



# Mauritania

## Mauritania: Current Path

Pierre Christian Tsopmo

Last updated 11 September 2025 using IFs v8.38

## Mauritania: Current Path

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

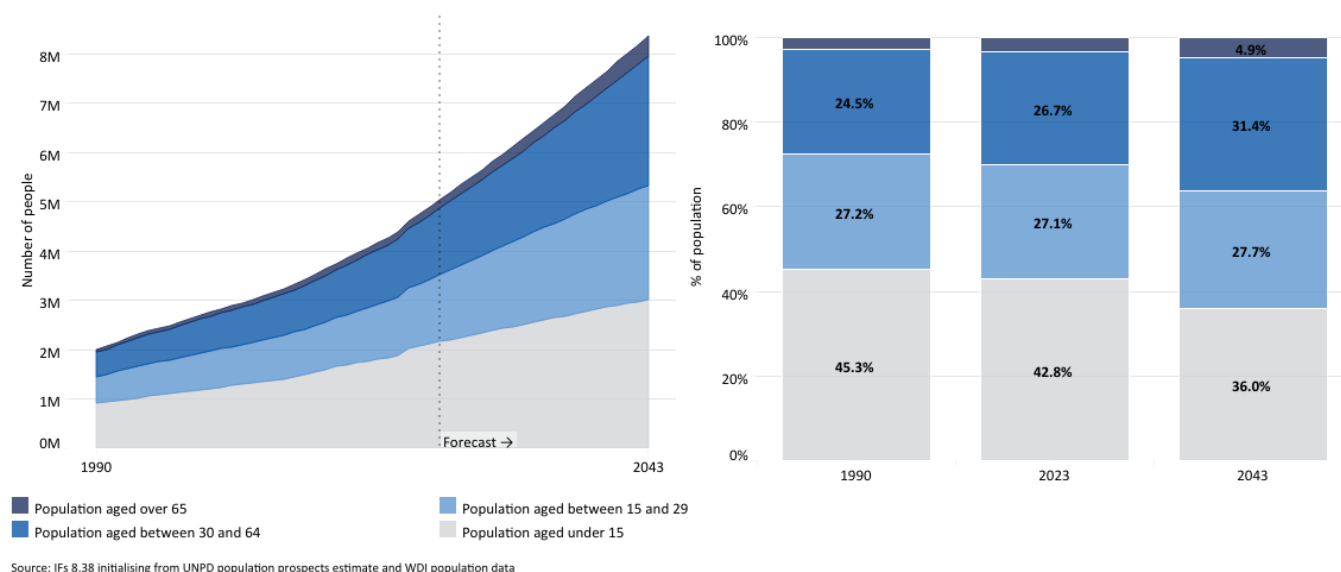


Chart 2 presents the Current Path of the population structure, from 1990 to 2043.

The population of Mauritania has been growing steadily over the last three decades, rising from 1.9 million in 1990 to 5.0 million in 2023, a growth rate of almost 157.4%. However, its population is far smaller than the average for LMICs in Africa and represents barely 0.4% of that of sub-Saharan African countries. In the Current Path, Mauritania's population will reach 8.3 million in 2043, and is forecast to remain far below the average for LMICs in Africa.

In 2023, the fertility rate was 4.7 births per woman, higher than the continent's average of 4.1 births per woman and 3.9 for African LMICs. In the Current Path, Mauritania's fertility rate will decline to 3.5 births per woman in 2043. This high rate is a major factor contributing to the country's positive demographic growth, and can be explained in part by local traditions and practices. In Mauritania, procreation is often considered an important value, and families tend to favour having a large number of children. On the other hand, poverty and lack of resources - economic hardship and lack of opportunities - can push families to have more children to provide labour and social security in times of need.

The Mauritanian median age was 18.2 years in 2023 - far below the average for Africa LMICs. In the Current Path, the median age in Mauritania will reach 22.0 years in 2043, and will remain below average for LMICs in Africa. The youth of Mauritania's population is certainly an asset in terms of human capital for the country, but it also represents a certain risk or pressure for governments in terms of public policies for social insertion. Life expectancy in Mauritania will improve from 71.7 years in 2023 to 76.9 years in 2043, reflecting a positive trend, higher than the average for LMICs in Africa (72.4 years).

