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Establishing Central and East Africa as Sources of Quality Products and Investment Destinations of Choice, to Accelerate Industrialization and Economic Diversification, and to Strengthen Food Security

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Report on the Socio-Economic Situation of the Countries of Central Africa

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BEAC	Bank of Central African States
ECA/SRO/CA	Sub-Regional Office for Central Africa of the Economic Commission for Africa
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
CEMAC	Central African Economic and Monetary Community
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
HDI	Human Development Index
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
ILO	International Labour Organization
UNO	United Nations Organization
CAR	Central African Republic
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
STP	Sao Tome and Principe
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area

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Overview

Economic activity in 2022 evolved against an international backdrop of the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which led to a fall in the supply of raw materials, and soaring commodity and energy prices. Having inherited three years of crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, the **global economy** slowed to 3.5% in 2022 (from 6.3% in 2021), and is expected to slow further in 2023 and 2024 to an average of 3.0% following the tightening of global financial conditions. In 2025, the global economy is expected to recover gradually to 3.2%, driven by easing disruptions in the supply chain and supply of energy and food. In **advanced countries**, growth slowed to 2.7% in 2022 (compared with 5.4% in 2021). The slowdown is expected to continue in 2023 and 2024. **In emerging and developing countries**, growth was also slow in 2022 (4.0% in 2022 compared with 6.8% in 2021). In 2023-25, growth is expected to average around 4.0%, due in particular to the reopening of borders in China and the recovery in economic activity around the world.

Regarding prices, global inflation continued to rise, reaching 8.7% in 2022, compared with 4.7% in 2021. In 2023, it should gradually fall to 6.8%, then to 5.2% in 2024 and 3.9% in 2025, thanks in particular to the massive and simultaneous tightening of central banks' monetary policies, and the fall in fuel and energy commodity prices, particularly in the United States, the Euro zone and Latin America.

In **sub-Saharan Africa**, after the sharp fall recorded in 2020 (-1.6% compared with 3.2% in 2019) due to the restrictions induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, growth in the region rebounded to 4.8% in 2021. In 2022, there was renewed slowdown, due in particular to the fall in demand for goods exported by the countries in the region as a result of the breakdown in supply chains, and the increase in central bank rates in most countries to check inflation. Growth is expected to slow to 3.9% in 2022, and to continue to fall in 2023 to 3.5%, for the second year running against a backdrop of weakening global economic activity.

From 2024 onwards, a recovery in economic activity is expected, underpinned by the easing of disruptions in supply chains, as well as the supply of commodities and foodstuffs. Growth should accelerate to 4.1% in 2024-25.

In terms of price trends, the region has continued to experience high (2-digit) levels of inflation since 2020. In 2022, inflation was expected to average +14.5% compared with 11.0% in 2021. This is the outcome of a general rise in food inflation in all the countries in the region, due to the increase in world fuel and food prices caused by the Russia-Ukraine crisis. In 2023, overall inflation will remain high at 14.0%, while from 2024 onwards, inflationary pressures should begin to ease. As a major net importer of food and energy products, sub-Saharan Africa should, in 2024, benefit from the fall in world prices for these products (which began in 2023 and should continue until 2025). This should highly contribute to the slowdown in overall inflation in the region, which is expected to reach 10.5% in 2024 and 8.7% in 2025.

Table 1: Key indicators of the international environment (2021-2025)

INDICATORS (in %, except as otherwise indicated)	2021	2022*	2023**	2024**	2025**
Real DGP growth					
Global economy	6.3	3.5	3.0	3.0	3.2
Advanced countries	5.4	2.7	1.5	1.4	1.8
Emerging and developing countries	6.8	4.0	4.0	4.1	4.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.7	3.9	3.5	4.1	4.1
Inflation					
Global economy	4.7	8.7	6.8	5.2	3.9
Advanced countries	3.1	7.3	4.7	2.8	2.1
Emerging and developing countries	5.9	9.8	8.3	6.8	5.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	11.0	14.5	14.0	10.5	8.7

*Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook (July and April 2023), *estimate, **forecast*

In Central Africa,[1] the economic recovery that began in 2021 continued into 2022 thanks to dynamic economic activity in all Member States. Sub-regional real growth was estimated at 4.2% in 2022, up 1.3 points on 2021. Regarding prices, the sub-region has continued to face strong inflationary pressures since 2018. In 2022, the increase in commodity prices caused by the fall in cereal supply exerted strong pressure on prices. Average inflation in the sub-region accelerated to 12.8%, driven by high average price levels in Angola (21.4%), Burundi (18.9%), Sao Tome and Principe (18.0%) and Rwanda (13.9%).

Public finance management in the sub-region resulted in a fiscal surplus in 2022 equivalent to 1.45% of GDP, an improvement on 2021 when it stood at 0.24% of GDP. This performance is linked to the recovery in economic activity that began in 2021 following the gradual lifting of restrictions imposed as part of the fight against COVID-19, combined with the recovery in commodity prices, particularly crude oil.

In addition, the external trade of ECCAS countries continued the recovery begun in 2021. The sub-region's current account balance remained in surplus in 2022 at 3.1% of GDP (compared with 1.5% of GDP in 2021), thanks in particular to the good performances of Angola (11.0% of GDP) and Congo (19.4% of GDP).

In terms of social development, demographic growth has slowed as a result of a fall in the birth rate, but fertility rates are still high. The countries of the sub-region, which are in the second phase of the demographic transition, are faced with the challenges of a young population. Poverty remains another major challenge in the sub-region. Women and young people are the most vulnerable to poverty and are more exposed to the risk of unemployment and working poverty.

Informal employment remains the dominant form of employment, and the industrial and service sectors are timidly absorbing the available workforce, which is mainly to be found in the agricultural sector.

[1] Central Africa covers the 11 countries of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (ECCAS): Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe.

In addition, much remains to be done in terms of social protection, with social safety nets covering only a small proportion of the poorest members of the population.

In education and health, despite the significant efforts made by countries in terms of spending in these areas, much remains to be done to ensure that the sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda are achieved. Efforts are needed to ensure that resources are used efficiently, to the benefit of all, especially the most vulnerable.

1. Recent Macroeconomic Trends in Central African Countries and Outlook for 2023-2025

In recent years, Central Africa, like the other sub-regions of the continent, has been marked by economic, climatic and security crises, the impact of which has taken a toll on the economies of its Member States. These Sates are becoming increasingly aware of the need to speed up economic diversification and develop production capacity to withstand systemic shocks and protect their economies against global disruptions such as the oil shocks, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This awareness is rooted in the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the leaders of the sub-region and which constitute the two major strategic frameworks for inclusive growth and sustainable development. This report analyses the recent economic dynamics of the countries of Central Africa by examining a number of key macroeconomic performance indicators in order to draw the attention of the countries' authorities to the need to continue implementing the economic reforms required to ensure that Central Africa fully harnesses its economic potential to achieve inclusive and sustainable economic development in line with Agendas 2030 and 2063.

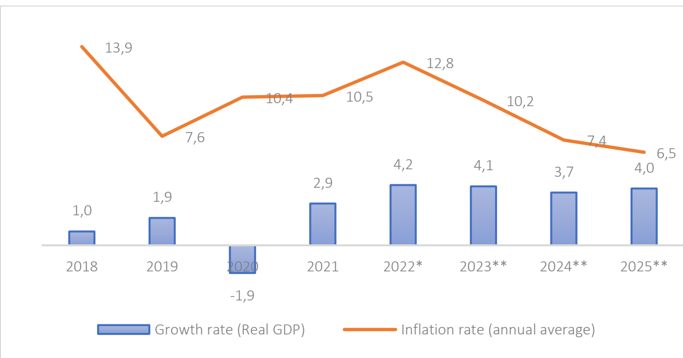
1.1. Real sector and prices

1.1.1 Growth

After two successive years of economic momentum, when real growth stood at 1.0% and 1.9% in 2018 and 2019 respectively, the sub-region contracted to 1.9% in 2020, suffering the disruptions caused by the COVID-19-related health crisis, in particular the disruption of supply circuits as a result of restrictions on the movement of people around the world. In 2021, the strong economic activity in the majority of ECCAS Member States (notably Angola, Rwanda, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, CAR, Gabon, DRC and Sao Tome and Principe) enabled a return to growth. Real GDP growth accelerated to 2.9%, driven mainly by the economic performances of Rwanda (+10.9%), the DRC (+8.9%), Cameroon (+3.6%) and Burundi (+3.1%).

The recovery continued in 2022, with growth estimated at 4.2%, underpinned by the positive performances recorded by all the Member States.

__Graph 1__: Real growth and inflation trends in Central Africa from 2018 to 2022 and outlook for 2023-2025



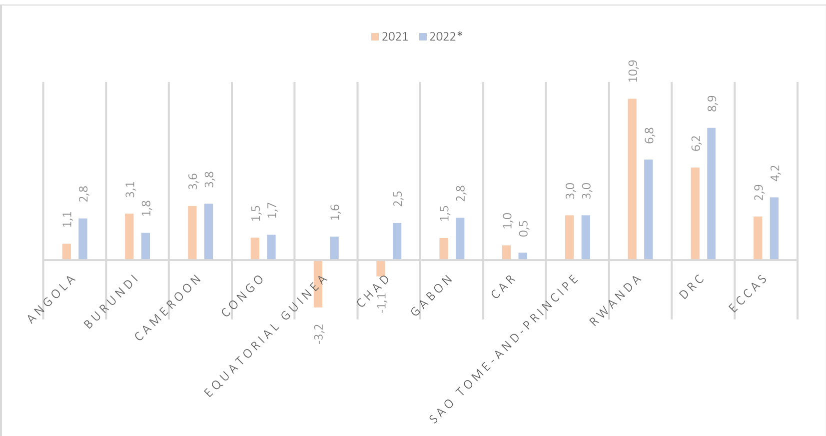
Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on IMF data

The DRC (8.9%) and Rwanda (+6.8%) recorded the best performances, followed by Cameroon (3.8%). In the DRC, performance was mainly driven by buoyant mining output, boosted by the launch of the Kamoa-Kakula copper mine in mid-2021, which is undergoing progressive expansions and is on track to become the world's third largest copper mine by 2024. The buoyant economic activity in Rwanda has been underpinned since 2021 by good performances in the manufacturing and services sectors, combined with strong private consumption, despite a contraction in the construction sector and weak agricultural output affected by weather conditions. In Cameroon, growth was underpinned in 2022 by the non-oil sector (+3.9%), notably through the strong agro-industry and services sectors.

In the specific case of Angola, the powerhouse of the sub-region, the recovery that began in 2021 after five successive years of economic recession continued into 2022. Real GDP growth accelerated to 2.8%, an improvement of 1.7 points compared with 2021, backed by oil price rise and increased oil production (growth in the oil sector stood at 2.0% in 2022 compared with -11.5% in 2021), as well as the resilient non-oil sector (+3.2%).

CAR and Sao Tome and Principe remain the worst performers in the sub-region. In CAR, a deceleration has been recorded since 2019, due in particular to the persistent major structural constraints linked to the internal armed conflicts. In 2022, the growth rate was estimated at 0.5%, compared with 1% in 2021 and 2020. In Sao Tome and Principe, the economy continued in 2022 the slowdown observed since 2021, with a growth rate of 0.9% compared with 1.9% a year earlier. This underperformance is mainly due to (i) persistent energy shortages, (ii) the effects of the COVID-19-related health crisis on the tourism sector (the main driver of the economy), (iii) the floods that occurred in late 2021 and early 2022, which caused a slowdown in fishing and farming activities, and (iv) the effects of the Russia-Ukraine war, which weakened transport and commercial services due to higher freight and shipping costs.

