



# Mauritania

## Mauritania: Current Path

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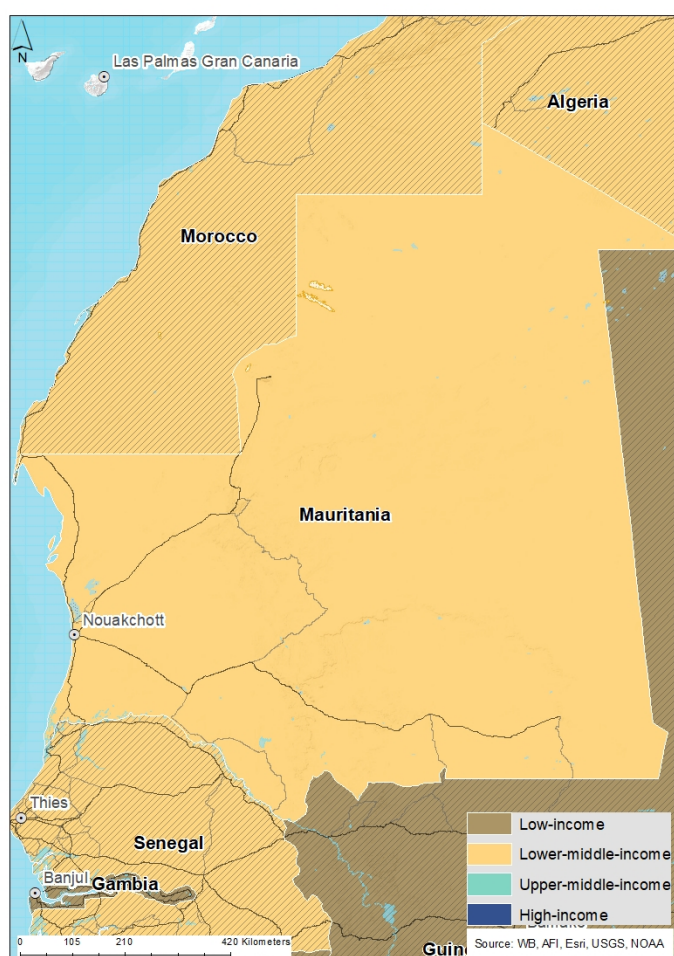
## Mauritania: Current Path

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### Mauritania: Current Path forecast

Chart 1: Political map of Mauritania



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

Mauritania, officially the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, is a country in north-west Africa. It is bordered by the Atlantic

Ocean to the west, Western Sahara to the north and north-west, Algeria to the north-east, Mali to the east and south-east, and Senegal to the south-west. Mauritania is the eleventh largest country in Africa, and 90% of its territory is situated in the Sahara Desert. It is one of the least densely populated countries in the world, and only 0.5% of its land is arable.[1] Most of its population of approximately 4.5 million people lives in the temperate south of the country with more than 54% of the population living in urban areas. Mauritania's capital, largest city and population centre is Nouakchott, which is located on the Atlantic coast.

The name Mauritania goes back to the ancient Berber kingdom of Mauretania, located in what is today Morocco and Algeria. The Berber people occupied what is now Mauritania from the third century CE before Arabs conquered the area in the eighth century, bringing with them Islam, Arab culture and the Arabic language. In the early 20th century, France colonised Mauritania as part of French West Africa before the country became independent again in 1960.

Since independence, Mauritania has experienced recurrent coups and periods of military dictatorship. The most recent coup, in 2008, was led by General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, who later won presidential elections in 2009 and 2014. He was succeeded by Mohamed Ould Ghazouani as a result of the 2019 elections, which were considered Mauritania's first peaceful transition of power since independence.

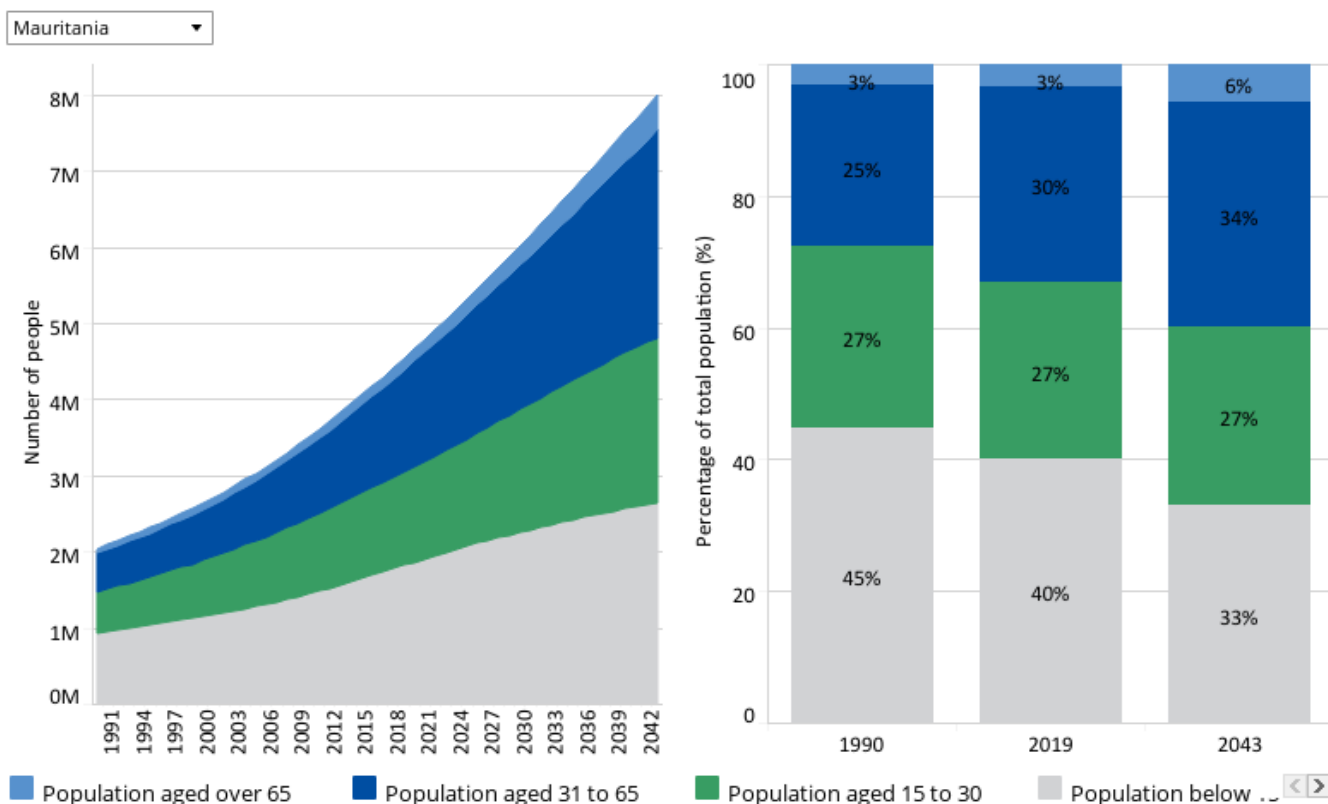
Mauritania is culturally and politically part of the Arab world. The country is a member of the Arab League and Arabic is the sole official language. Mauritania is a member of the United Nations, the African Union, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).



