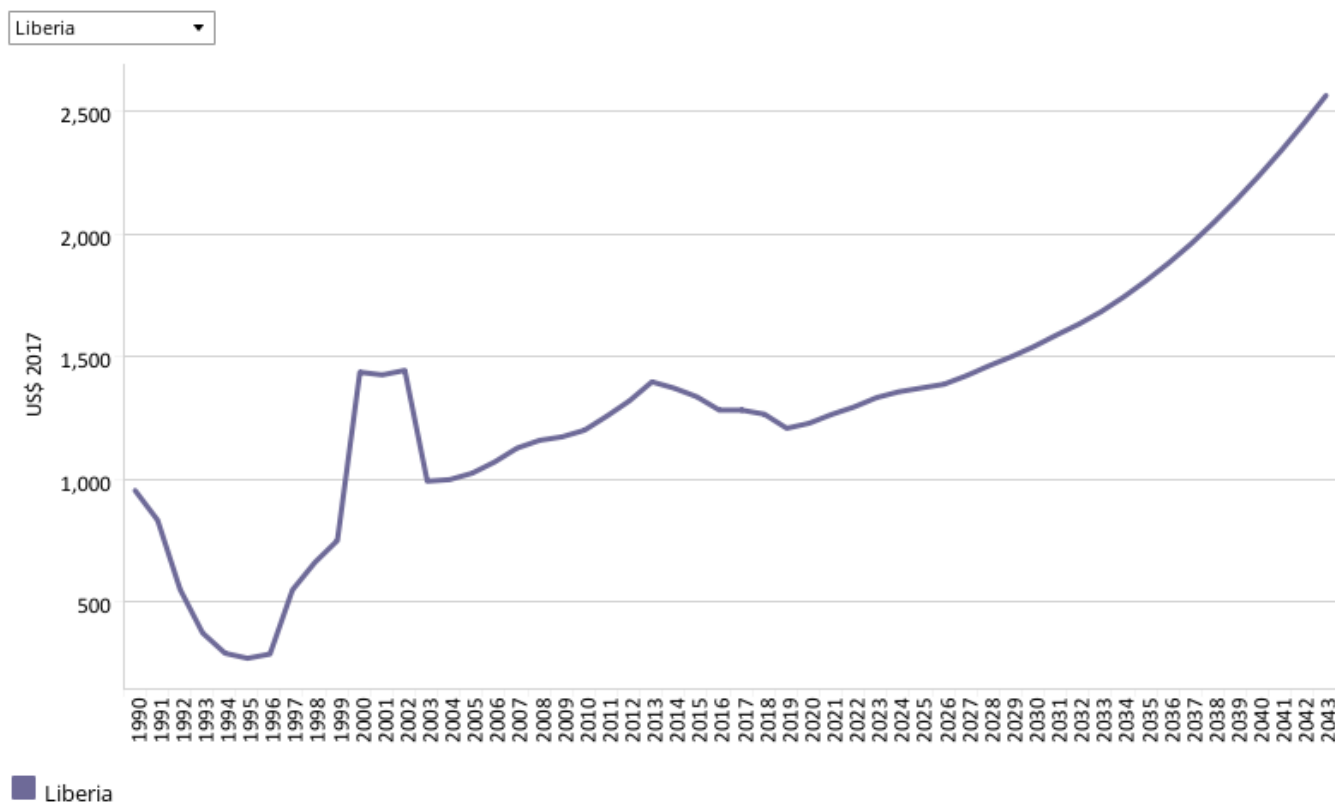
Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook database

[View on Tableau Public](#)