Mauritania's population structure has not changed significantly since the 1990s. For instance, Mauritania's population aged under 15 has fallen only from 46.6% of the population in 1990 to 42.9% in 2023. In the Current Path, this drop will continue to 2043, when the under-15 population is estimated to decline to 36.0% of the population. However, the working-age population (age 15–65) proportion slightly increased from 53.1% in 1990 to 53.8% of the population in 2023. Between 1990 and 2023, Mauritania's dependency ratio (the ratio of youth and elderly to the working age population) was about 1.2:1 - slightly below the average ratio of 1.4:1 for LMICs in Africa in 2023. In the Current Path, this ratio will increase to 1.41 by 2043. However, it will remain below the 1.61 average for lower-middle-income countries in Africa by 2043.

Mauritania's low demographic dividend means that the working population is smaller than the dependant population. This limits the potential for economic growth, as there are fewer people of an age to contribute to the country's development.

Chart 3: Population distribution map, 2023



Chart 3 presents a population distribution map for 2023.

Mauritania has one of the lowest population densities in the world, estimated at around 0.04 persons per hectare, far lower than the African lower-middle-income countries average of 0.8 persons per hectare in 2023. The majority of Mauritania's population is young and rapidly growing, with a diverse ethnic make-up. Around 70% of the population are Bidhanes and Haratines, and 30% are of African origin.

The population is very unevenly distributed, with the majority living in the south (around 85% over 20% of the land surface area). The desert north has a very low population density (0.4 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>), while the Ouergha river area is denser (20 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>). Mauritania's most populous regions are the capital (Nouakchott: 28.0%) and the southern regions such as Gogol (9.0%), Assaba (9.0%), Brakna (8.0%), Hodh Ech Chargui (7.8%), Trarza (7.3%) and Guidimaka (7.3%), not to forget the large region of Hodh Ech Chargui, which is as much part of the South as the North (12.0%).

In the Current Path, Mauritania' population density will reach 0.08 people per hectare, and will remain far lower than the African lower-middle-income average of 1.2 people per hectare by 2043.

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

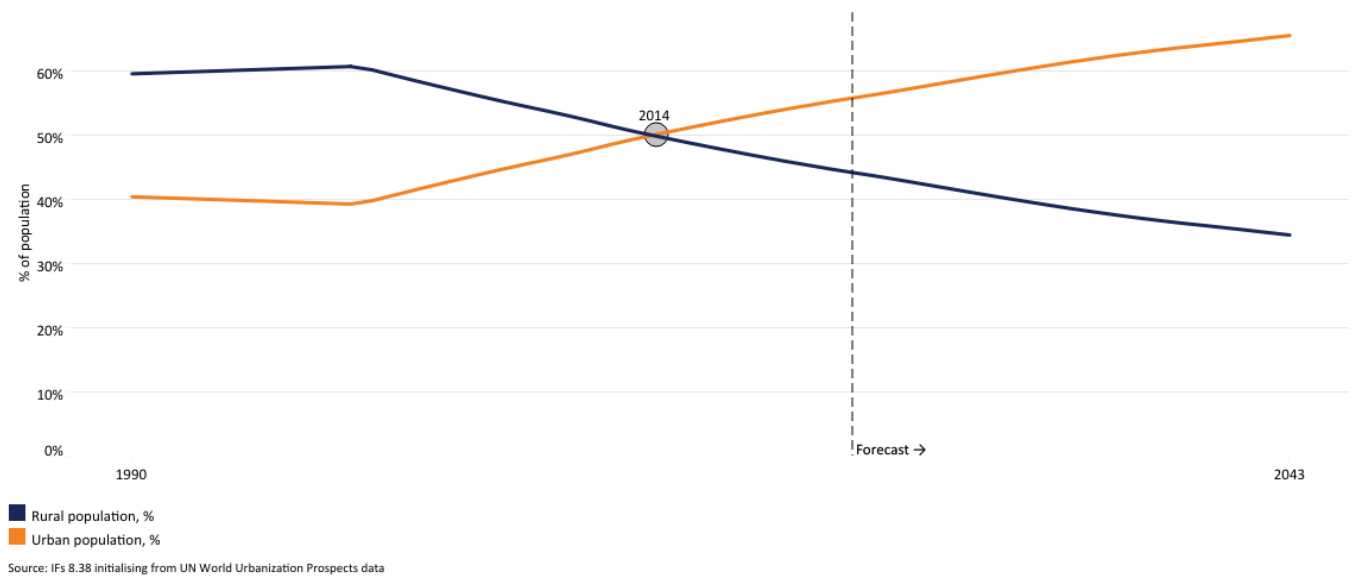


Chart 4 presents the urban and rural population in the Current Path, from 1990 to 2043.