## 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

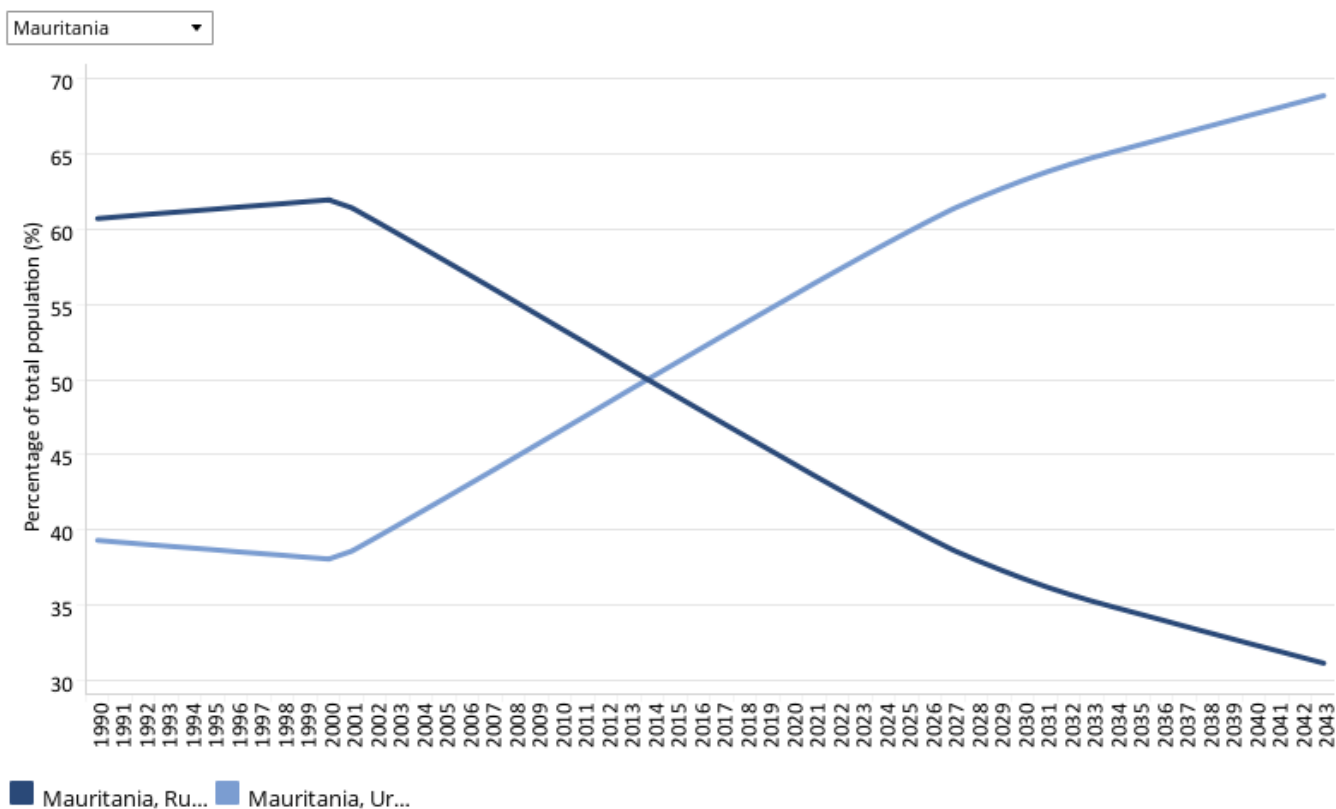
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In 1990, Mauritania had a population of just over 2 million people. By 2019 it had more than doubled to 4.5 million. The country still has high birth rates that fuel rapid population growth. In 2019, Mauritania's average total fertility was 4.6 births per woman, down from 6.1 births per woman in 1990. The current fertility rate is more than double replacement level fertility which is 2.1 births per woman. Mauritania will likely reach replacement level fertility only around 2066.