<u>Graph 2</u> : Real GDP growth in ECCAS countries in 2021-2022 (%)



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on IMF data (estimate)*

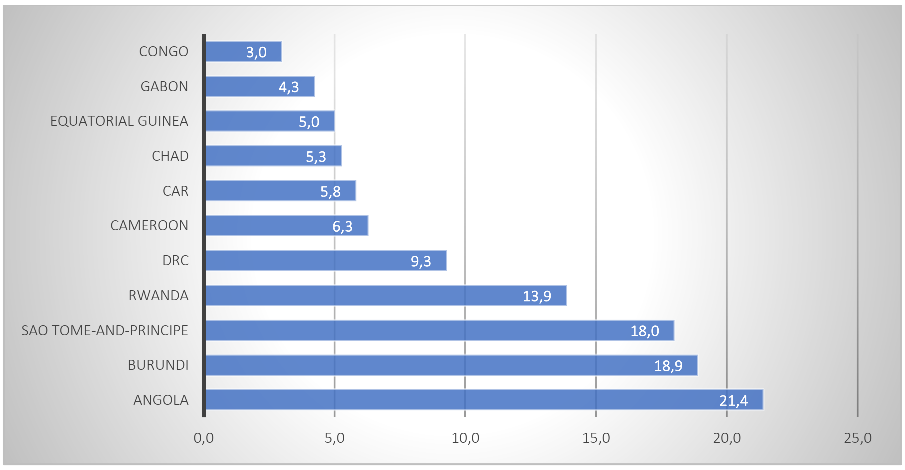
Overall, the 2023-25 outlook for the sub-region is favourable, despite the multiple crises and uncertainties linked to the post-election process in the run-up to the presidential and legislative elections in some countries, with the risk of ensuing conflicts. Although there will be a slight slowdown over the period, economic growth in ECCAS is expected to reach 4.1% in 2023, 3.7% in 2024 and then accelerate to 4.0% in 2025, driven by the economic momentum of countries such as Rwanda, DRC, Burundi, Cameroon and Congo, with average annual growth rates of +7.1%, +6.5%, +5.1%, +4.2% and +3.9% respectively.

Equatorial Guinea would be the only country to experience a recession over the period, with growth estimated at -6.2% on average per annum, mainly as a result of the decline in oil production.

1.1.2. Prices

The sub-region has continued to face strong inflationary pressures since 2018. The general price level averaged around 10.6% over the 2018-2021 period. In 2022, the rise in prices was exacerbated by the increase in commodity prices as a result of the drop in cereal supply caused by the Russia-Ukraine war. Average inflation in the sub-region accelerated to 12.8%, driven by high average price levels in Angola (21.4%), Burundi (18.9%), Sao Tome and Principe (18.0%) and Rwanda (13.9%).

__Graph 3__ : Inflation trends in Central African countries in 2022



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on IMF data

In Burundi and Sao Tome and Principe, the sharp rise in world food and fuel prices intensified socio-economic vulnerabilities. In Rwanda, the 2022 rise in inflation was mainly due to higher food and energy prices, as well as domestic demand fuelled by strong credit growth.

In Angola, however, despite a still high level of inflation in 2022, the inflationary surge has been slightly contained (inflation is estimated to have fallen by 4.4 points compared with 2021) thanks to a stronger kwanza and the Central Bank's efforts to tighten monetary policy, despite the rise in world commodity, food and fuel prices.

Looking ahead, average inflation in the sub-region is expected to slow gradually over the period 2023-2025. It should stand at 10.2% in 2023, 7.4% in 2024 and 6.5% in 2025, underpinned by the fall in average consumer prices over the period in most of the countries, linked to the fall in world commodity, food and fuel prices. In eight countries (Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe), inflation will fall from 2023 onwards, while in Rwanda, the DRC and CAR, inflationary pressures will continue before easing from 2024 onwards.

In Rwanda, inflationary pressures (above the National Bank of Rwanda's 5% benchmark level) are expected to continue in 2023 at +14.5%, mainly due to persistently high food inflation. On the other hand, from 2024 onwards, the monetary tightening measures envisaged to support the external balance and price stability should gradually bring inflation down to around 5%. In the DRC, after a further rise to 14.8% in 2023, the gradual decline in food and fuel prices and the easing of disruptions in the global supply chain, combined with the moderating effect of monetary tightening on private consumption (continued implementation of a prudent monetary policy by the Central Bank), will help to bring inflation down to an average of 7.1% over the period 2024-25. In the CAR, the fuel price reforms undertaken by Government, sharply increasing retail fuel prices in January 2023 for the first time since 2015, would push inflation up from 5.8% in 2022 to 6.3% in 2023. Nevertheless, following further monetary tightening by BEAC, average inflation could fall to 2.7% in 2024 and 2.8% in 2025.

1.2. Public finances

After the poor performance in terms of public finances in 2019 and 2020 (the overall budget deficit stood at around 0.5% and 2.3% of GDP respectively), the economic activity recovery that began in 2021 following the gradual lifting of restrictions imposed under the fight against COVID-19, combined with the recovery in commodity prices, particularly crude oil, helped to improve public finances. In 2022, the sub-region recorded a fiscal surplus of 1.45% of GDP, an improvement of 1.21 points compared with 2021.

This surplus is all the more remarkable given that it was achieved against a backdrop of increased public spending due to budget support measures (notably subsidies on petroleum products at the pump and a freeze on the prices of essential goods) taken by the governments of Central African countries in the face of the continuing negative impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on energy and food products.

By country, overall fiscal surpluses were recorded in 2022 in 7 out of 11 countries, namely: Congo (8.9% of GDP compared with 1.8% in 2021), Equatorial Guinea (3.5% of GDP compared with 2.6% in 2021), Chad (6.1% of GDP after a deficit of 1.9% of GDP in 2021), Rwanda (5.3% of GDP compared with 4, 7% of GDP in 2021), Gabon (1.8% of GDP after a deficit of 1.9% of GDP in 2021), Sao Tome and Principe (+8.1% of GDP after 1.5% in 2021) and Angola (1.7% of GDP after 3.8% in 2021) (Graph 4). The fiscal surpluses of Angola, Central Africa's largest economy and leading oil producer, were sustained by higher oil prices and stable production. The government of Angola also introduced fiscal flexibility in order to improve revenue mobilization, in particular by increasing the efficiency of tax collection and reducing tax evasion.

On the other hand, fiscal deficits were recorded in 2022 in CAR (-5.3% of GDP after -6.0% in 2021), Cameroon (-1.1% of GDP after -3.0% of GDP in 2021), Burundi (-5% of GDP after -7.8% of GDP in 2021), and the DRC (-0.5% of GDP after -1.6% of GDP in 2021). The budget deficit in

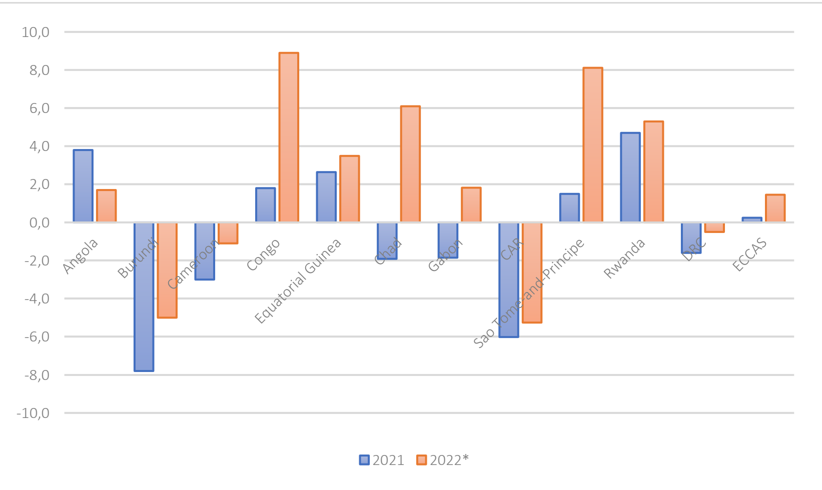
Burundi, although smaller than in 2021, is linked to the increase in public investment spending, as well as to the wage adjustment begun in 2016, which has led to an increase in the wage bill over the years. Efforts to rationalize public authorities have been undertaken to improve revenue, through several reforms, including (i) digitization, (ii) strengthening control missions and the collection of current revenue and tax arrears, (iii) taxing the informal sector, (iv) simplifying procedures and facilitating payments, and (v) building the capacity of tax administration staff and its partners. Despite these efforts, the increase in revenue in 2022 (+23.8% of GDP, i.e. 0.6 point more than in 2021) is still below public spending (+31.0% of GDP, i.e. 2.2 points more than in 2021).

Although also lower than in 2021, the budget deficit in the DRC is linked in particular to the increase in civil servants' salaries, justified by the State's desire to improve their social conditions, and to the increase in exceptional expenditure linked to security, as well as to the reduction in professional income tax.

In Cameroon, the increase in oil revenues in 2022 (3.5% of GDP compared with 1.9% of GDP in 2021) and in non-oil revenues (12.1% of GDP compared with 11.8% of GDP in 2021) also helped to reduce the overall deficit compared with 2021. In the CAR, the budget deficit, although also lower in 2022 than in 2021, was caused by the poor revenue collection in connection with the fuel shortage and the slowdown in economic activity. In fact, monthly domestic revenue fell from around XAF[2] 11 billion in the middle of the year to XAF 8.5 billion. In response to this shortfall, the authorities made a partial adjustment to non-priority domestic spending of XAF 9.5 billion (or 0.6% of GDP).

The sub-regional outlook for 2023 is expected to be less favourable overall, due to sub-regional and international uncertainties. Public finance management is expected to result in a budget surplus decline to 0.2% of GDP in 2023, followed by a deficit in 2024 (-0.6% of GDP) and 2025 (-0.9% of GDP).

Graph 4: *Trends in the overall fiscal balance of ECCAS countries in 2021 and 2022 (% of GDP)*



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on IMF data, (* estimate)

[2] Central African CFA Franc

1.3. Monetary sector

During 2021, the year of post-COVID recovery, money supply increased in all ECCAS countries. It stood at 24.6% of GDP, mainly as a result of an increase in credit to the private sector in most countries. In 2022, the money supply fell to 21.6% of GDP, masking contrasting trends between countries. This underperformance is essentially due to the decline in money supply in Angola (19.5% of GDP in 2022 compared with 24.4% of GDP in 2021), Equatorial Guinea (9.9% of GDP in 2022 compared with 14.7% of GDP in 2021), Congo (27.5% of GDP in 2022 compared with 34% of GDP in 2021) and the DRC (19.5% of GDP in 2022 compared with 21.8% of GDP in 2021) (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Trends in money supply in ECCAS countries between 2020 and 2022 (as a % of GDP)

	2020	2021	2022*
Angola	38.4	24.4	19.5
Burundi	1.3	1.5	1.8
Cameroon	26.0	29.1	29.6
Congo	35.8	34.0	27.5
Gabon	29.4	23.4	24.8
Equatorial Guinea	17.2	14.7	9.9
CAR	30.3	33.3	31.9
DRC	15.0	21.8	19.5
Rwanda	27.0	29.9	29.2
Sao Tome and Principe	32.4	30.2	29.7
Chad	20.8	23.3	24.4
ECCAS	26.6	24.6	21.6

Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on IMF data, (estimate)*

In terms of monetary policy, the Bank of Central African States (BEAC)[3] tightened its monetary policy throughout 2022. The stronger-than-expected acceleration in inflationary pressures, owing to the sharp rise in world food prices and the depreciation of the euro against the US dollar, as well as to disruptions in international supply circuits, led to a tightening of monetary policy. At the end of the September 2022 Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting, BEAC tightened its monetary policy again, following on from the March 2022 meeting. The tender interest rate (TIAO), BEAC's key rate, was raised from 4.0% to 4.5%. In anticipation of a persistent inflation rise, linked to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and in line with the currency's internal stability objective, the MPC decided at its March 2023 meeting to raise the tender interest rate from 4.5% to 5%.