Urban growth in Mauritania has undergone a spectacular boost since the 1990s, mainly as a result of the rural population drain. Indeed, while in 1960 Mauritania had no town with more than 10 000 inhabitants, with an urbanisation rate of 3% (i.e. a total of around 65 000 urban dwellers), between 1990 and 2023 the country's urban population rose from 40.4% to 55.8% - higher than the average of 48.6% for LMICs in Africa in 2023.

The country first achieved parity in rural-urban dwellers in 2014. Most of the urban population is located in Nouakchott. Rapid urban growth poses challenges in terms of infrastructure, housing and services, particularly for Nouakchott's outlying informal settlements. In addition, Mauritania is currently facing major migration challenges, serving as a key transit point for migrants on their way to Europe. Nouakchott hosts around 500 000 irregular migrants, reflecting its strategic position on migration routes. The deteriorating security situation in Mali has also led to an influx of refugees, with around 170 000 Malians sheltered in the Mbera camp.

In response to the vulnerability of Mauritania's towns and cities, the government, with the support of the International Development Association (IDA), has launched the [Support Project for Decentralisation and the Development of Productive Intermediate Towns](#) (MOUDOUN). The aim of this project is to strengthen the government's efforts to make the country's inland towns and cities more productive, resilient, green and inclusive. In the Current Path, Mauritania's urban population will be around 65.5% by 2043 - an increase of 17.3 percentage points in 20 years, above the average of 57.5% for LMICs in Africa.

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

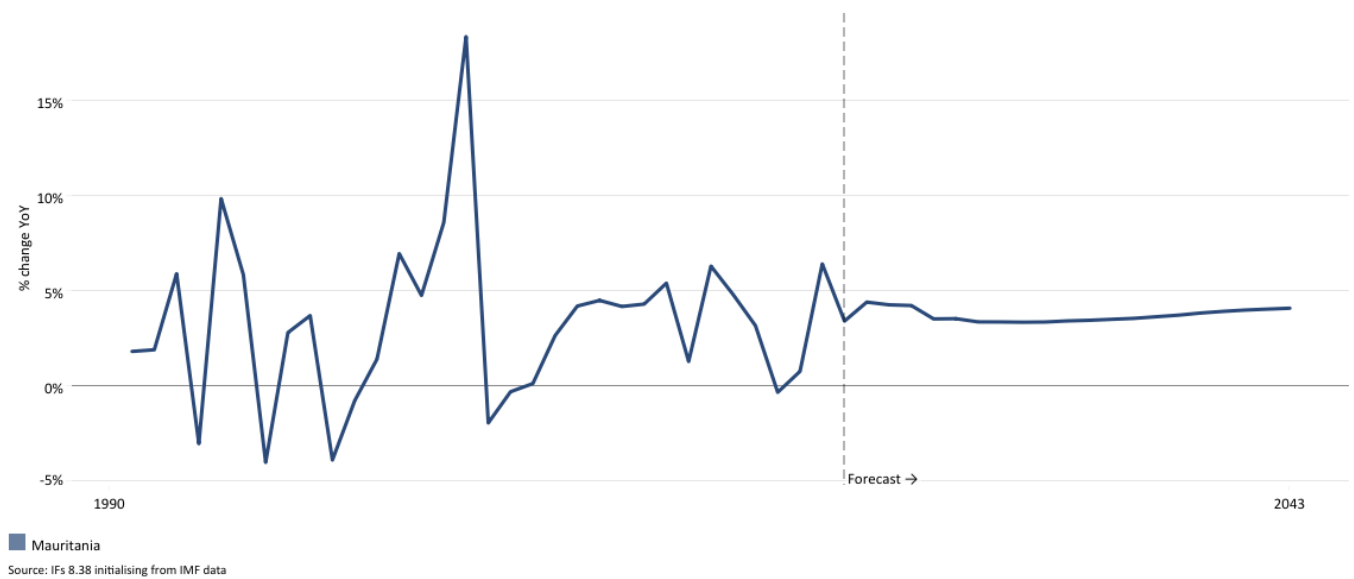


Chart 5 presents GDP in market exchange rates (MER) and growth rate in the Current Path, from 1990 to 2043.