With a median age of 19.9 years, Mauritania is a very young country and the youngest in North Africa, followed by Egypt with a median age of 24.6 years. The average median age for North Africa is 26.7 years. Mauritania's population structure is changing gradually. In 2019, 40% of the population was younger than 15 years, compared to 45% in 1990. By 2043, this figure is expected to drop to 33%. At the same time, the share of the population aged between 31 and 65 years is growing: from 25% in 1990 to 30% in 2019, and likely to 35% in 2043. In 2019, 56.6% of Mauritania's population was of working age (between 15 and 65 years old), and its share is forecast to expand to 61.2% of the overall population.

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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Mauritania already is a predominantly urban country: 54.6% of the population lives in cities and towns and only 45.4% inhabit rural areas. Primarily, this is the result of desertification.[2] Several major droughts during the 1970s destroyed livestock and triggered mass rural to urban migration.[3] The unmanaged urban growth happened primarily in the coastal cities of Nouakchott, Mauritania's capital, and Nouadhibou. At independence in 1960, Nouakchott was a small town with a population of about 5 250 people. By 1990 it had expanded to 418 590 people — a phenomenal almost 80-fold increase. In 2019, Nouakchott had an average annual urban growth rate of 4.4% and an estimated population of 1.26 million people.[4] This means that close to one-third of Mauritania's population is concentrated in the capital city.

By 2043, the share of Mauritians living in cities and towns will increase to 68.8%. This is significantly above the anticipated average rate of 59.4% for its lower middle-income peer group on the continent. In North Africa however, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco are more urbanised than Mauritania. Egypt, on the other hand, is still predominantly rural with only 42.8% of its population living in urban areas.

Chart 4: Population density map for 2019



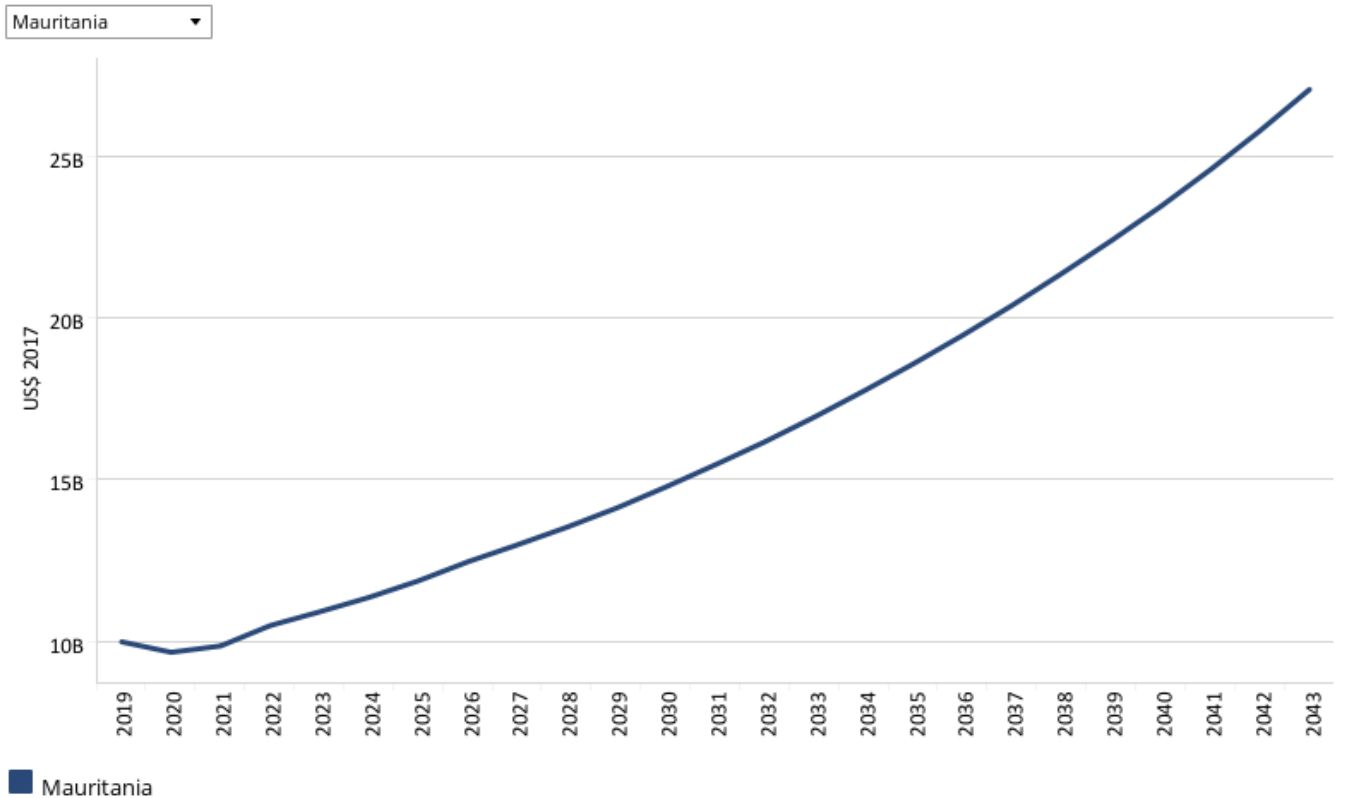
In North Africa, Mauritania is the second least densely populated country, followed by Libya. In 2019, population density was 0.4 people per hectare, which makes Mauritania comparable to countries like Botswana or Namibia in Southern Africa. Population density in Mauritania is set to increase to 0.8 people per hectare by 2043.