Navigation icons: Refresh, Previous, Next, Home, Print, Share

The GDP of Liberia doubled over the three decades from 1990 to 2019, growing from US\$1.6 billion to US\$3.2 billion. The slow growth in GDP within this period can mainly be attributed to the instability due to war in the country. Liberia had two major civil wars within this period: the first civil war from 1989 to 1996, and the second civil war from 1999 to 2003. During the first civil war, the Liberian economy was in recession, recording negative growth rates until 1996 when it started recovering and recording positive growth. This economic growth was interrupted between 2003 and 2004 mainly by a UN embargo placed on Liberia’s timber exports for their support of rebels of the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, which crippled the Liberian economy. However, after the return to constitutional rule in 2006, the country implemented reforms such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), Lift Liberia (2008–2011) and Agenda for Transformation, all aimed at economic recovery and sustained growth. This led to a period of stable growth until the Ebola crisis in 2014, which again had a disastrous impact on the economy. By 2019, a negative growth of the economy was recorded partly due to the weakness of the currency and the external sector. Over the next 22 years, Liberia’s GDP is estimated to more than triple growing to US\$10.8 billion by 2043. This increase in GDP reflects the greater 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

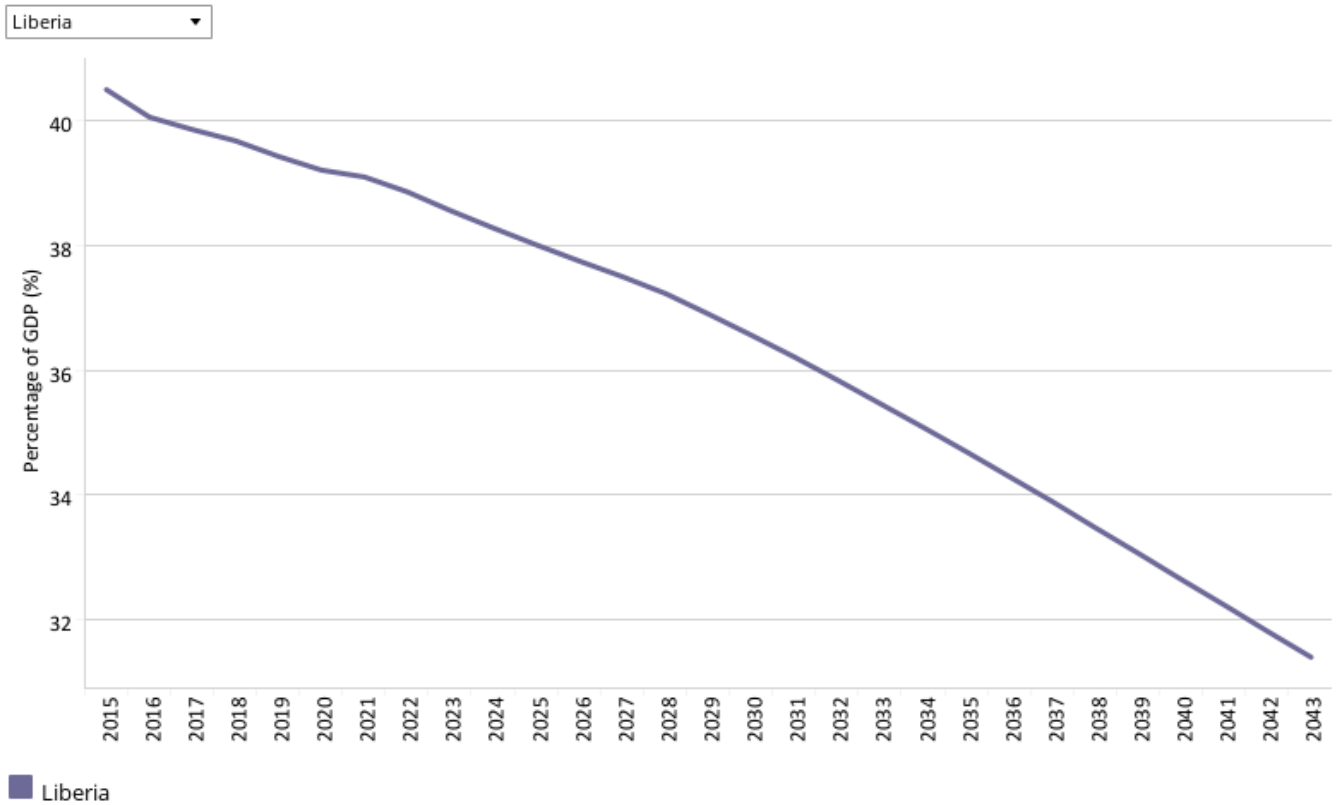
[View on Tableau Public](#)

Navigation icons: back, forward, refresh, search, share

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 Liberia.