Despite an abundance of natural resources, including iron ore and petroleum, Mauritania remains poor. Progress in structural transformation has been slow, attributable to a growth model based on extractive resources and agriculture. In 2023, its GDP measured at market exchange rates (MER) has more than quadrupled, rising from US\$2.9 billion in 1990 to US\$8.1 billion in 2023. This GDP is driven by almost 22% of the primary sector (mainly agriculture (9.3% real growth in 2023)), 33% of the secondary sector (dominated by the extractive industry, particularly iron ore extraction, which accounts for almost 50% of exports) and 45% of the tertiary sector. In 2023, Mauritania's economic growth rate was 3.4%, falling from 6.4% in 2022. This growth rate was slightly lower than the average for LMICs in Africa.

With a model of growth based on the exploitation of extractive resources, Mauritania's economy remains highly vulnerable to fluctuations in the prices of the raw materials it exports, mainly iron, which leads to volatility in growth. In addition, this fall in its growth rate is due to a decline in both its supply and demand indicators. In terms of supply, the country has seen a fall in industrial production, particularly of gold and iron ore, and a modest performance in agriculture and fishing. On the demand side, the fall in public investment has affected economic growth.

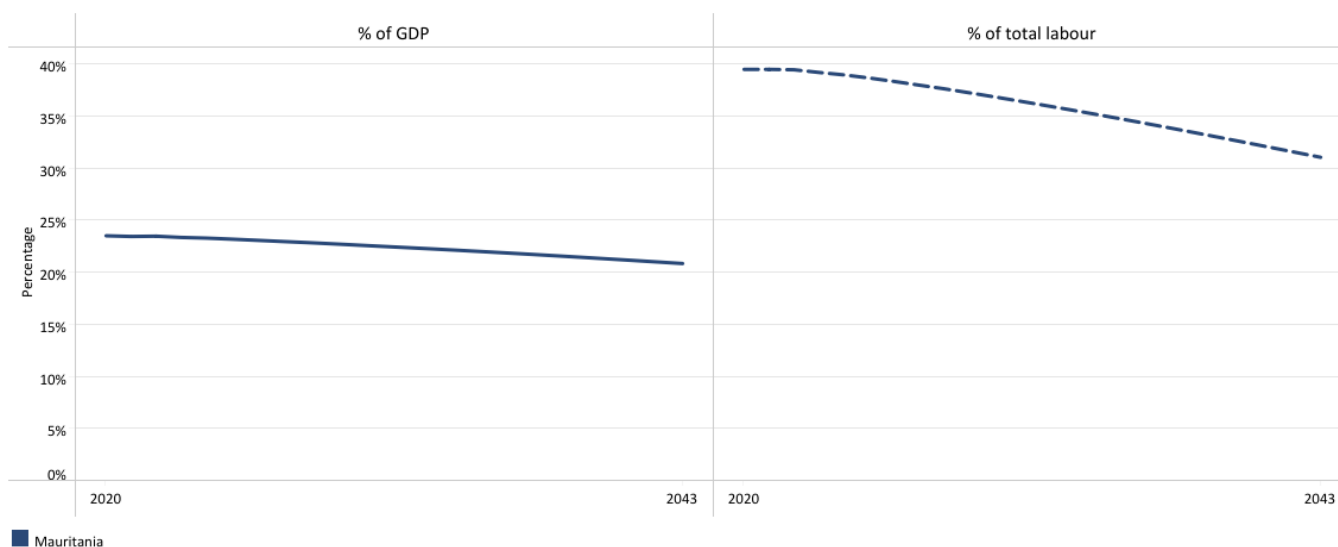
In light of its macroeconomic specificities and development constraints, Mauritania, in partnership with the African Development Bank, has established the 2023-2028 Country Strategy Paper (CSP), which aims to structurally transform the country's economy, focusing on fundamental changes to support economic diversification and transformation. This strategy focuses on the needs of the poorest and most marginalised groups, based on strong, sustainable and inclusive growth, the development of human capital and access to basic social services, and the strengthening of governance.

According to the World Bank, inflation has recently fallen to 1.5% (year-on-year) in 2024 from 1.6% in 2023, driven by lower food and oil prices and supported by the Central Bank's tight monetary policy. The budget deficit will fall to 0.1% of GDP in 2024, from 2.4% in 2023, due to higher revenues from telecommunications taxes and withholding taxes on extractive industries, as well as tight control of spending. Tax revenues increased slightly from 13.1% of GDP in 2022 to 14% in 2023. Public debt has fallen from 52.4% of GDP in 2021 to an estimated 48% in 2023 following the debt restructuring agreement with Saudi Arabia.