Mauritania's main area of settlement is located along the border with neighbouring Senegal, a primarily agricultural region with high population densities. The area around the capital city Nouakchott is the second most densely populated population centre. The third most important population centre is related to iron ore mining in Zoueiratt and its export through the port of Nouadhibou.[5]



## 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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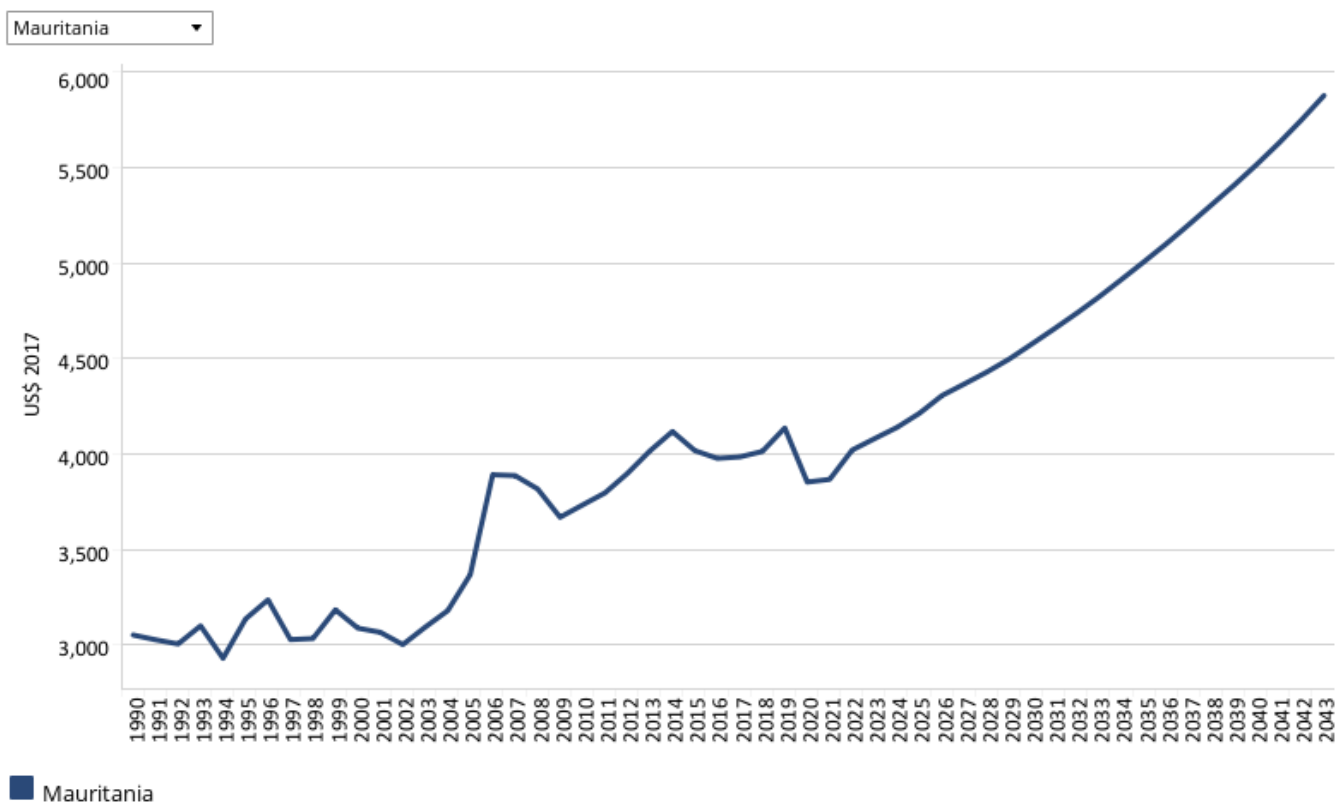
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Between 1990 and 2019, Mauritania's GDP more than doubled from US\$4 billion to US\$10 billion. Until 2043, the country's GDP will expand to US\$27.1 billion.

Despite an abundance of natural resources, including iron ore and petroleum, Mauritania remains poor. Its economy is based primarily on agriculture, livestock and fishing. In 2019, Mauritania's economy ranked 17th out of 23 lower middle-income economies in Africa.