The Central Bank of Congo (BCC) also tightened its monetary policy. The key rate was raised from 7.5% in January 2022 to 8.25% in November 2022. At its March 2023 meeting, the BCC's MPC noted that, as at 17 March, the cumulative inflation rate had reached 5.1%, compared with a forecast of 9.7% at the end of December, mainly due to the rise in food prices.

[3] Central Bank common to the six countries of CEMAC (Cameroon, CAR, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Chad)

1.4. External sector

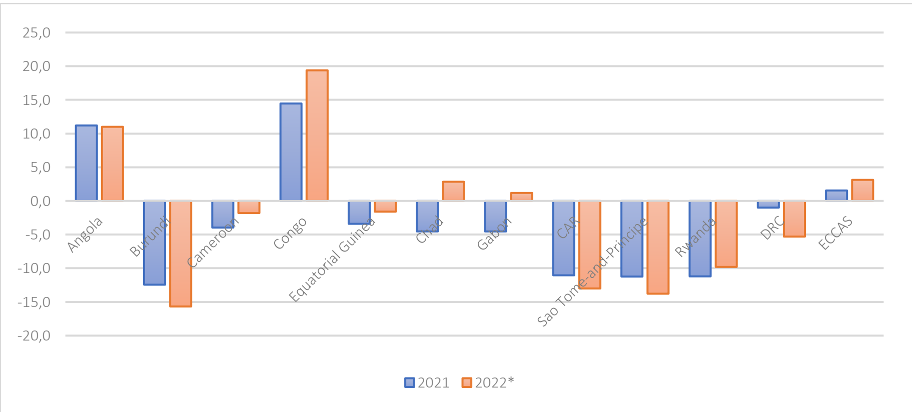
The year 2020 was characterized by a fall in world trade associated with a sharp deterioration in the terms of trade due to the health shock linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. The external sector of ECCAS member countries was impacted by the extroverted nature of their economies, which are heavily dependent on exports of raw materials and imports of consumer and capital goods. Against this backdrop, the current account showed a deficit equivalent to 2.1% of sub-regional GDP, compared with a small surplus of 0.4% of GDP a year earlier.

In 2021 and 2022, ECCAS countries' foreign trade recovered, with the gradual end of the restrictions imposed under the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery in commodity prices. The region's current account balance returned to surplus (1.5% of GDP in 2021 and 3.1% of GDP in 2022), thanks in particular to the performance of Angola (11.2% of GDP in 2021 and 11% of GDP in 2022) and Congo (14.5% of GDP in 2021 and 19.4% of GDP in 2022).

Graph 5 below illustrates the contrasting trends in the external positions of Central African countries. The level of current accounts differs from country to country, with oil exporters Angola and Congo showing a surplus of 11% and 19.4% of GDP respectively in 2022. In the other countries, current account deficits widened in 2022, especially in Burundi, DRC, CAR and Sao Tome and Principe, under pressure from food and energy imports. Burundi, DRC, CAR and Sao Tome and Principe are expected to record current account deficits of 15.7%, 5.3% and 13% of GDP respectively in 2022, mainly due to a 4.2%, 7.7% and 9.4% fall in the terms of trade.

Looking ahead, the sub-region's current account balance is expected to be zero in 2023 and in deficit in 2024-25 (i.e. -1.2% of GDP and -1.4% of GDP respectively).

__Graph 5__: Trends in the current account balance of ECCAS countries in 2021 and 2022 (% of GDP)



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on IMF data, (* estimate)

1.5. Recommendations

Economic activity in Central Africa continues to evolve amid uncertainties. Indeed, geopolitical tensions and the persistent Russia-Ukraine conflict could lead to further bottlenecks in global supply chains and shocks to the prices of raw materials exported by the sub-region.

Furthermore, though favourable, the growth outlook should not mask the fact that it remains weak, as it is too close to the demographic growth rate (+3.0%) to translate into a significant improvement in GDP per capita. The acceleration of inflationary pressures due to rising food and oil prices has widened income inequalities within households in Central African countries. The small surpluses or deficits in the public and external accounts illustrate the structural dependence of the sub-region's economies on commodity prices and thus reflect a need for financing. On the basis of these challenges, but also of the opportunities arising therefrom, the following economic policy recommendations can be made:

- Central African countries, through their regional economic communities, must achieve effective implementation of economic policies and reforms aimed at making the sub-regional economy much more competitive and attractive to investors and at creating backward and forward linkages between the resource sectors and other sectors of the economy, with a view to promoting the development of regional value chains, diversification and industrialization based on its natural resources and driven by trade in line with the spirit of the 2017 Douala Consensus;
- The new Master Plan for Industrialization and Economic Diversification (PDIDE) developed by ECCAS aims to accelerate the structural transformation of Central African economies by focusing on high value-added activities in the manufacturing sectors, through the development of industrial value chains and special economic zones. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), for which ECCAS has also adopted an implementation strategy, is a real catalyst for stimulating trade between African countries and the sub-region, fostering regional value chains conducive to integration into the global economy and supporting industrial development;
- National authorities need to bring inflationary pressures under control as quickly as possible, particularly the rise in food prices. Central Africa has 27 million hectares of arable land and four ecological zones conducive to the development of agriculture and pastoral activities. Through the implementation of the PDIDE, the aim is to invest in agriculture in order to ensure self-sufficiency and food security for the population. It also entails investing in infrastructure to support this strategic guidance;
- Central African countries must improve the quality of public spending by increasing spending that contributes more to gross fixed capital formation;
- The countries of Central Africa collectively benefit from a global advantage in terms of their exceptional natural capital in the Congo Basin. This calls for the imperative need to operationalize the consortium for the evaluation and enhancement of Central Africa's natural capital to finance collective initiatives for industrial development and economic diversification in the sub-region.

2. Recent Social Development in Central Africa

Anticipating demographic change and understanding population trends is essential for national development planning and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2063 Agenda for Africa. The 2030 Agenda places people at the centre of sustainable development, echoing the ideals set out in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), adopted in Cairo in 1994 (UNDESA, 2022).

According to the World Population Prospects 2022,[4] recent demographic trends in sub-Saharan Africa point to future challenges for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly with regard to poverty reduction, education, health and employment. For example, rapid population growth means that countries need to provide schooling and health care for an increasing number of children, as well as quality education and employment opportunities for a growing number of young people (UNDESA, 2022).

An overview of the socio-economic situation in the countries of Central Africa reveals a slowdown in population growth due to a fall in the birth rate, but fertility rates are still high. The countries of the sub-region, which are in the second phase of the demographic transition, are faced with the challenges of a young population. Poverty remains another major challenge in the sub-region, with five countries recording low Human Development Indices (HDIs) and three of the five countries with the lowest HDIs in the world.

Women and young people are the most vulnerable to poverty and are more exposed to the risk of unemployment or of being the working poverty. Policies to reduce poverty should therefore focus on promoting decent work, sufficient income, job security, a safe and healthy working environment, adequate working conditions, employment opportunities and adequate social protection, particularly for the most vulnerable populations.

The vulnerability of a large proportion of the jobs available in Central Africa is also a major problem. Informal employment remains the dominant form of employment, and the industrial and service sectors are timidly absorbing the available workforce, which is mainly to be found in the agricultural sector.

In addition, much remains to be done in terms of social protection, with social safety nets covering only a small proportion of the economically marginalized.

Regarding education and health, despite the significant efforts made by countries in terms of spending in these areas, much remains to be done to ensure that the sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda are achieved. Furthermore, efforts are needed to ensure that resources are used efficiently, to the benefit of all, especially the most vulnerable.

[4] The *World Population Prospects 2022* is the twenty-seventh edition of the official world population estimates and projections published by the United Nations since 1951, through the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

2.1. Demographic trends

The total population of Central Africa in 2022 was 222.74 million inhabitants. It should reach 280.44 million by 2030, the target date of Agenda 2030, and 571.88 million by the target date of Agenda 2063 for Africa.

Sub-Saharan Africa is recognized as the region with the strongest demographic growth, with the population expected to almost double to over 2 billion by the end of the 2040 decade. Central Africa accounted for 19% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa in 2022. By the target dates of the 2030 and 2063 Agendas, the population of Central Africa should account for almost a quarter of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, at 21.5% and 22.4% respectively.

Most countries have stabilized populations

Between 2018 and 2022, while some countries in Central Africa continued to record demographic growth (CAR, DRC, Sao Tome and Principe), a majority of them saw their populations stabilize or beginning to decline. In fact, 8 of the 11 countries in the region recorded a slowdown in population growth between 2018 and 2022.

The DRC alone accounts for almost 45% of the population of Central Africa. It is one of the 8 countries in the world that will account for more than half of the projected increase in the world's population between 2022 and 2050.[5]

Table 3: Annual population growth rates: estimates, 2018-2021, and medium scenario with 95% prediction intervals, 2022, 2030, 2050 and 2063 (in %)

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2030	2050	2063
Burundi	3.52	3.02	2.72	2.62	2.70	2.43	1.70	1.27
Rwanda	2.41	2.37	2.42	2.33	2.30	2.02	1.40	1.02
Angola	3.42	3.37	3.17	3.16	3.03	2.76	2.00	1.55
Cameroon	2.80	2.75	2.67	2.60	2.60	2.34	1.73	1.34
CAR	2.04	2.41	2.66	1.58	2.83	3.00	1.89	1.37
Chad	3.47	3.13	3.19	3.14	3.09	2.82	2.01	1.52
Congo	2.39	2.32	2.35	2.29	2.27	2.14	1.58	1.27
DRC	3.20	3.17	3.28	3.17	3.23	3.06	2.24	1.75
Equatorial Guinea	3.41	3.26	2.22	2.54	2.35	2.05	1.29	0.90
Gabon	2.33	2.25	2.14	2.05	1.99	1.75	1.23	0.88
Sao Tome and Principe	1.54	1.51	2.21	1.84	1.96	1.87	1.31	1.01
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.62	2.62	2.60	2.51	2.50	2.32	1.66	1.27

Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on World Population Prospect, UNDESA, data, 2022

Demographic growth is slowing due a decline in births, but fertility rates remain high

Trends in population size and age structure depend mainly on fertility and mortality rates, which fell in all countries in the sub-region between 2018 and 2022. Indeed, the pace of

[5] According to the WPP 2022, more than half of the projected increase in the world's population between 2022 and 2050 is expected to be concentrated in just eight countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines and the United Republic of Tanzania.

population growth slowed as a result of falling fertility rates between 2018 and 2022.[6] However, countries continue to record high fertility rates, ranging from 3.46 births per woman in Gabon to 6.22 births per woman in Chad. In the sub-region, 5 countries have fertility rates above the sub-Saharan average (4.52 births per woman in 2022).

The United Nations forecasts confirm a significant reduction in the fertility rate, i.e. the average number of births per woman in a lifetime, by 2030 in all countries in the sub-region (Figure 6). However, projections for 2030 and 2050 suggest fertility rates that are still high, and much higher than the global average (2.27 and 2.15 births per woman, in 2030 and 2050 respectively).