In the Current Path, Mauritania's GDP will reach US\$16.8 billion in 2043. Average growth rates over this period will stabilise

at around 4.0%. However, the lack of infrastructure, improving the business climate, strengthening human capital, digitising the economy and improving access to international financial markets remain the main challenges facing Mauritania if it is to achieve stronger growth.

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



Source: IFs 8.38 initialising from Elgin and Oztunali (2008), and Schneider and Enste (2012) data

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 in our modelling are largely estimates and therefore may 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 have a host of development challenges such as higher poverty, lower per capita incomes, greater inequality and weaker productivity investment, among others.

Like in most African economies, the informal sector is a significant part of the Mauritania economy; it plays a key economic role, particularly in terms of employment. In 2023, the informal sector in Mauritania represented 23.3% of GDP, far below the average of 30.7% of GDP for LMICs in Africa. The main sectors of activity in the informal sector (excluding agriculture) are trade (44%), services (21.9%) and manufacturing (26.3%). Around 63.3% of heads of informal production units (UPI) have no formal education or have attended a Koranic school. Faced with this, [Mauritania's informal sector reduction policy](#) therefore focuses on integrating informal businesses into the formal sector by modernising tax administration and improving access to financial services. In addition, the government also aims to create a more favourable economic environment for business growth, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In the Current Path, the size of the informal sector will decline to 20.8% of GDP in 2043 and remain below the average of 27.0% for LMICs in Africa.

In terms of the labour force, about 39.2% was informal in 2023. This figure was far lower than the average of 57.6% for LMICs in Africa. Men occupied 25.2% of informal labour and women 66.8%. In the Current Path, the size of informal labour will decline to reach 31.0% of total labour in 2043, forecast to remain below the average of 54.2% for LMICs in Africa in that same year. However, the informal sector is faced with financing constraints, low production capacity and the use of obsolete technologies that limit productivity.

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

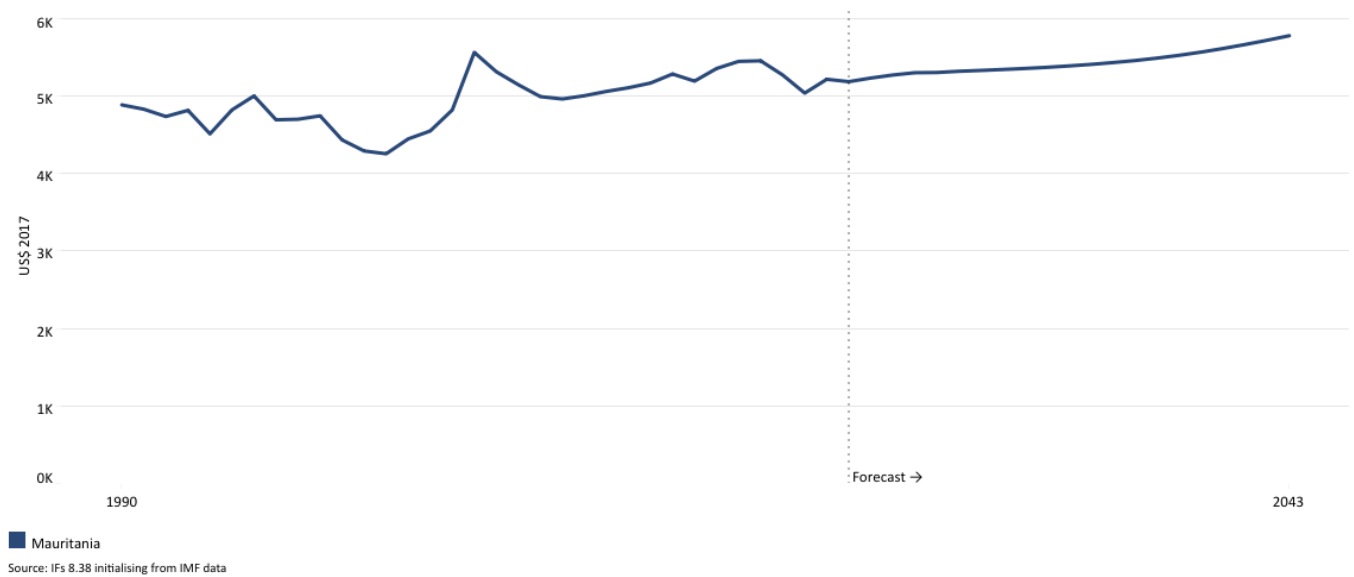


Chart 7 presents GDP per capita in the Current Path, from 1990 to 2043, compared with the average for the Africa income group.