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

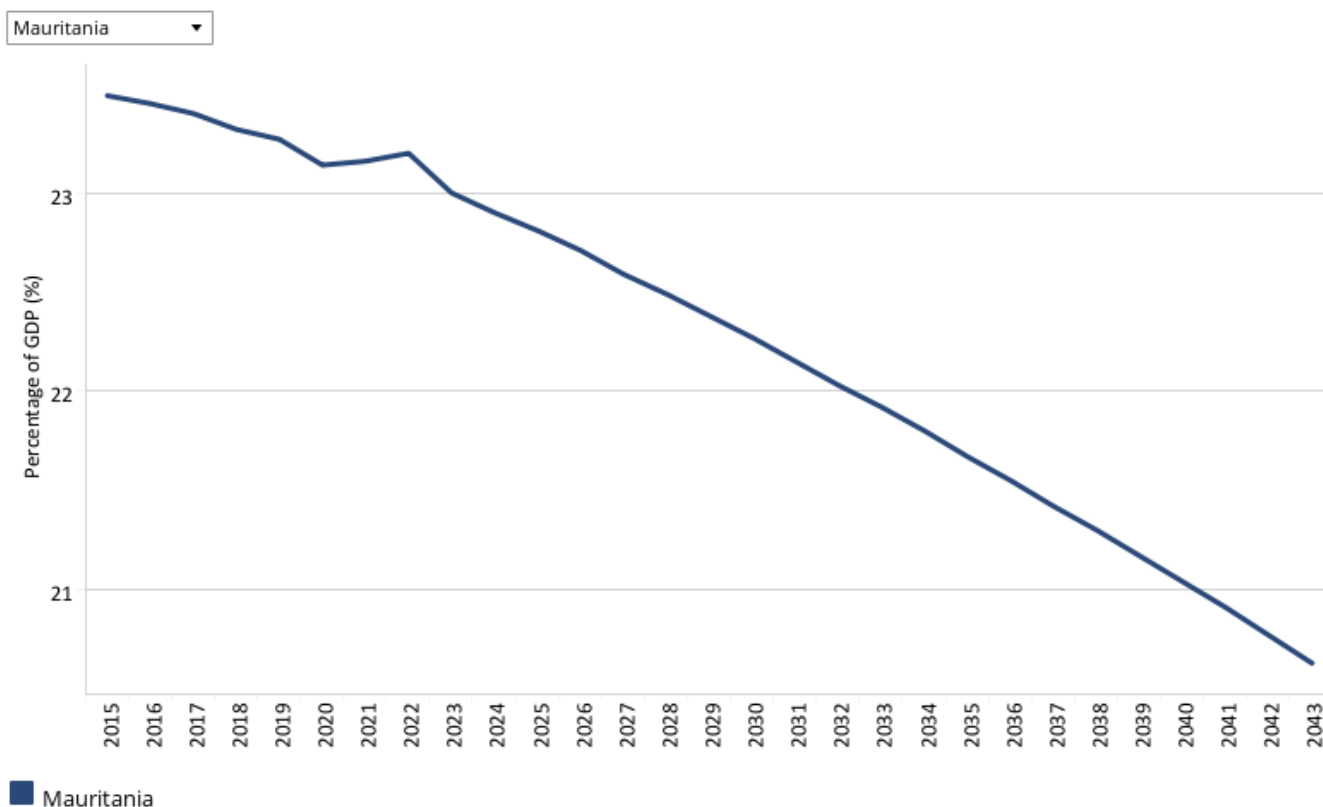
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Although many of the charts in the sectoral scenarios also include GDP per capita, this overview is an essential point of departure for interpreting the general economic outlook of Mauritania.

In 2019, Mauritania's GDP per capita ranked sixth out of the 23 lower middle-income countries in Africa at a value of US\$4 138 — significantly below the group's average GDP per capita which stood at US\$6 989. Mauritania's per capita income will increase to US\$5 879 by 2043, but it will continue to lag behind the group's average GDP per capita which is forecast to be US\$9 142 in 2043.

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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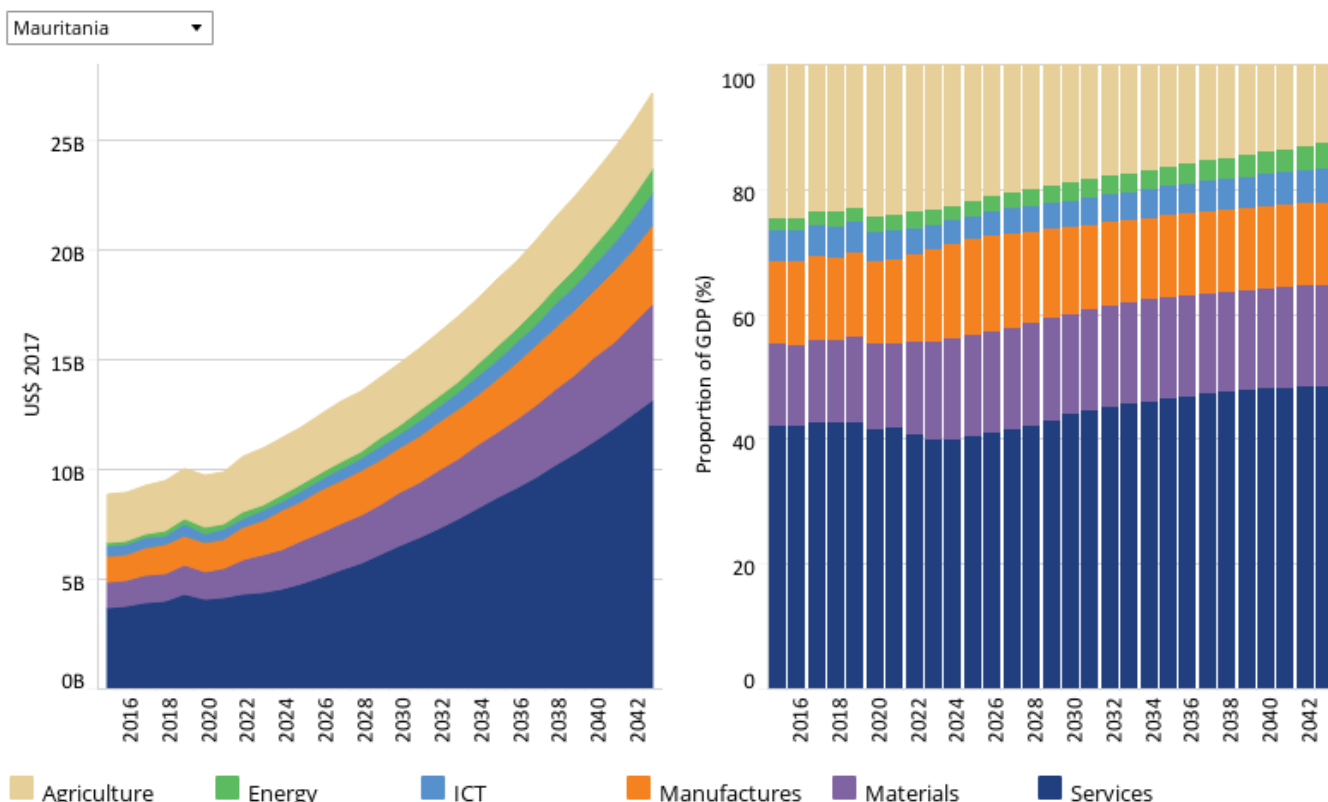
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In 2019, Mauritania's informal sector accounted for approximately 23.3% of GDP. Within IFs, Mauritania had the largest informal sector in North Africa, closely followed by Tunisia and Morocco. The average value for Africa's lower middle-income economy in 2019 was 29%.