__Graph 6__: Total fertility rate (live births per woman), 2018, 2022, 2030, 2050

Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on World Population Prospect, UNDESA, data, 2022

The countries of the sub-region are in the second phase of the demographic transition, which is characterized by falling mortality rates and declining but still high fertility rates, as is the case across Africa as a whole (Magrin and Ninot, 2020). This means that the population is growing rapidly, but the rate of growth is expected to slow as fertility rates continue to fall.

Demographic transition is a complex process with major implications for social, economic and cultural factors, urbanization and the improvements needed in healthcare and education. There are still significant challenges, particularly with regard to the provision of public services for a population that remains young (Canning et al., 2015).

Indeed, the age structure of the population is important because different ages interact differently with the economy, also modifying the performance of the economy. Exploiting the demographic dividend requires investment in health and education and economic policies that absorb the increased labour supply in the economy, enabling people to save and invest for their future retirement.

[6]Population growth is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including fertility, mortality and migration. This chapter will focus on fertility.

The structure of the population is characterized by a high proportion of young people and a relatively low but growing proportion of elderly people.

According to recent estimates, in 2021, the median age of the population in the sub-region[7] ranged from around 14.7 years for the Central African Republic to 21.6 years for Gabon. Six of the 11 countries in the sub-region scored relatively low compared with 17.6 years for sub-Saharan Africa (which is also the lowest in the world).

The median age of the population has also increased in recent years, suggesting that the sub-region is heading towards a phase of ageing population, albeit less alarming than in other regions of the world. While the population of Central African countries remains young compared with other regions of the world, this progressive trend highlights the importance for countries in the sub-region to prepare to implement measures and programmes adapted to the growing proportion of elderly people, notably by strengthening social security and pension systems, as well as health and care systems for the elderly.

Table 4: Population projections for ECCAS countries in 2030, 2050 and 2063[8]
(in millions of inhabitants)

	2030	2050	2063
Burundi	15.801	24.209	29.277
Rwanda	16.376	23.030	26.952
Angola	44.912	72.328	91.008
Cameroon	34.051	51.280	62.526
CAR	7.104	11.533	14.261
Chad	22.460	36.452	45.849
Congo	7.115	10.379	12.481
DRC	127.582	217.494	281.587
Equatorial Guinea	2.000	2.791	3.213
Gabon	2.775	3.757	4.303
Sao Tome and Principe	0.265	0.367	0.426
Total Central Africa	280.441	453.62	571.883

Source: World Population Prospects. UNDESA 2022, online Edition

Population growth is associated with a number of challenges and has consequences on poverty, migration and development. It can affect the provision of public services and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) because of the pressure on available resources.

For example, by the target date of the 2030 Agenda, women will account for half of the population in Central Africa.[9] This reinforces the importance of promoting women's access to public services, but also the need to ensure the provision of services that meet the specific needs of women and girls, as set out in the SDGs.

[7] According to UNDESA's WPP 2022 data, the median age of the global population in 2021 was 30 years. In the sub-region, the median age of the population is 15.6 years for Burundi, 19 years for Rwanda, 16.2 years for Angola, 17.5 years for Cameroon, 14.7 years for the Central African Republic, 15 years for Chad, 18.2 years for Congo, 15.6 years for the Democratic Republic of Congo, 20.9 for Equatorial Guinea, 21.6 years for Gabon and 18.4 years for Sao Tomé and Principe.

[8] Medium scenario projection. Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition.

[9] According to estimates, women will account for 48% of the population in Equatorial Guinea; 49% of the population in Gabon; 50% of the population in Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Congo, DRC and STP; and 51% of the population in Rwanda and Angola.

2.2. Poverty

In a context where the COVID-19 pandemic continues to give rise to new variants, the war in Ukraine and its repercussions around the world, new climatic and ecological disasters threatening the planet, emerging security crises, etc., layers of uncertainty are accumulating and interacting to hamper efforts to achieve sustainable development and reduce poverty in sub-Saharan Africa.

Overall, between 1990 and 2015, the rate of extreme poverty in the world fell from 36% to 10%[10]. However, the pace of change has slowed down. According to an article published by UNU-WIDER, half a billion people, or 8% of the world's population, risk falling into poverty as a result of the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic (Sumner et al., 2020).

This sub-section provides an overview of the status of poverty in the sub-region, based on SDG1, which aims to eradicate poverty in all its forms everywhere in the world. Due to the difficulty of obtaining available and harmonized data for the countries in the sub-region, the section provides an analysis of the human development index and employee poverty (SDG1, indicator 1.1.1).

Three countries in the sub-region are ranked among the five countries with the lowest human development index in the world

In the ECCAS zone, only Gabon is classified as a country with high human development, which implies that the country offers a generally high standard of living, with decent healthcare, education and remuneration opportunities. Five countries (Sao Tome and Principe, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Cameroon and Congo) have average human development indices. On the other hand, Rwanda, the DRC, Burundi, the Central African Republic and Chad have low human development indices. Three countries in the sub-region (Burundi, Central African Republic and Chad) rank among the five countries with the lowest levels of human development in the world (Table 5). This implies that in these three countries, the level of human development is insufficient to meet the basic needs of the population. These countries combine low life expectancy, low levels of education, inadequate incomes and poor quality of life. This stems from difficulties in providing basic services to the populations, such as access to drinking water, food and healthcare.

Table 5: Human Development Index (HDI) for ECCAS countries

HDI rank	Country	2021	Remarks
112	Gabon	0.706	High HDI
138	Sao Tome and Principe	0.618	Average HDI
145	Equatorial Guinea	0.596	Average HDI
148	Angola	0.586	Average HDI
151	Cameroon	0.576	Average HDI
153	Congo	0.571	Average HDI
165	Rwanda	0.534	Low HDI
179	DRC	0.479	Low HDI
187	Burundi	0.426	Low HDI

[10] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/fr/poverty/

188	**CAR**	0.404	Low HDI
190	**Chad**	0.394	Low HDI

Source: UNDP 2022 (Human Development Report 2021-22)

How do the countries of the sub-region rank in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG1), which aims to eradicate poverty in all its forms throughout the world?

In most countries in the sub-region, a job is no guarantee of decent living conditions and an escape from poverty.

The proportion of working poor is a relevant indicator for poverty analysis, providing relevant information on the link between employment and poverty, which is crucial for the development of effective policies.[11] Indeed, ILO (2019) reveals that the differences between in-work poverty rates and poverty rates are not significant. While employment does not expose individuals to a higher risk of poverty, it is not a guarantee against poverty. Employed people are just as vulnerable to poverty as others, which underlines the need to redouble efforts to ensure decent work for all.

Employment should be a route out of poverty, provided that the quality of employment is adequate, with decent work, sufficient income, job security and a safe and healthy working environment.

When we consider the proportion of the employed population (aged 15 and over) living below the poverty line[12], in particular indicator 1.1.1 of SDG1, the statistics for 2022 reveal that in 7 out of 9 countries in the ECCAS zone, more than a third of workers live in poverty. This means that in the majority of countries in the sub-region, having a job does not necessarily mean that an individual is in a position to escape poverty (Table 6).

In addition to offering a generally high standard of living (high HDI), Gabon has some particularly interesting statistics, with only 1.6% of the employed population living below the poverty line in 2022. The country is followed by Cameroon, with 19.6% of the employed population (i.e. 2 out of 10 people) living below the poverty line.

Table 6: Employed population living below the poverty line, by gender and age (%)

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Angola	43.8	46.1	49.6	50.6	50.6
Burundi	77.5	78.1	79.4	79.6	79.7
Cameroon	20.0	19.7	20.4	20.1	19.6
CAR	61.7	61.6	61.4	61.9	61.5
Chad	33.2	32.7	34.9	36.8	36.8
Congo	52.1	53.4	57.7	60.3	60.1

[11] For purposes of international comparability, the poverty line considered in this section refers to an international absolute poverty line of USD 1.90 per capita per day at purchasing power parity.
[12] The proportion of the employed population living below the international poverty line of USD 1.90 per day, also known as the in-work poverty rate, is defined as the proportion of individuals who are employed but still below the poverty line as defined by the international standard.

DRC	68.0	67.3	68.2	67.1	66.0
Gabon	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.6
Rwanda	46.9	43.1	46.3	42.5	40.3

Source: UN (Statistics Division), SDG indicator database, consulted on 1 August 2023

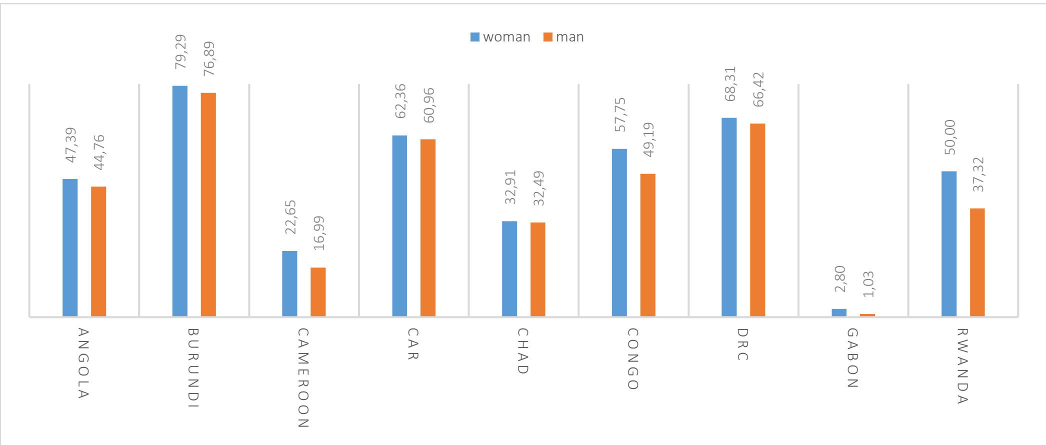
The statistics in Table 6 show an increase in the working poor population between 2018 and 2022 in Angola, Burundi, Chad and Congo, while the reverse is true for Rwanda, Gabon, the DRC, the Central African Republic and Cameroon. The sub-region's lacklustre progress is a reminder of the need to redouble our efforts to reduce poverty.

Women are more likely to be working poor than men

Separate analysis of data on in-work poverty rates by gender shows persistent gender inequalities. Indeed, in all the countries in the sub-region for which data is available, employed women are more vulnerable to poverty than employed men (Figure 7). This is even true for Gabon, where in-work poverty is predominantly female, despite the country's extremely low in-work poverty rate.

The most significant difference is seen in Rwanda, where 50% of female employees compared with 37% of male employees are poor. Rwanda is followed by Congo, where almost 58% of female employees are poor, compared with 49% of male employees.

Graph 7: Employed population living below the poverty line, aged 15 and over, by gender, in 2019 (latest year available), as a %



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on data for indicator 1.1.1 of SDG1, United Nations Statistics Division's Database of SDG Indicators, consulted on 1 August 2023

Women are more likely to be working poor than men. This is the outcome of accumulated discrimination throughout the life cycle, which affects investment in human capital and the returns on that investment in the labour market. However, it also stems from the characteristics of the labour market and the public policies in place, which do not take into account factors such as women's triple role: reproduction, production and community work. This highlights the need for policies to improve the quality of employment for women, including policies to facilitate the balance between work and family responsibilities.