From 1990 to 1996, the GDP per capita for Liberia declined from US\$954 to US\$287 before assuming an upward trend. As indicated earlier, the low GDP per capita was mainly as a result of the instability in the country during this period. As of 2019, Liberia’s GDP per capita had increased to US\$1 208, constituting a 28.7% increase over the 29-year period; this is US\$452 below the average for low-income Africa and more than US\$4 000 below the average for Africa. This gap is expected to widen to US\$1 224 by 2043. This suggests that Liberia either has a higher population growth rate or slower economic growth compared to the average for low-income country in Africa. The historical increase in GDP per capita reflects the relatively high GDP growth compared to population over the period. With an expected increase in GDP and decline in fertility rates, the GDP per capita will rise over the next 22 years, such that by 2043, the GDP per capita will have more than doubled to US\$2 566.

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



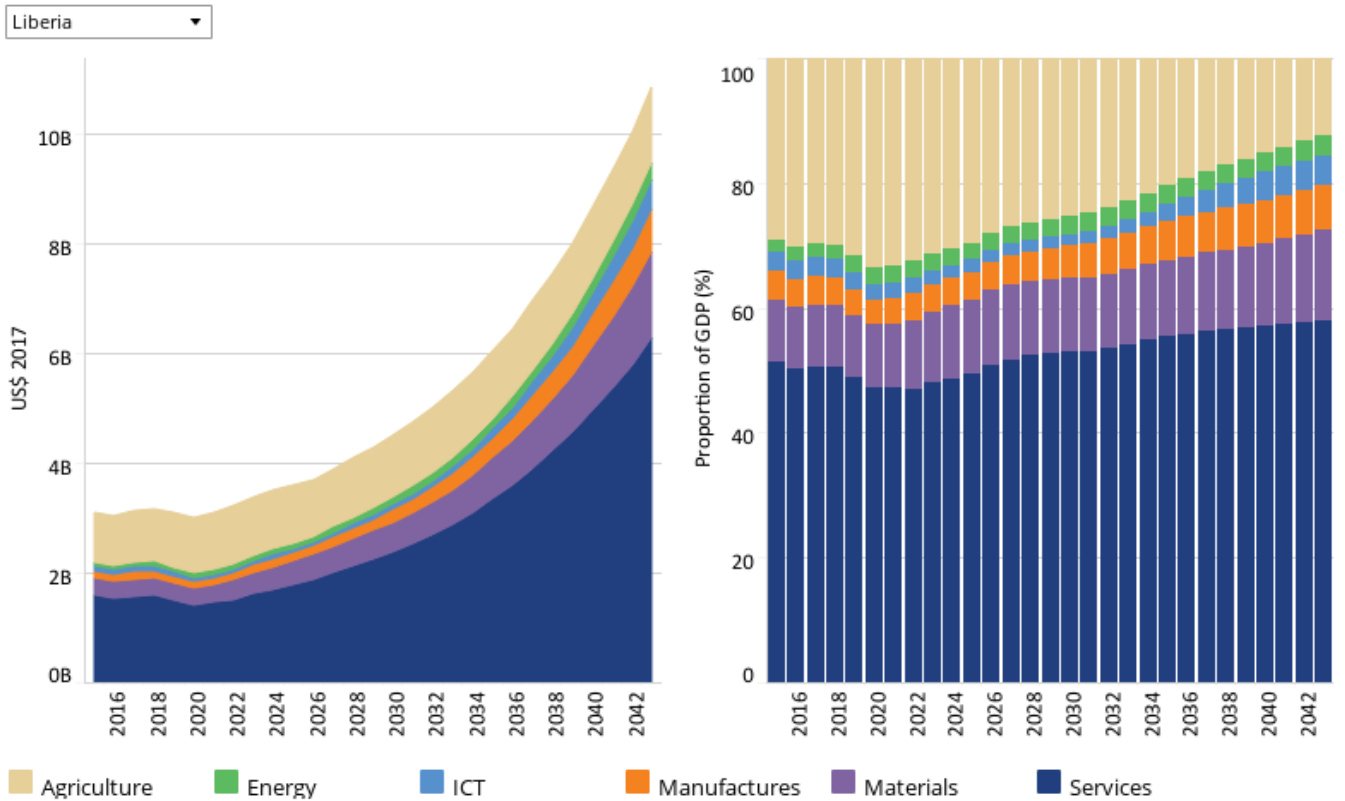
Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Economic Commission for Europe [2008]; Elgin and Oztunali [2012]; Schneider and Enste [2012]