Mauritania's informal sector is a burden on the formal economy because of low contributions to tax revenues and the subsequent negative impact on expenditure on public utilities. By 2043, the contribution of the informal sector to the country's GDP is forecast to fall to 20.6%.

In 2019, 40.5% of Mauritania's labour force worked in the informal sector, mostly in agriculture, including livestock. In North Africa, only Egypt has a larger share of the labour force working in the informal sector. Typically, those workers are vulnerable to lose their job/income and they lack pension or health insurance. The share of workers in the informal sector will drop to 32.1% over the coming decades.

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), manufacturing, services and information and communication technologies (ICT). Most other sources use a threefold distinction between only agriculture, industry and services with the result that data may differ.

In 2019, Mauritania's service sector accounted for 42.6% of the country's GDP (US\$54.3 billion), followed by the agriculture sector which represented 23.1% (US\$2.3 billion). The third largest sector, both in terms of its contribution to GDP as well as in absolute terms, was the materials sector, which accounted for 13.6% of GDP at a value of US\$1.4 billion. The materials sector was closely followed by the manufacturing sector at US\$1.3 billion. The ICT and energy sectors accounted for 4.9% and 2.3% of GDP, respectively.

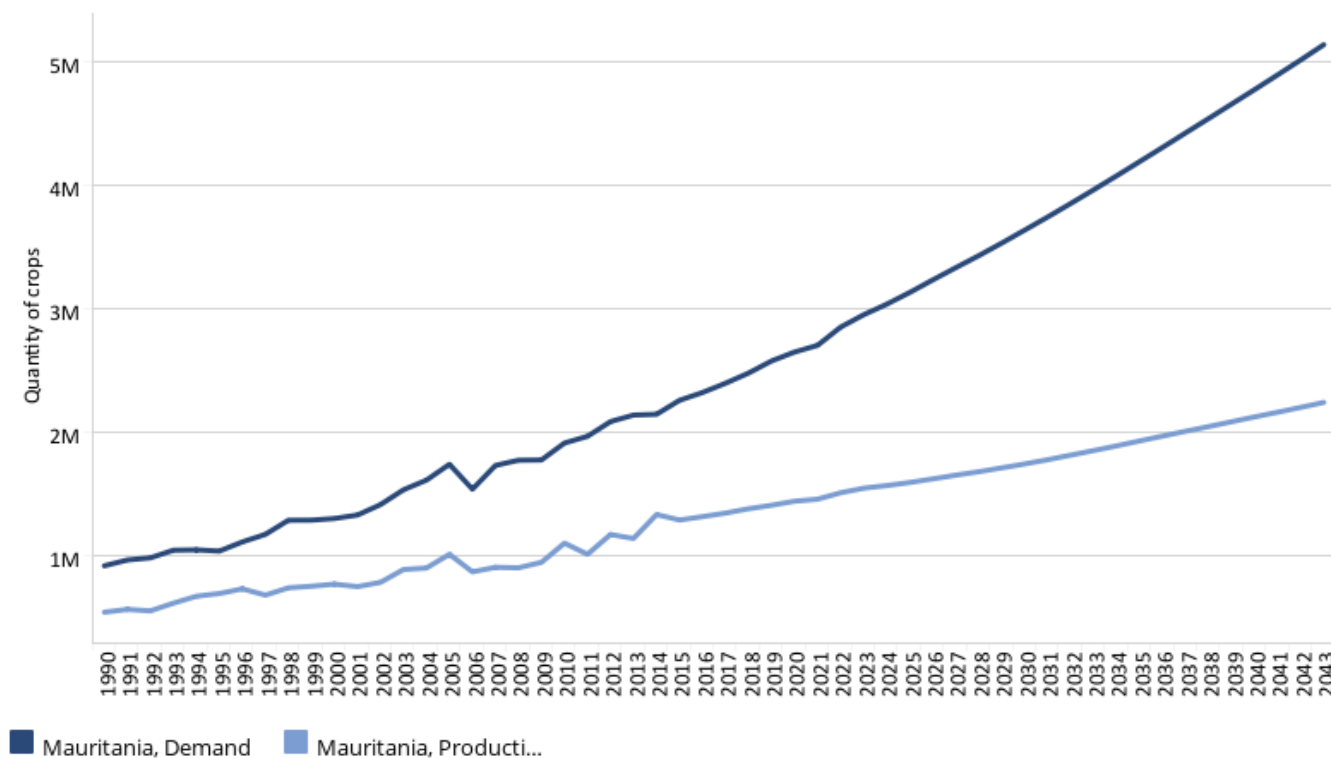
The service sector will remain the most important contributor to Mauritania's GDP by far. Its share is set to grow to 48.4% of GDP (valued at US\$13.1 billion) by 2043. The materials sector is also set to increase to account for 16.3%. The contribution of the agriculture sector, on the other hand, will drop to 12.7% in 2043, although in absolute terms the sector will still experience growth and reach a value of US\$3.4 billion. The contribution of the ICT sector will increase by 0.5 percentage points and increase in value to US\$1.5 billion in 2043.