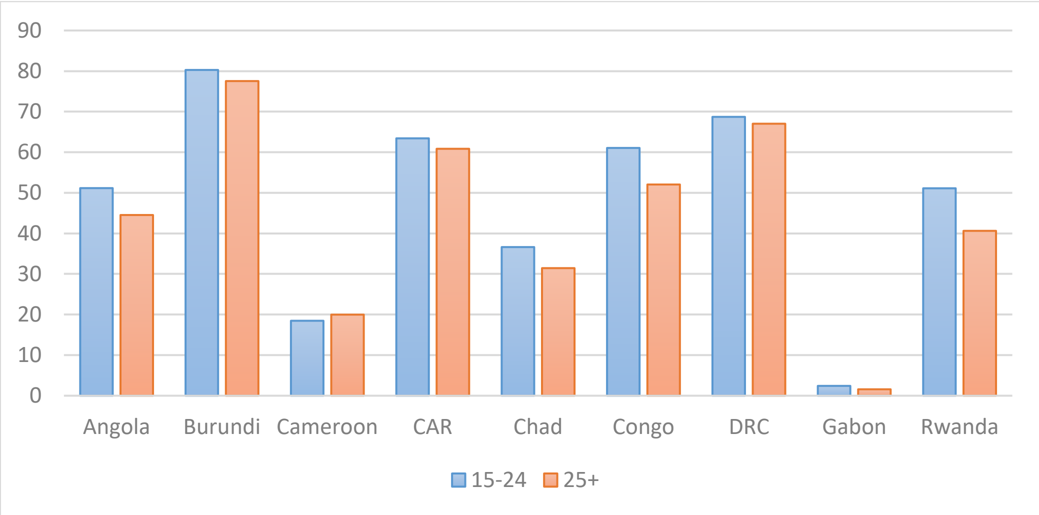
Young workers are more likely to fall into extreme poverty than adult workers

In all the countries in the sub-region for which data is available, poverty among young workers (aged 15 to 24) is higher than among adult workers (aged over 25), with the exception of Cameroon, where the opposite is observed.[13]

Rwanda, Congo and Angola have the widest gaps between young and adult populations. In Rwanda, 51% of the young employed population is poor, compared with 40.6% of the adult employed population. In Congo, 61% of the young employed population is poor, compared with 52% of the adult employed population.

In 6 of the 9 countries for which data is available, more than half of young workers are in situations of precariousness and extreme poverty.

Graph 8: *Employed population living below the poverty line, by age group, in 2019 (latest year available), as a %*



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on data for indicator 1.1.1 of SDG1, United Nations Statistics Division's Database of SDG Indicators, consulted on 1 August 2023

Several factors may explain the greater poverty among young workers, including job insecurity characterized by temporary contracts, irregular working hours and low wages (ILO, 2007).

Eradicating poverty in the sub-region requires identifying and tackling its root causes, using population data disaggregated by various relevant factors, including gender, age, area of residence and employment status. For example, while the working poor may face inadequate working conditions and insufficient income, the unemployed and those outside the labour force may face a lack of employment opportunities and insufficient social protection. Policies to reduce poverty should therefore focus on promoting decent work, sufficient income, job security, a safe and healthy working environment, adequate working conditions, employment opportunities and adequate social protection, particularly for the most vulnerable populations. Policies should also focus on the over-representation of women among the poor. In addition, the combination of poverty and informality places workers in a particularly vulnerable situation in the labour market.

There is still much to be done in terms of social protection to reduce poverty

[13] The ILO classification of workers by age group is considered.

Analysis of social protection mechanisms suggests that in 2017, almost 47% of the population in Gabon and almost half of the poorest people in the country were covered by social assistance programmes.[14] In the other countries for which data is available, the statistics suggest that a low proportion of the population has access to social protection mechanisms. For example, in Sao Tomé and Principe, around 16% of the population is covered by at least one social protection benefit. In the CAR, only 1.4% of the population is covered by a social protection benefit.

Table 7: Proportion of the population covered by at least one social protection benefit (%)

	Year	%
Angola	2020	10.5
Cameroon	2020	10.3
CAR	2020	1.4
DRC	2020	14.1
Rwanda	2021	9.8
Sao Tome and Principe	2021	15.9

Source: CEA/BSR-AC based on indicator 1.3.1 of ODD1, Database of SDG indicators of the United Nations Statistics Division, consulted on 1 August 2023

Observations for the countries in the sub-region reveal that much remains to be done in terms of social protection to reduce poverty. Social safety nets cover only a small proportion of the poorest people. Implementing pro-poor programmes and expanding social security coverage are key to improving social protection. Women and young workers are particularly affected by poverty, with higher rates than men and adult workers respectively. Public policies must factor these inequalities and implement measures to support these vulnerable groups.

2.3. Employment situation in Central Africa

Goal 8 of the SDGs is based on the idea that economic growth can be sustainable and inclusive, that it can create decent jobs and opportunities for all. This is a major challenge for Central Africa, given its high unemployment rate and the still predominant informal labour market.

This sub-section provides an analysis of the Central African labour market based on three main elements: the structure of employment and the dominant sectors in the sub-region; unemployment and its breakdown by gender and age; and the vulnerability of employment in the countries of the region.

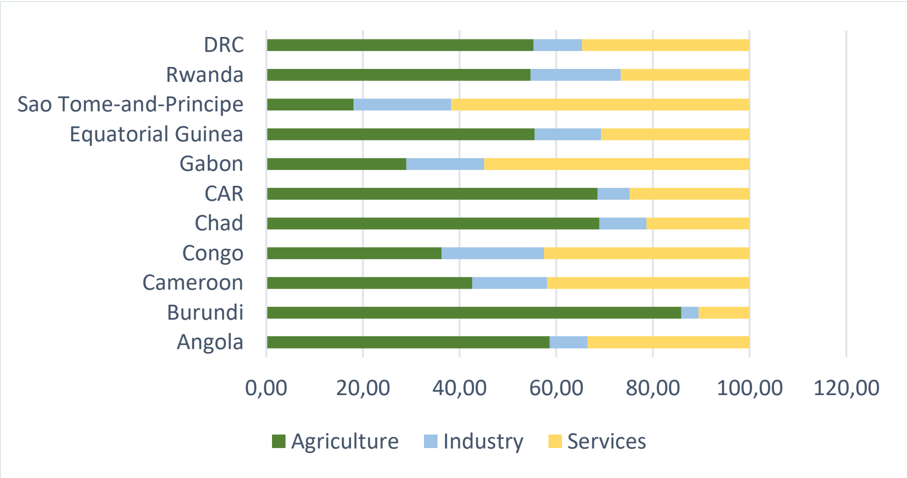
Employment structure in Central Africa: agriculture still dominant, industry growing steadily

Employment in Central Africa remains characterized by a predominantly strong agricultural sector and a persistently weak industrial sector. According to World Bank figures, in 2021, more than half of all jobs in the sub-region were still linked to agriculture. Industry and services accounted for around 13% and 35% respectively.

[14] Data for indicator 1.3.1 of SDG1, United Nations Statistics Division's Database of SDG Indicators, consulted on 1 August 2023.

However, trends since 2015 indicate a decrease in the share of agriculture, from 54% to 52%, and an increase in industry, from 11.8% to 13%. The share of services in employment in the sub-region is also growing, from 33.7% to 34.8%. These trends could indicate a gradual industrialization of the region, in line with the Douala Consensus. Worthy of particular note is the performance and transformation of the Rwandan economy, where the share of jobs in the industrial sector doubled between 2015 and 2021, rising from 9.4% to 18.7%.

__Graph 9__: Employment sectors in Central Africa in 2021 (%)

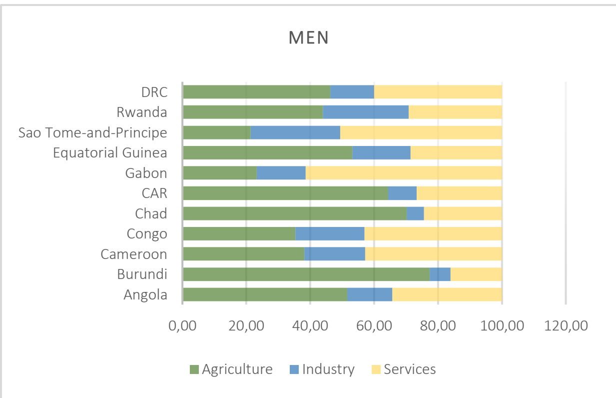


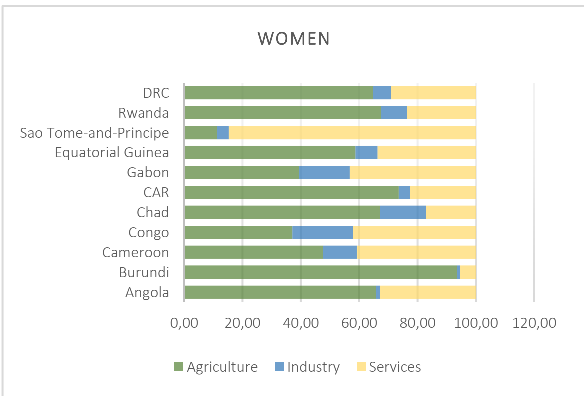
Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on World Bank data (World Developments Indicators, last update: 25/07/2023)

Women have a strong presence in the agricultural sector, but are under-represented in industry

Figure 10 also shows that in 2021, women in the sub-region were strongly represented in the agricultural (57%) and services (34.1%) sectors, but still under-represented in industry (8.97%). Men, for their part, are mainly represented in the agricultural sector (47.8%), but are also present in services (36.1%) and industry (16.2%). In Sao Tome and Principe in particular, where the services sector is the country's largest employer, women are much more present in services (84.7%) than men (50.6%).

__Graph 10__: Employment sector and gender in Central Africa in 2021 (%)

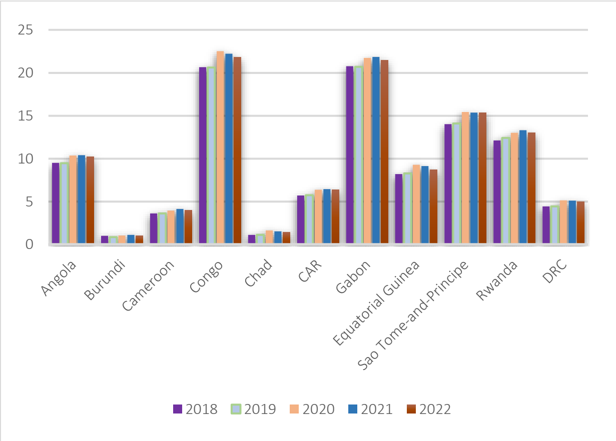




Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on World Bank data (World Developments Indicators, last update: 25/07/2023)

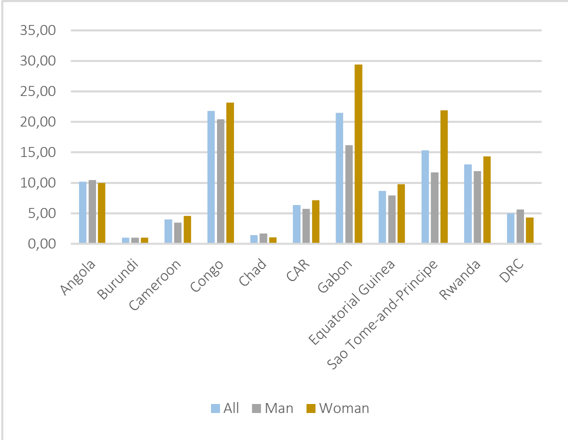
Unemployment still high in the sub-region

Graph 11: Unemployment rate in Central Africa from 2018 to 2022 (%)



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on World Bank data (World Developments Indicators, last update: 25/07/2023)

Graph 12 : Unemployment rate by gender in Africa in 2022 (%)



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on World Bank data (World Developments Indicators, last update: 25/07/2023)

Unemployment is defined as the proportion of the working population who are unemployed but available for work and looking for work. The unemployment rate in Central Africa rose significantly from 2019, with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. It rose from 10.7% in 2018 to almost 12% in 2020. The gradual reduction in restrictions linked to the pandemic did not contribute to a significant reduction in this rate. In 2022, it stood at 11.5%, still higher than before COVID-19.