[View on Tableau Public](#)

Navigation icons: back, forward, refresh, search, and share.

The size of the informal sector in Liberia was equivalent to 39.4% of GDP in 2019. This is expected to decline to 31.4% by 2043, constituting an 8 percentage point decrease over the next 24 years. In 2019, the total number of people employed by the informal economy constituted 60% of the total labour force, but this is expected to decline to 47.7% in 2043. It is therefore not surprising that the level of informality will also decline within the same period. In 2016, the informal sector accounted for 87% of employment in Liberia. This figure is even higher among women, youth and rural dwellers. Informal activities are mainly in the areas of trade including street selling, selling in the marketplaces and other casual labour activities. Most informal workers in the country are poor, living a hand-to-mouth existence. Throughout the period under consideration, the size of the informal sector in Liberia is higher than the average for low-income African countries. This suggests that Liberia has performed relatively poorer in formalising its economy compared to other African countries within its income group.

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

[View on Tableau Public](#)

Navigation icons: Refresh, Previous, Next, Home, Search, Share

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.

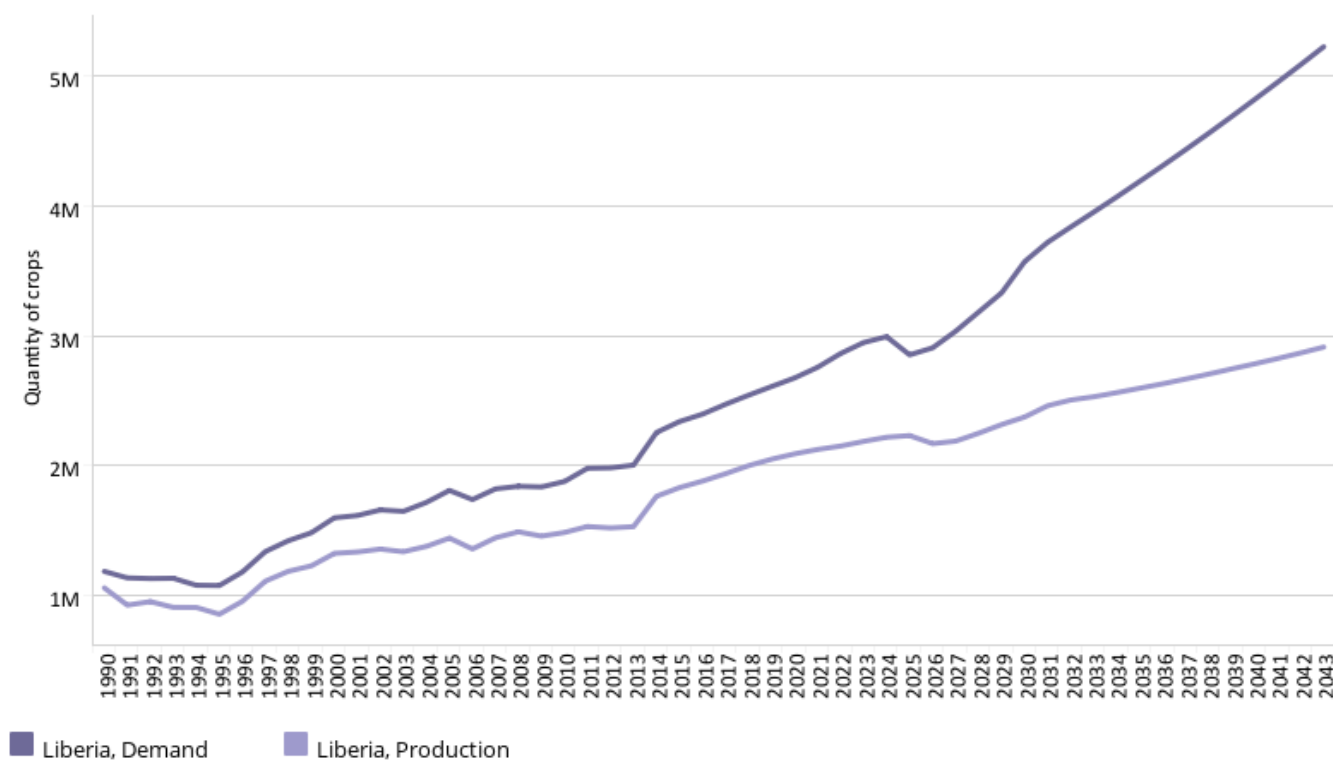
The three largest contributors to GDP in Liberia are service, agriculture and materials, respectively. In 2019, the service sector contribution to GDP was about US\$1.5 billion, representing 47.3% of GDP. This is not surprising given that the service sector share of total employment in the country increased from 33% in 1991 to 47.2% in 2019. This is expected to increase to US\$6.3 billion by 2043, representing 57.9% of GDP, suggesting that the country may still rely quite heavily on the service sector for job creation in coming years. The agricultural sector, which also employs about 42.6% of the total labour force, is currently the second largest contributor to GDP with a share of 33.1%, constituting about US\$0.98 billion in 2019. The materials sector is the third most significant contributor to GDP with a share of 9.9%. However, it is expected that the materials sector will overtake the agriculture sector as the second largest contributor to GDP, so that by 2043, the manufacturing sector will contribute 2 percentage points more to GDP than agriculture. While the declining share of the agriculture sector and the increasing share of the service sector is consistent with the economic transformation of the economy, the negligible contribution of the manufacturing sector, which is key to economic transformation and the creation of sustainable decent employment, is a concern.