Mauritania's expected trajectory roughly mirrors that of its lower middle-income peer group with the service sector representing both the current and future lion's share of contribution to GDP.

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



Mauritania



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.

In 2019, Mauritania's agriculture sector accounted for 15.5% of GDP, less than in the average lower middle-income economy on the continent where agriculture represented about 17.7% of GDP. In 2019, crop yields were only 3.6 tons per hectare compared to the average of just over 5 tons for its African income peer group. In Egypt, for example, crop yields were 29.2 tons per hectare in 2019.

In Mauritania, many agriculture producers still rely on traditional technologies and have limited access to fertilisers, pesticides and mechanisation, which negatively impact productivity.[6] In 2019, Mauritania's agricultural production stood at 1.4 million metric tons, falling short of agricultural demand at 2.6 million metric tons. The forecast is for this gap to become larger, resulting in about 2.9 million metric tons of unmet demand in 2043 compared to 1.2 million metric tons in 2019.



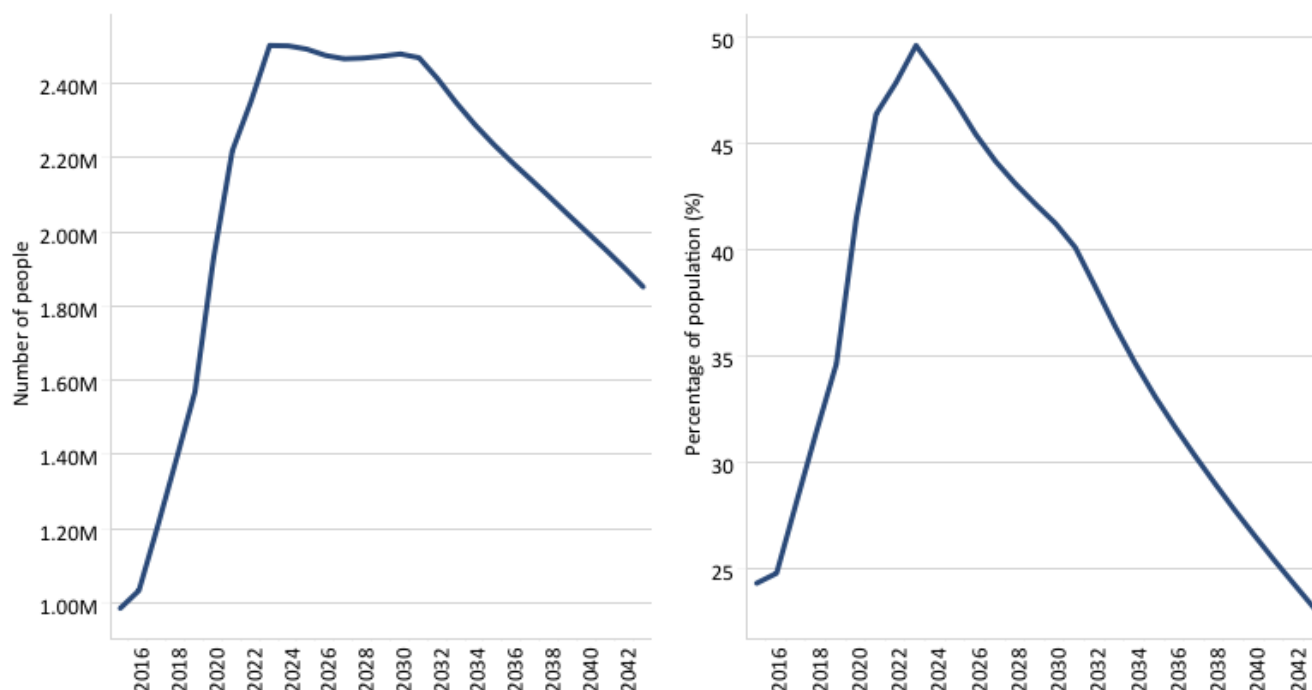
## Poverty: Current Path

Chart 10: Poverty in CP, 2015–2043

Millions of people and % of total population



Mauritania \$3.20



Mauritania

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 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 (SDG) 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 lower middle-income country, the World Bank uses the US\$3.20 per day benchmark to define extreme poverty in Mauritania. The country's poverty burden is significant. In 2019, close to 1 million Mauritaniens lived below the poverty line; this equals 34.6% of the population, and is close to 3.7 percentage points below the average poverty rate for Africa's lower middle-income economies which is 38.3%. Over time, the share of Mauritaniens living in extreme poverty will further decrease but fast population growth means that the number of poor people is set to rise.