More specifically, the unemployment rate is higher in the Republic of Congo and Gabon. In 2022, it stood at 21.8% and 21.5% respectively. However, in some countries, such as Cameroon, the unemployment rate remained virtually stable at 3.8% on average between 2018 and 2022.

Figure 12 also shows that women are generally more vulnerable to unemployment in Central Africa. In 2022, they accounted for 11.5%, compared with 8.74% for men. In Gabon, for example, 29.4% of women were unemployed in 2022, compared with 16.2% of men.

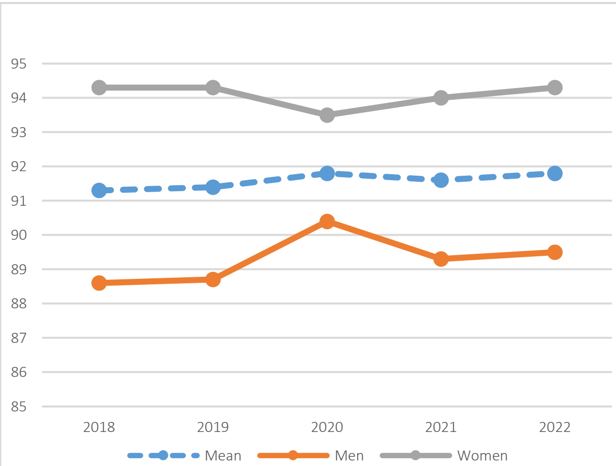
These figures also show that the youth unemployment rate is significantly higher than the regional average. In 2022, for example, the unemployment rate for young people was 16.57%, compared with 9.84% for the general population. For young men, the rate was 15.62% compared with 8.74% for men in general, and for young women 18.23% compared with 11.51% for women in general. These figures show the interlocking and complementary nature of the inequalities that persist in Central Africa.

The economy in the sub-region is predominantly informal and women are over-represented.

The informal economy[15] remains the dominant form of employment in Central Africa. According to the International Labour Office estimates, almost 92% of jobs in the sub-region are in the informal sector. This trend in the regional economy was slightly reinforced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women are also over-represented in the informal economy. Despite the reduction in gender gaps during the pandemic, women's employment in the informal sector, having reached 94.3% in 2022, remains significantly above the regional average.

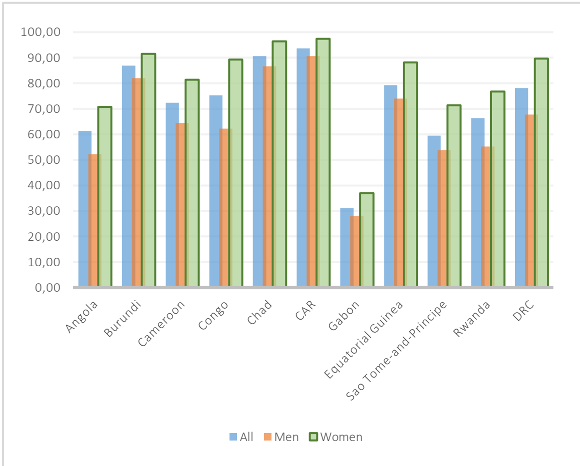
Furthermore, World Bank figures reveal the vulnerability of a large proportion of the jobs available in Central Africa. These workers are particularly vulnerable to poverty because they are less likely to have formal working arrangements, to benefit from social protection and to

Graph 14 : Trends in informal employment in Central Africa by gender from 2018 to 2022 (%)



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on ILO data (excluding Burundi and Rwanda)

Graph 14 : Vulnerable employment in Central Africa by gender in 2022 (%)



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on World Bank data (World Developments Indicators, last update: 25/07/2023)

generate sufficient savings to cope with economic shocks. In 2022, 72.2% of jobs in the sub-region were held by family workers and the self-employed. This figure is even higher for women, who account for 80.9% of vulnerable workers.

2.4. Progress and challenges of quality education for all in Central Africa

With the Sustainable Development Goals, the Member States of the United Nations have set themselves the ambitious target of "***ensuring equal access to quality education for all, and promoting opportunities for lifelong learning***".

[15] The ILO defines informal employment as including persons who, in their main or secondary employment, were (a) own-account workers, employers and members of producers' cooperatives employed in their own informal sector enterprises; (b) own-account workers engaged in the production of goods exclusively for their own final household use (e.g. subsistence farming); (c) contributing family workers, whether employed in formal or informal sector enterprises; or (d) employees in informal jobs, whether employed by formal sector enterprises, informal sector enterprises or as household paid domestic workers.

The key trends in education in the sub-region are analysed through three themes: access, equity and financing, and with the help of indicator 4.1.2 on the completion rate in primary and lower secondary education.

Access

At the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, delegates from 181 countries set themselves the ambitious target of ensuring that by 2015 all children, especially girls, children from vulnerable households and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

Far from having kept the promise of sending all children to primary school by 2015, the world has set itself a new goal for education, through SDG 4, with an even higher level of ambition, advocating that all young people complete their secondary education by 2030. Universal completion of upper secondary education, rather than mere enrolment, is therefore the absolute goal of SDG 4, despite the fact that the goals of free and compulsory education are still a distant prospect in many countries.

Primary education completion rate SDG 4, Indicator 4.1.2

Statistics for the Central Africa sub-region show that countries are still a long way from this completion target. In 2020, only 2 out of 10 ECCAS countries,[16] notably Sao Tome and Principe and the Republic of Congo, could boast of having more than 8 out of 10 children completing primary education (Table 8). The statistics show consistency in completion rates for these two countries between 2018 and 2020. On the other hand, countries such as CAR and Chad, which are experiencing security crises in particular, have no more than 3 out of 10 children completing primary education.

Table 8: Completion rate, primary education, SDG4, Indicator 4.1.2 (%)

	2018	2019	2020
Angola	57	58	59
Burundi	48	50	52
Cameroon	74	76	76
CAR	31	27	31
Chad	30	27	31
Congo	85	86	87
DRC	67	57	58
Gabon		76	
Rwanda	51	54	63
STP	86	87	88

Source: UN (Statistics Division), SDG indicator database, consulted on 1 August 2023

While Sao Tome and Principe and Congo record the highest primary school completion rates in the ECCAS region, the picture is different when it comes to lower secondary education. While Sao Tome and Principe recorded a similar completion rate, with around 8 out of 10 children completing lower secondary education, Congo experienced a drop to just under 6 out of 10

[16] Data for Equatorial Guinea is not available.

children completing lower secondary education (Table 9). The statistics in Table 9 show that 8 out of 10 countries have completion rates in lower secondary education of less than 50%, with rates even below 30% for Burundi, CAR, Chad and Rwanda.

It is important to note that there is consistency in the statistics between 2018 and 2020. Countries that recorded low rates in 2018 continued to record similar rates over the period 2018 to 2020. The same pattern applies to countries with higher or lower rates. This means that countries fail to have policies or mechanisms to significantly stimulate participation in education. This may be the outcome of various factors (social, economic, cultural, security, governance, etc.) that interplay and affect effective participation in school.

Table 9: Completion rate of lower secondary education, SDG4, Indicator 4.1.2 (%)

	2018	2019	2020
Angola	35	36	37
Burundi	24	26	27
Cameroon	47	44	45
CAR	16	12	17
Chad	16	13	17
Congo	52	54	**56**
DRC	54	47	47
Gabon	..	..	..
Rwanda	26	27	30
STP	77	60	**82**

Source: UN (Statistics Division), SDG indicator database, consulted on 1 August 2023

It is also crucial to take into account the significant impact of demographic growth. This is another reason why the number of out-of-school children is not falling (UNESCO, 2000). In Chad, for example, the percentage of out-of-school children of primary school age has fallen by around half over the last 20 years, but the number of children has almost doubled. As a result, the absolute number of out-of-school children has hardly changed[17,18].

The statistics for Central Africa confirm concerns about the likelihood of achieving the target of ***"100% of children completing lower secondary education by the target date of 2030***". In addition, the statistics observed may mask inequalities between genders and social classes, as well as disparities between regions.

Equity

Gender equality

In reality, girls are even more likely than boys to never attend or finish school. The same pattern applies to children from poor households, who are less likely to go to school than children from rich households, and to children in rural areas, who are more likely to be excluded from the school system than children in urban areas.

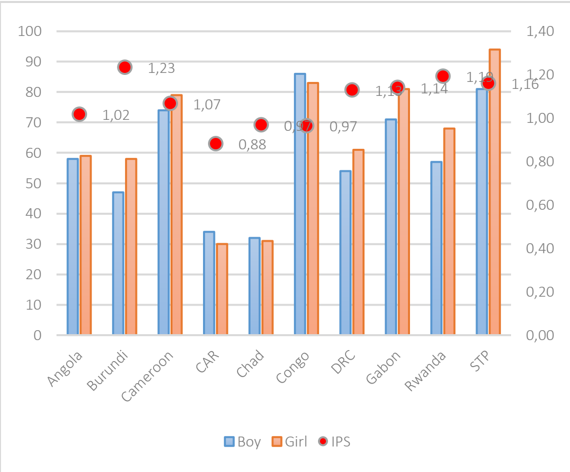
[17] https://www.education-progress.org/fr/articles/access

[18] According to UNESCO statistics, the number of out-of-school children of primary school age rose from 511,634 in 2015 to 645,764 in 2021. Source http://data.uis.unesco.org/, consulted on 1 August 2023

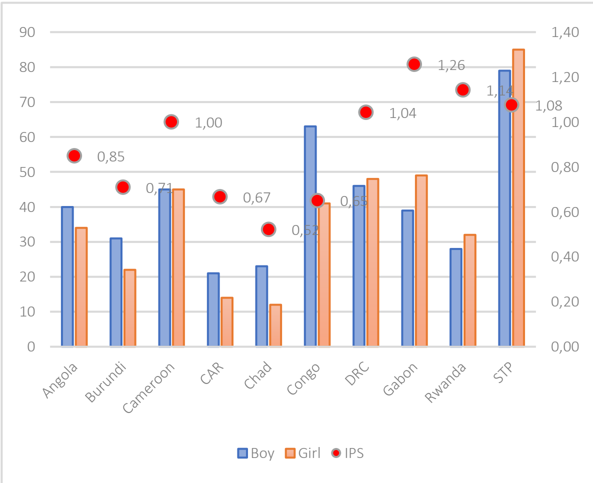
Significant progress has been made on gender parity in access to primary education (UNESCO, 2015), which was a major target of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In some Central African countries, efforts to promote girls' enrolment have even resulted in higher levels of primary school enrolment for girls than for boys. Such is the case in Burundi, Cameroon, DRC, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe, whose gender parity indices (GPIs)[19] in the primary completion rate were significantly higher than 1.03 in 2020, reflecting a disparity in favour of girls (Graph15). Gender parity is observed in Angola, Chad and Congo. Only CAR has a GPI below 0.97, reflecting disparities in favour of boys in primary education.

Despite this progress, there is generally a decline in the indicators for boys and girls and a fall in the GPI as the level of education increases (Koissy-Kpein, 2020). Graph 16 shows not only the drop in completion rates for lower secondary education for girls and boys across the sub-region as a whole, but also the drop in GPI. Parity between girls and boys in completion rates in lower secondary education is observed in Cameroon; while the GPI reveals a disparity in favour of girls in the DRC, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe.