Despite its limitations, GDP per capita is generally used to measure the standard of living and is the most widely used and accepted indicator to compare welfare among countries. Using the purchasing power parity (PPP) measure for this analysis, Mauritania's GDP per capita has improved modestly over the last thirty years. GDP per capita of US\$5 183 in 2023 was below the average of US\$5 843 for LMICs in Africa. This figure represents an improvement of 9.1% from the US\$4 751 it recorded in 1990.

In the Current Path, Mauritania's GDP per capita will reach US\$5 773 in 2043. It will remain far below the average of US\$7 803 for LMICs in Africa in the same year. Mauritania's GDP per capita figure nonetheless conceals a number of challenges in terms of improving human capital, inequality, climate challenges, the business climate, mobilising tax revenues, improving social policy and reducing informality.

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

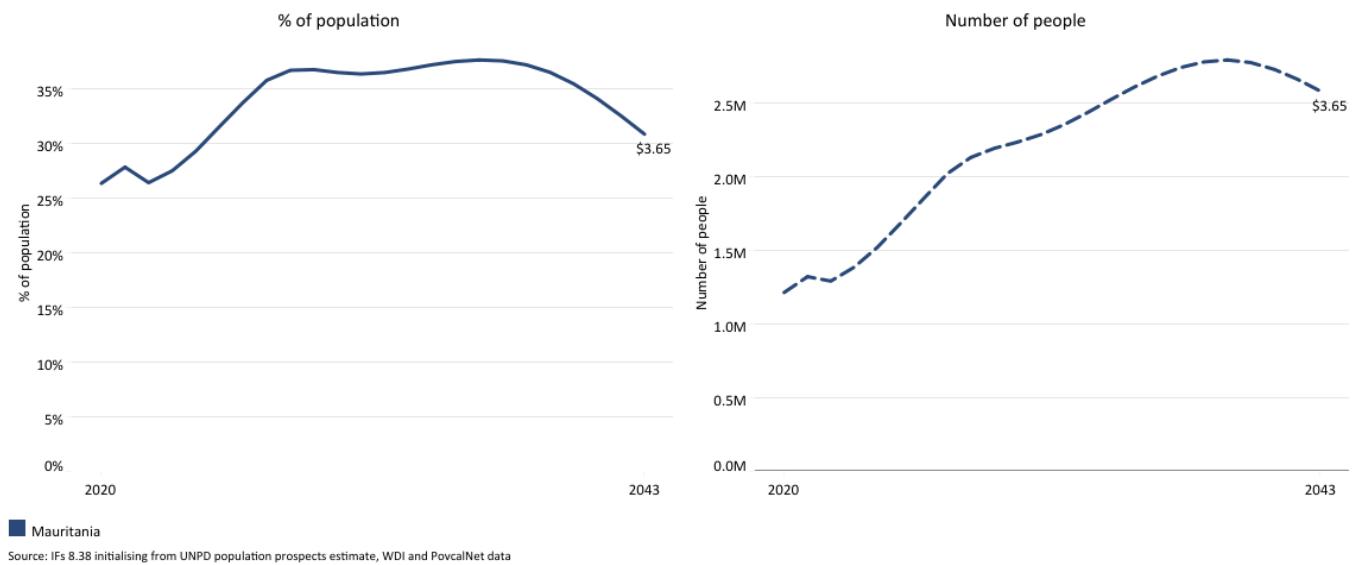


Chart 8 presents the rate and number of extremely poor people in the Current Path from 2020 to 2043.

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 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>

Theoretically, 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 this poverty line is generally a function of consumption patterns and the cost of living in the country's main regions or cities. Mauritania's poverty is a serious problem, with high levels of multidimensional and income poverty, where approximately 77% of the rural population experiences multidimensional poverty.