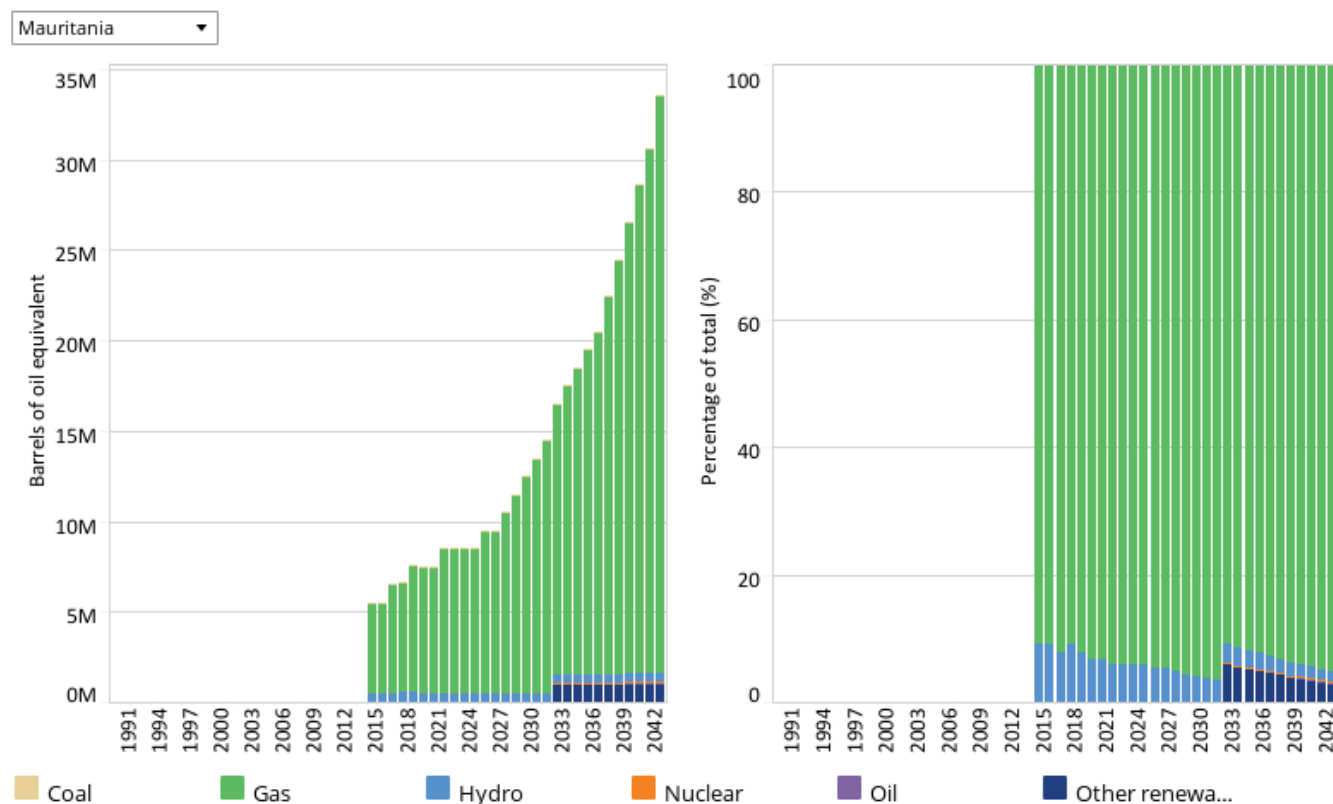
In the Current Path forecast, 1.85 million people, or 23.3% of the population, will live below the poverty line in 2043. In 2019, Mauritania had by far the highest poverty rate in Northern Africa, followed by Egypt.



## Carbon Emissions/Energy: Current Path

Chart 11: Energy production by type in CP, 1990–2043

Barrels of oil equivalent and % of energy production



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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.

Mauritania's total energy production was equivalent to about 8 million barrels of oil in 2019. By 2043, it is estimated to increase more than fourfold to 34 million barrels of oil equivalent. The country's energy mix is dominated by gas for 92% of total energy production in 2019, followed by hydro at 8%. By 2043, the country's reliance on other renewables is set to grow significantly accounting for 3% of total production. In comparison, the contribution of renewables in the average African lower middle-income economies is forecast to stand at 8.1% of total energy production in 2019. In Mauritania, hydro will drop to 1% of total energy. Gas will remain dominant at 95% of total production by then.

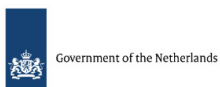


In 2019, Mauritania emitted only 0.9 million tons of carbon in 2019. Emissions will increase to 3 million tons of carbon by 2043. Mauritania ranks low on emissions within the group of lower middle-income economies in Africa.

## Endnotes

1. World Bank, [The World Bank in Mauritania](#)
2. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, [Action against desertification – Mauritania](#)
3. BTI Transformation Index, [Mauritania Country Report 2022](#)
4. World Population Review, [Nouakchott Population 2022](#)
5. Africapolis, [Mauritania](#)
6. International Trade Administration, [Mauritania – Country commercial guide](#), 15 August 2022

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Mustapha Jobarteh joined the ISS in January 2022 as a Senior Researcher in the African Futures and Innovation programme in Pretoria. Before joining ISS, Mustapha was a senior lecturer and Head of the Department of Economics and Finance at the University of the Gambia and a research fellow with the Center for Policy, Research and Strategic Studies. His interests include macroeconomics, international trade and econometric modelling. Mustapha has a PhD in economics from Istanbul Medeniyet University, Istanbul, Turkey.

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