<u>Graph 15</u>: Completion rate, primary education, by gender, 2020* (%)



<u>Graph 16</u>: Completion rate of lower secondary education, by gender, 2020* (%)



** Except 2017 for Gabon.*
Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on data from UN (Statistics Division), SDG indicator database, consulted on 1 August 2023

There are a number of factors that lead to lower levels of schooling for girls than for boys, and these factors persist despite advocacy and efforts for equality in education: gender roles in the society, the community and the family, gender discrimination, security crises, harmful cultural practices and unequal gender norms, the direct and opportunity costs of girls' schooling, etc. (Koissy-Kpein, 2020). For example, despite commitments to guarantee free primary education, many of the costs associated with sending children to school continue to be billed in the form of textbooks, uniforms, school fees and so on. In addition to these direct costs, additional costs

[19] The gender parity index represents the ratio between the value of a given indicator corresponding to the female gender and that corresponding to the male gender. Generally speaking, a GPI between 0.97 and 1.03 indicates gender parity. A GPI of less than 0.97 indicates a disparity in favour of the male sex. A GPI greater than 1.03 indicates a disparity in favour of women.

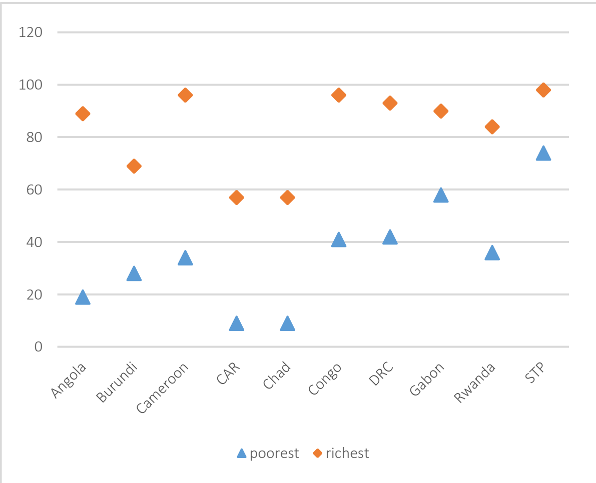
can be two to three times higher than school fees, and can be higher for girls[20]. Added to these costs are the greater opportunity costs associated with girls' domestic work. As a result, parents may prefer to keep their daughters at home and send their sons to school (Koissy-Kpein, 2020).

Household wealth

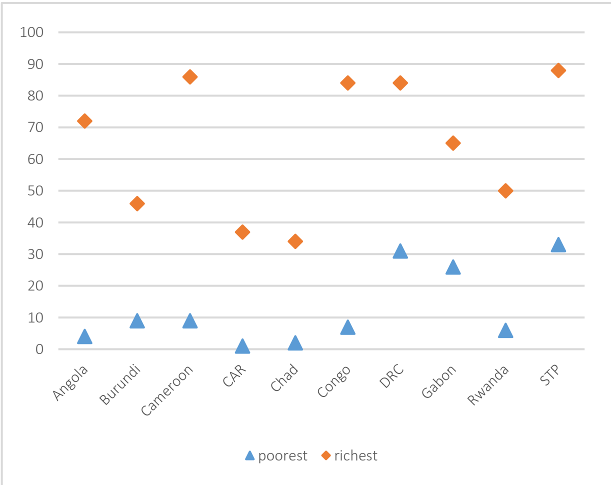
Inequalities in education, particularly gender inequality, are closely linked to poverty. Household wealth is recognized as very important for several dimensions of child well-being and investment in human capital (Koissy-Kpein, 2013, 2020). According to UNESCO (2015), the poorest children are four times less likely to go to school and five times less likely to complete primary education than their wealthier counterparts; girls are less likely to go to school than boys among the poorest children, and the poorest girls are still at a significant disadvantage in entering and completing primary education.

The statistics for Central Africa confirm this assertion, as Graphs 17 and 18 show us the significant gap between the poorest and richest households in completion rates. In CAR and Chad, children from the richest households are 6 times more likely to finish school than children from the poorest households. In Angola, children from the richest households are 5 times more likely to complete primary school than children from the poorest households. The smallest gap is in Sao Tome and Principe, where children from the richest households are only 1.3 times more likely to complete primary school than children from the poorest households.

<u>Graph 18</u>: Completion rate, primary education, richest vs poorest, latest year available (%)



<u>Graph 18</u> : Completion rate, secondary education, richest vs poorest, latest year available (%)



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on data from UN (Statistics Division), SDG indicator database, consulted on 1 August 2023

In Graph 18, it is even more striking to see how these gaps change as children continue their education, as the gap between the poorest and richest widens further at lower secondary level. In CAR, for example, children from the richest families are 37 times more likely to complete lower secondary education than children from the poorest families. In 7 out of 10 countries, completion rates for children from the poorest families are well below 10%, reaching 1%, 2%

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[20] For example, for safety reasons, girls must be accompanied to school, generating higher transport costs for girls than for boys. Similarly, the cost of uniforms may be higher for girls (Koissy-Kpein, 2020).

and 4% for CAR, Chad and Angola respectively. Sao Tomé and Principe, Gabon and the DRC have the smallest gaps between rich and poor, and children from the richest families are almost 3 times more likely to complete lower secondary education than children from the poorest families.

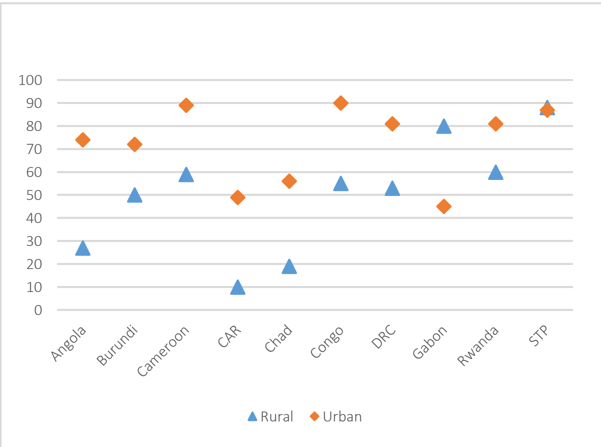
Place of residence: urban versus rural areas

Inequalities are also reinforced in marginalized communities and between rural and urban areas. The combination of poverty, lack of public services, social pressure and gender roles reinforces the exclusion of the most vulnerable, especially girls (Koissy-Kpein, 2020).

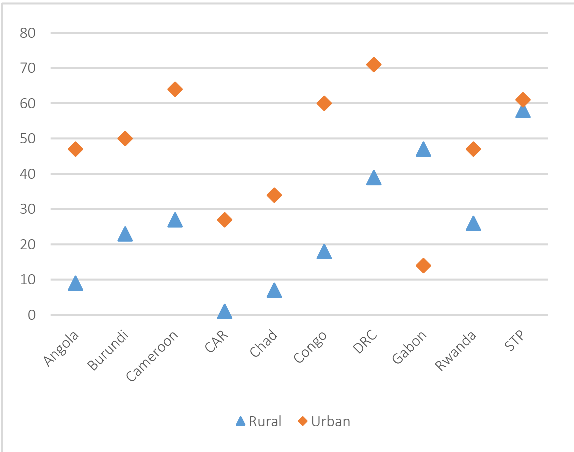
With the exception of Sao Tome and Principe, statistics show a significant gap in primary and lower secondary education completion rates between children living in urban and rural areas. Indeed, children living in urban areas are more likely to complete school than those living in rural areas. However, the reverse is true for Gabon (Graphs 19 and 20).

For example, in Cameroon, in 2018, 59% of children living in rural areas completed primary education, compared with 89% of children in urban areas. While almost 64% of children in urban areas completed lower secondary education, only 27% of children living in rural areas did so. In CAR, in 2019, 27% of children in urban areas completed lower secondary education, while only 1% of children in rural areas did so.

Graph 20 : Completion rate, primary education, urban vs rural, latest year available (%)



Graph 20: Completion rate, secondary education, urban vs rural, latest year available (%)



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on data from UN (Statistics Division), SDG indicator database, consulted on 1 August 2023

Analyses generally reveal how individual characteristics, such as gender, interact with others, such as wealth and area of residence, to affect school attendance (Koissy-Kpein, 2020). For example, girls from poor households in rural areas are generally less likely to attend school than girls from rich households in urban areas (UNESCO, 2025). It is therefore important to have disaggregated data in order to define and design appropriate strategies to reduce inequalities in education.

Financing

The Education 2030 Framework for Action, which proposes bold and urgent action to transform lives through a new vision of education, has set two key funding benchmarks for governments: (i) to devote at least 4% to 6% of GDP to education and/or (ii) to devote at least 15% to 20% of public expenditure to education.

In 2020, three countries - Congo, Burundi and Sao Tome and Principe - met the first criterion

> ***Box 1**: Education 2030 Framework for Action and financing education*
>
> The Education 2030 Framework for Action is an instrument for implementing the SDG-Education 2030 agenda adopted by 184 Member States in November 2015. It is based on the Incheon Declaration and aims to mobilize all countries and partners around SDG4 on education and its targets. It focuses on inclusive and equitable quality education, and highlights the importance of education for sustainable development and the achievement of all the other SDGs. In particular, it proposes ways of implementing, coordinating, financing and monitoring Education 2030. It calls for a significant increase in investment in education, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. It encourages countries to develop medium-term education financing plans that take into account short- and long-term financing needs. It also encourages countries to mobilize domestic and international resources to finance education, including public-private partnerships and innovative financing. The Education 2030 Framework emphasizes the importance of effective and efficient public spending on education, ensuring that resources are used in a transparent and accountable manner.
>
> *Source: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action SDG 4 - Education 2030*

for government funding set out in the Education 2030 Framework for Action. These countries devote between 4% and 6% of GDP to education. In 2022 ,6 out of 10 countries in the sub-region devoted at least 15% of public spending to education(Table 11). These are Chad, DRC, Congo, Gabon, Burundi and Sao Tome and Principe. The highest percentage in the sub-region was recorded in Burundi (20.64%). Angola, Cameroon, CAR and Rwanda do not meet either of the two main criteria for government funding set out in the Education 2030 Framework for Action.

Two out of ten countries in Central Africa experienced a drop in the share of public spending on education between 2018 and 2020 (Table 10). These are Burundi and Sao Tome and Principe, despite their good results in relation to the two main criteria for government funding set out in the Education 2030 Framework for Action. The other countries, on the other hand, recorded an increase in public spending on education.

Table 10: Public spending on education in 2018 and 2020 (as a % of GDP)

	2018	2019	2020	2018 and 2020 trends
Angola	2.04	1.93	2.42	↗
Cameroon	3.03	3.08	3.17	↗
CAR	1.57	1.77	2.17	↗
Chad	2.26	2.37	2.91	↗
DRC			2.45	
Congo	3.00	3.58	4.45	↗
Gabon	2.93	2.73	3.18	↗

	2018	2019	2020	2018 and 2020 trends
Burundi	5.08	5.35	5.04	
Rwanda	3.07	3.24	3.33	
Sao Tome and Principe	5.24	5.92	5.01	

Source: World Bank (World Development Indicators, consulted on 7 July 2023)

The trends in education spending as a percentage of total spending between 2018 and 2022, reveal a decline in Cameroon, the DRC and Sao Tome and Principe. The other countries, on the other hand, show an increase in education spending (Table 11).