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

Crops million tons



Liberia



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

[View on Tableau Public](#)

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 for 2019 was 2.9 metric tons per hectare. In 1990, Liberia’s demand for agricultural products outstripped domestic production by 130 000 metric tons, which increased to 560 000 metric tons in 2019. These supply shortfalls can partly be attributed to the declining interest in the agriculture sector reflected in the share of total employment. From 1995 to 2019, the sector’s share of total employment reduced from 57.1% to 46.2%. Although the yield per hectare for crops is expected to increase from 2.9 metric tons per hectare in 2019 to 3.7 metric tons per hectare in 2043, the gap between demand and production will widen. By 2043, demand will outstrip domestic production by about 2.31 million metric tons, representing a 313% gap increase over the period. This raises concerns about food security in the country in the next 22 years.

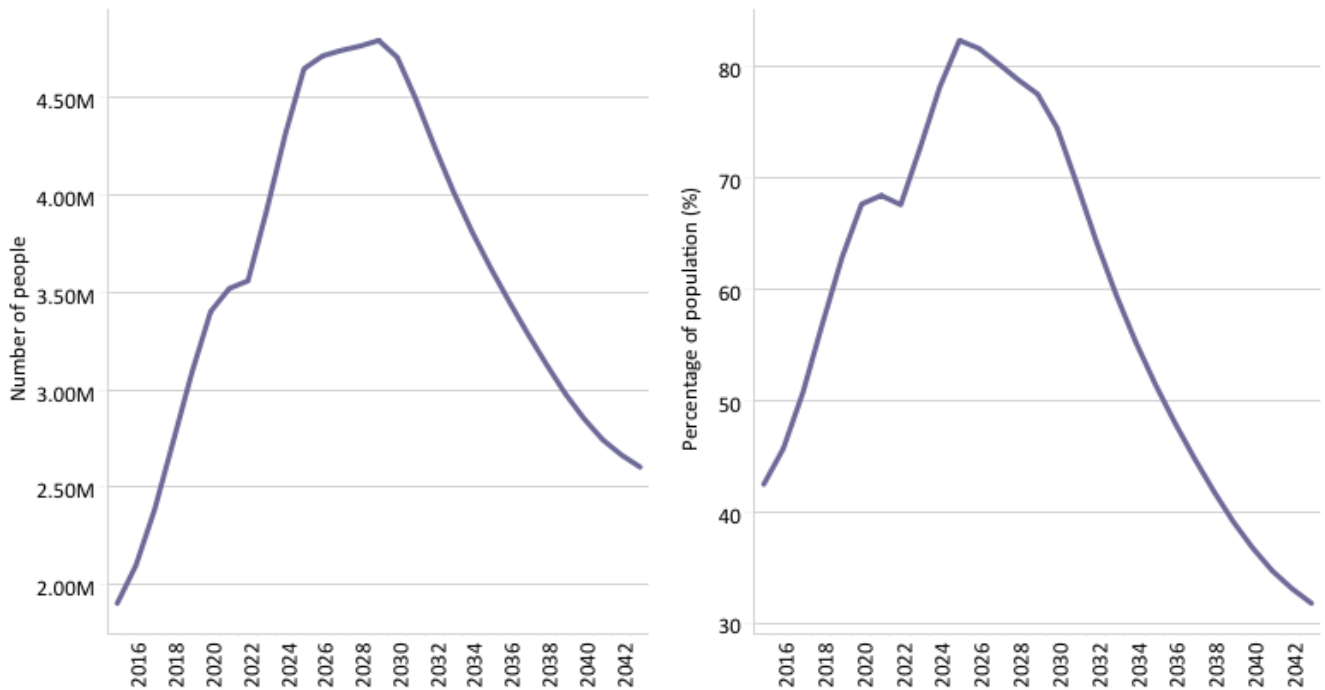


Poverty: Current Path

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



Liberia \$1.90



Liberia

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

[View on Tableau Public](#)

Navigation icons: back, forward, search, and share.

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 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, Liberia uses the US\$1.90 per day benchmark. The country is the ninth poorest country in Africa and the world. As of 2019, there were still over 3.1 million people, constituting 62.9% of the Liberian population, who lived on less than US\$1.90 per day. This number is expected to increase until it peaks in 2029 with 4.8 million poor people (more than 77% of the population) living below the poverty line. Afterwards, there is a downward turn, so that by 2043, there will still be 2.6 million people (31.9% of the population) who live on less than US\$1.90 per day. This means that although the proportion of the extremely poor population will reduce by 10.7 percentage points (compared to 2019), the absolute