By utilising the lower-middle-income poverty line of US\$3.65 a day (in 2017 PPP), in 2023, 1.4 million people (representing 27.5% of the population) lived in poverty, far below the average of 48.5% for other lower-middle-income countries in

Africa. In the Current Path, the poverty rate line of US\$3.65 a day in Mauritania is expected to reach 30.9%, and remain below the average of 34.4% for lower-middle-income African countries. However, using the \$2.15 poverty line, 294 190 people (representing 5.8% of the population) lived in poverty, far below the average of 23.4% for lower-middle-income countries in Africa. In the Current Path, the poverty rate using the \$2.15 poverty line in Mauritania is expected to increase to 6.4%.

Over the last several decades, the Mauritanian government has undertaken major reforms to reduce poverty. In addition to the National Poverty Reduction Strategy adopted in 1994, Mauritania recently approved the [Projet d'Appui au Système de Filets Sociaux](#) en Mauritanie phase II (PASyFIS II) and the Elmaouna programme in 2020. These projects aim to strengthen the social protection system for the most vulnerable households. These projects include cash transfers and other assistance measures, such as the Tekavoul programme, which provides cash transfers to households in extreme poverty and improves the effectiveness of the social protection system, as well as supports refugee communities.

In 2023, Mauritania's [Human Development Index](#) (HDI) was 0.58, compared with 0.54 in 2022, placing it in the medium human development category and 150th in the world. The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) captures acute multidimensional poverty by measuring each person's overlapping deprivations across 10 indicators in three equally weighted dimensions: health, education and standard of living. In 2023, the MPI shows that [58.4%](#) of the Mauritanian population, around 2.6 million people, are in a situation of multidimensional poverty. Children aged 0-17, who represent over half (50.7%) of the Mauritanian population, are the poorest age group: [61.9%](#) of them live in multidimensional poverty, and their MPI is 0.35, the highest of all age groups. In addition, [12.3%](#) of the population, around 567 000 people, are classified as vulnerable to experiencing multidimensional poverty.

## Chart 9: National Development Plan of Mauritania



**REPUBLIQUE ISLAMIQUE DE MAURITANIE**  
Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances



**STRATEGIE NATIONALE DE  
CROISSANCE ACCELEREE ET DE PROSPERITE PARTAGEE  
SCAPP 2016-2030**

**Volume I**  
**Diagnostic social, économique,  
institutionnel et environnemental**

1

Chart 9 depicts the National Development Plan.

To promote its medium- and long-term development, Mauritania has drawn up a **National Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity** (SCAPP-2016-2030), in line with the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2015-2030). This strategy aligns with the vision for the future, entitled 'The Mauritania we want in 2030', based on the values of Sunni and tolerant Islam, social cohesion and peace, equity and solidarity, national unity, justice and democracy, transparency and human rights within a framework of good governance. It aims to achieve strong, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, with a view to satisfying the essential needs of all citizens and ensuring their well-being.

Three convergent drivers **constitute** the strategic objectives selected to ensure this growth, in order to achieve prosperity that benefits everyone:

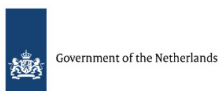
- **Strategic lever 1** aims to promote strong, sustainable and inclusive growth through the creation of the right conditions for a structural transformation of the economy and society. This transformation should promote: i) the emergence and strengthening of wealth and job-creating sectors capable of ensuring social inclusion and satisfying domestic demand, in particular through private initiative and innovation, ii) sustainable development and environmental protection, and iii) the establishment of the infrastructure necessary for growth.
- **Strategic lever 2** aims to promote the development of human capital capable of facilitating economic growth and deriving maximum benefit from it through i) improving access to and the quality of education and vocational training, ii)

improving conditions of access to health services, and iii) promoting employment, youth, culture and the resilience of the most vulnerable sections of society.

- **Strategic lever 3** aims to strengthen governance in all its dimensions, notably through i) consolidation of the rule of law and democracy, ii) social cohesion and equity, security and respect for human rights, as well as iii) efficient economic and financial management and capturing the demographic dividend.

In addition, the strategy **takes into account** Mauritania's international commitments (2030 Sustainable Development Goals, African Union Agenda 2063, Nairobi Commitments on Integrated Community Development, N4G 2021 Commitments, specific agreements signed, etc.) and the sectoral and regional strategies currently being implemented, as well as the President's Expanded Priority Programme (ProPEP) launched in January 2020.

## 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

Pierre Christian Tsopmo (2026) Mauritania. Published online at [futures.issafrica.org](https://futures.issafrica.org). Retrieved from <https://futures.issafrica.org/geographic/countries/mauritania/> [Online Resource] Updated 11 September 2025.

## About the authors

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.

## 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.