Table 11: Public spending on education (as a % of public spending)

	2018	2020	2021	2022	2018 and 2022 trends*
Angola	5.41	6.47	6.92	6.64	
Cameroon	16.88	14.39	14.89	12.57	
CAR	9.14	9.78	9.09	10.74	
Chad	..	11.67	15.13	16.72	
DRC	..	..	21.61	18.41	
Congo	15.58	18.29	17.88	16.63	
Gabon	14.70	15.03	15.12	..	
Burundi	19.52	20.74	20.44	20.64	
Rwanda	10.80	10.78	11.32	..	
Sao Tome and Principe	20.12	16.13	16.58	17.09	

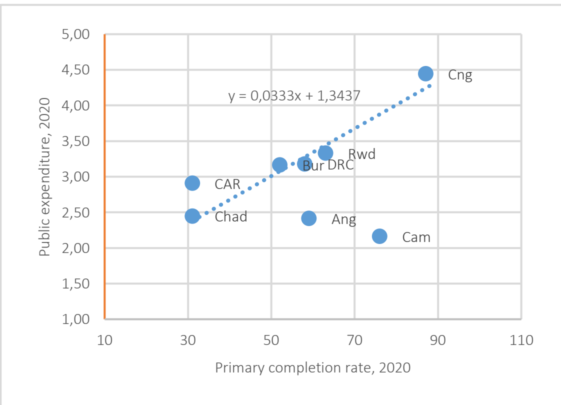
** 2021 considered for Gabon and Rwanda, 2020 and 2022 for Chad, 2021 and 2022 for the DRC.*

Source: World Bank (World Development Indicators, consulted on 7 July 2023)

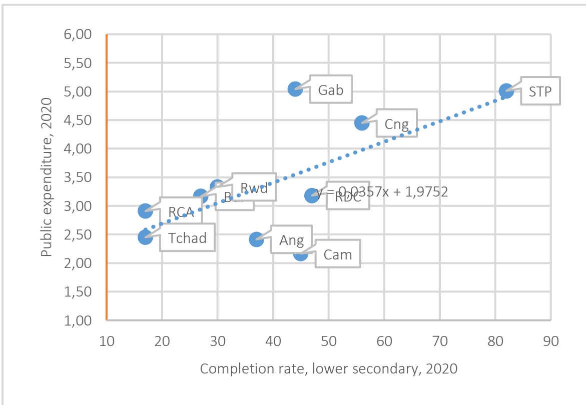
The observations for the Central Africa region are particularly noteworthy and interesting. They show that, despite the COVID-19 crisis that affected economies, countries relatively stayed the course and continue to make considerable efforts with regard to public spending on education and the Education 2030 Framework for action.

Are the significant efforts made by governments in terms of education spending sufficient to achieve SDG4?

Graph 22: Public spending on education (% GDP) and primary completion rate



Graph 22 : Public spending on education (% GDP) and lower secondary completion rate



Source: ECA/SRO-CA based on data from UN (Statistics Division), SDG indicator database, consulted on 1 August 2023

Graphs 21 and 22 reveal a positive relationship between the primary completion rate, the lower secondary completion rate and public spending on education. This implies that countries that devote more financial resources to education have higher completion rates. This result must be interpreted with caution, as it does not factor inequalities between children and the factors that may interact to influence children's school attendance. In addition, higher completion rates may be the result of joint actions and measures by governments and development partners to promote education for all. Indeed, one would expect the financial resources committed to education to be coupled with significant measures and effective action.

Knowing whether children attend school, whether they complete their studies, what pupils learn at school, the quality of their education, the quality of learning and the level of illiteracy, ensuring the provision of a safe and non-violent learning environment, and understanding the factors that influence school attendance and the quality of teaching, are all essential and relevant policy concerns for the countries of Central Africa.

This section therefore offers a preliminary reflection on the current state of Education for All in the sub-region and does not address other key elements for achieving Education for All, such as:

- Attendance at a pre-primary school, which is a decisive starting point in children's educational careers;
- Participation beyond the normal age, which has an impact on the likelihood of repeating a year, failing exams and ultimately dropping out of school;
- The quality of teaching and teachers, who are the cornerstone of quality education;
- Adult literacy;
- Digitalization and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics);
- School infrastructure, including the provision of a conducive learning environment with adequate water and sanitation facilities;
- Violence and gender-based violence in schools;
- Etc.

2.5. Health

Enabling all people to enjoy good health and promoting well-being for all at all ages (goal 3 of the SDGs) are recognized as essential conditions for sustainable development. Before the COVID-19 health crisis, major progress had been made in health for all, including significant advances in reducing infant and maternal mortality.

The analysis for Central Africa will focus on two SDG3 indicators: maternal health and child health.

Progress is still needed to effectively reduce female mortality.

In 2020, there were 545 maternal deaths per 100000 live births in sub-Saharan Africa. Eight of the 11 countries in Central Africa have mortality rates below the regional average. Maternal mortality statistics for the sub-region are still high, and reveal significant disparities between countries. While the highest rate is observed in Chad, with 1063.49 maternal deaths per

100000 live births, Sao Tome and Principe records the lowest rate, with 146.24 maternal deaths per 100000 live births in 2020. Overall, however, maternal health in the sub-region improved between 2018 and 2020, with a reduction in the maternal mortality rate.

Table 12: Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births)

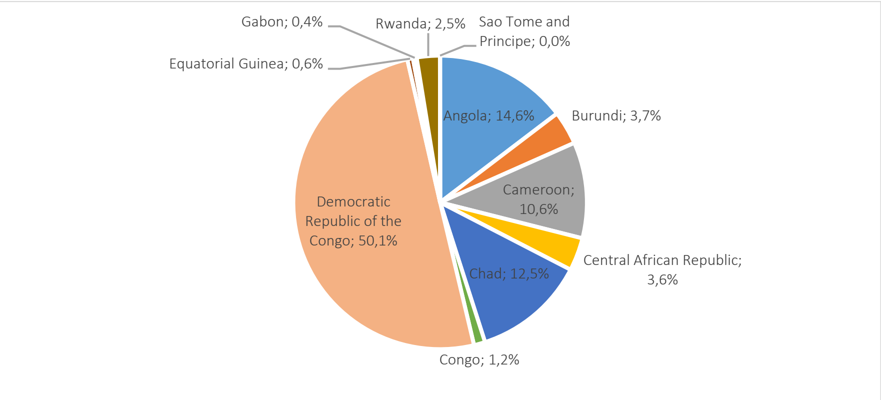
	2018	2019	2020
Angola	233.10	227.69	221.91
Burundi	517.91	479.29	494.43
Cameroon	423.89	439.77	437.75
CAR	867.63	847.29	835.27
Chad	1076.16	1047.30	1063.49
Congo	370.06	292.12	282.39
DRC	543.48	540.70	547.36
Equatorial Guinea	219.04	216.35	212.33
Gabon	228.57	225.47	226.55
Rwanda	281.36	281.31	258.92
Sao Tome and Principe	149.16	142.41	146.24

Source: UN (Statistics Division), SDG indicator database, consulted on 1 August 2023

Maternal mortality can be caused directly by a number of factors, as well as indirectly by pre-existing medical conditions aggravated by pregnancy. Complications leading to maternal death can, however, be detected and avoided if births are attended by qualified health personnel, with quality obstetric services having the appropriate equipment, drugs and supplies. This implies public spending on health that meets the needs of the population.

In 2021, 615679 children died before their 5^{th} birthday in the Central African sub-region.[21] The number of children dying before the age of 5 is still too high for the sub-region, despite the reduction recorded since 2015. Nearly half of all deaths in the sub-region are recorded in the DRC. The number of deaths is particularly low in Sao Tome and Principe, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.

Graph 23: Deaths of children under 5 in 2021 (%)



Source: UN (Statistics Division), SDG indicator database, consulted on 1 August 2023

[21] Calculation of the number of deaths of children under 5 for all 11 countries, using data from indicator 3.2.1. Source: SDG indicator database. Last accessed on 1 August 2023. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database

All the countries in the sub-region are recording a fall in the infant mortality rate. However, rates are still high. They are particularly high in the Central African Republic and Chad, with more than 100 deaths per 1000 live births (Table 13). Sao Tome and Principe has the lowest rates, with 15 deaths per 1000 live births in 2021.

Table 13: Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births)

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Angola	78	75	72.1	69.4
Burundi	59.1	56.7	54.6	52.6
Cameroon	77.7	75.1	72.4	69.8
CAR	108.8	105.9	103	99.9
Chad	118	114.3	110.5	107.1
Congo	47.7	52.4	44.5	43
DRC	87.2	84.4	81.7	79
Equatorial Guinea	84.7	81.9	79.3	76.8
Gabon	44.9	43.2	41	39.7
Rwanda	43.4	42.1	40.7	39.4
Sao Tome and Principe	18.3	17.1	16.2	15.4

Source: UN (Statistics Division), SDG indicator database, consulted on 1 August 2023

Central Africa must work towards more effective financing of health systems

While governments' efforts have led to progress on infant and maternal mortality, more effective funding of health systems, improved sanitation and hygiene, and better access to health professionals are still needed to save millions of lives.

Overall, health spending as a percentage of GDP gives an idea of the level of investment a country is making in its health system. Higher percentages may indicate a greater commitment to healthcare, while lower percentages suggest the need for increased investment to improve access to quality healthcare services. Health spending as a percentage of GDP has increased in many countries over time (Table 14). The COVID-19 pandemic probably had a significant impact on the share of healthcare expenditure in GDP, explaining the increase in 2020.

Table 14: Public health spending (as a % of GDP)

	2018	2019	2020
Angola	2.59	2.66	2.91
Cameroon	3.62	3.65	3.77
CAR	11.00	7.83	9.40
Chad	4.57	4.48	5.41
DRC	3.30	3.54	4.05
Congo	1.90	2.57	4.47
Equatorial Guinea	3.10	3.03	3.77
Gabon	2.75	2.77	3.43
Burundi	7.40	6.54	6.50
Rwanda	6.70	6.33	7.32
Sao Tome and Principe	5.84	5.23	4.91

Source: World Bank (World Developments Indicators)

Governments should also work to break down resources effectively in order to tackle the other ills of the sub-region, including malaria and HIV/AIDS, among others. As a reminder, AIDS is now the leading cause of death among adolescents (aged 10-19) in Africa, and HIV is the leading cause of death among women of childbearing age worldwide.[22]

2.6. Recommendations

To meet the challenge of population growth in the sub-region and achieve the development goals, it is important to implement policies that promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, reduce poverty and improve governance.

For the sub-region, which will be home to almost a quarter of the population of sub-Saharan Africa by the target dates of Agendas 2030 and 2063, and which has a large young population, reducing poverty requires a holistic approach that factors the economic, social and environmental dimensions. Policies must aim to promote inclusive economic growth, by establishing and strengthening social safety nets, improving access to education and health for all, and promoting decent jobs.

Central African countries must therefore:

- Promote decent jobs for all, especially for women and young people, and create employment opportunities in industry and services;
- Strengthen social safety nets, especially for the most vulnerable, the working poor, women and young people;
- Take bold measures to improve access to education. For example, by prioritizing free, quality primary and secondary education. This can include building schools, recruiting and training qualified teachers, providing adequate teaching materials, and ensuring affordable internet access for pupils and students to acquire the digital skills needed to make the most of technology;
- Take concrete measures to reduce inequalities in health, taking into account the social determinants of health, such as poverty, education, place of residence, etc. These measures could include the introduction and/or extension of health insurance cover, investment in health infrastructure, particularly in vulnerable regions, the creation of community health centres and mobile clinics, reform of health financing systems, etc.
- Promote family planning to reduce fertility and generate a demographic dividend, which can contribute to accelerated economic growth;
- Improve the efficient use and breakdown of resources and public spending to benefit everyone, particularly spending on education and health.

Central African countries must also work to collect reliable, high-quality and disaggregated data to better understand demographic trends and dynamics, in order to benefit from the demographic dividend.

[22] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/health/

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