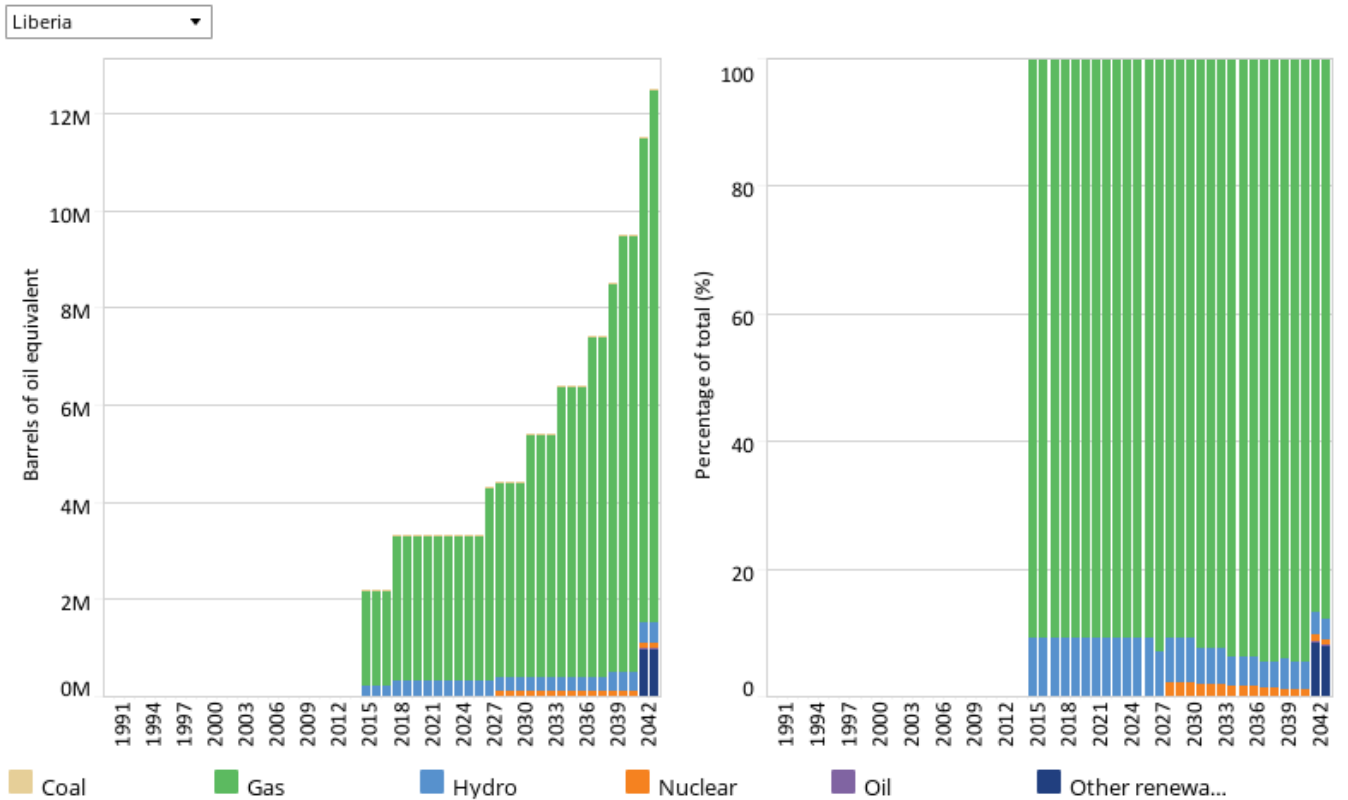
number of poor people in the country will be 700 000 people more than its level in 2019 due to a population growth rate that is outpacing development progress. Throughout the period 2019 to 2043, the proportion of poor people in Liberia is higher than the average for low-income countries in Africa. However, the gap in extreme poverty between Liberia and the projected average for low-income countries in Africa is expected to narrow from 35.8 percentage points in 2025 to 6.7 percentage points in 2043. Poverty is more prevalent in the rural areas of Liberia than in the urban centres albeit a huge problem in Monrovia. It is also more widespread in the hinterland than in the coastal districts.



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

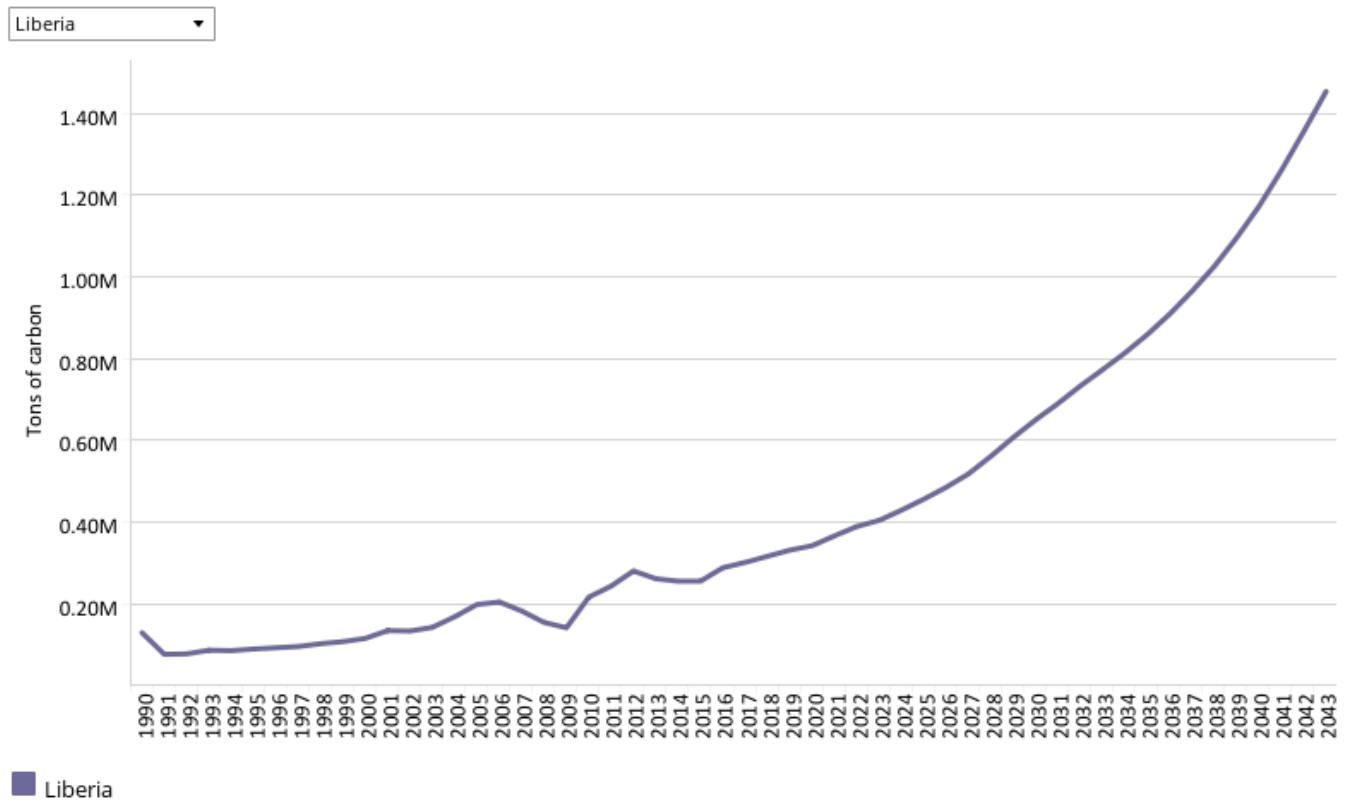
[View on Tableau Public](#)

Navigation icons: back, forward, search, share

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 has been the main energy produced in Liberia, with a total production of 3 million BOE in 2019, constituting about 91% of total energy production. Hydro productions constitute the remaining 9%. Although the civil war destroyed almost all the installed hydroelectric capacity in the country, there is still potential for the development of hydroelectric power in Liberia. It is expected that by 2042, Liberia will switch to the production of other renewable energies such that by 2043, renewable energy will constitute 8% of the total energy production. Total gas production in the country is projected to increase to 11 million BOE in 2043, representing 88% of total energy production. The share of hydro in total energy production will decline to 3.2% in 2043.

Chart 12: Carbon emissions in CP, 1990–2043
 Million tons of carbon (note, not CO₂ equivalent)



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

[View on Tableau Public](#)
↶
↷
↺
↻
⌵
⌵
📄
🔗 Share

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.

Liberia has significantly low levels of carbon emissions, partly due to low industrial activity. The manufacturing sector in Liberia is virtually non-existent, with almost every manufactured product in the country imported. The share of industry in total employment declined from 12.2% in 1991 to 9.8% in 1996 and increased to 10.2% in 2019. Some factors constraining industrialisation in Liberia include low skilled labour, poor infrastructure and lack of access to credit, among others. Carbon emissions increased steadily from 1990 to 2019, from 100 000 tons of carbon to 330 000 in this period. In the Current Path forecast, carbon emissions are forecast to increase to 1.5 million tons by 2043, the result of the projected increase in industrial activity in coming years.

Endnotes

1. Republic of Liberia, Ministry of Lands, Mines & Energy, Mineral Resources

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

Enoch Randy Aikins (2024) Liberia. Published online at futures.issafrica.org. Retrieved from <https://futures.issafrica.org/geographic/countries/liberia/> [Online Resource] Updated 13 December 2023.

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.

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.