

**Subregional Office for West Africa**

*Second joint meeting*

**38th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa**

**26th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa**

*Accra, Ghana, 1-3 November 2023*

**WEST AFRICA SOCIOECONOMIC  
PROFILE  
2023**

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	5
<b>I- International Economic Environment.....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 The world and regional Economy .....	6
1.2 Trends of selected international commodities prices .....	8
<b>II- The West African Economy in 2023 and outlook....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Growth and inflation dynamics at the subregional level .....	10
2.2 Production structure .....	11
2.3 Trade and current accounts .....	13
2.4 Public finance.....	14
<b>III- A review of selected social issues in West Africa .....</b>	<b>15</b>
3.1 Health situation.....	15
3.2 Education situation.....	18
3.3 The Employment situation.....	19
3.4 The poverty profile .....	22
3.5 Women empowerment and Gender Parity .....	23
3.6 Social Issues Factsheet .....	24
3.7 Rising humanitarian and food insecurity issues .....	26
Conclusion and Policy Recommendations.....	26
References. ....	28

## List of figures

Figure 1: Recent economic growth trends in the World (per cent) .....	6
Figure 2: Recent economic and inflation growth trends in Africa (per cent).....	7
Figure 3: Evolution of gold price (\$/toz.....	8
Figure 4: Evolution of metal price index.....	8
Figure 5: Evolution of crude oil price (\$ per barrel.....	9
Figure 6: Evolution of energy price index.....	9
Figure 7: Evolution of Cotton Price, A Index (\$/kg).....	9
Figure 9: Evolution of fertilizer price index.....	10
Figure 10: Evolution of food rice index .....	10
Figure 11: Recent economic growth and inflation trends in West Africa (per cent).....	10
Figure 12: Sectorial evolution of GDP in the ECOWAS region (per cent, 1999-2022) .....	12
Figure 13: Employment by economic activity in West Africa (per cent).....	13
Figure 14: Life expectancy and Healthy life expectancy at birth in 2019 in West Africa .....	15
Figure 15: Under 5 mortality per 1000 live birth 2021 in West Africa.....	16
Figure 16: Maternal mortality per 100,000 live births in 2020 in West Africa.....	17
Figure 17: Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water service, 2020.....	18
Figure 18: Proportion of population using (a) safely managed sanitation services and (b) a hand-washing facility with soap and water, 2020.....	18
Figure 19: Adult literacy rate 2021 West Africa .....	19
Figure 20: Years of schooling 2021 in West Africa.....	19
Figure 21: Unemployment estimate rates for 2023 in West Africa.....	20
Figure 22: Estimate Informal employment rate for 2022 .....	21
Figure 23: Informal employment rate in West Africa .....	21
Figure 24: Estimate rate for the youth (between 15 and 24 years) not in employment, education, or training in	
Figure 25: Estimate poverty headcount ratio at \$2.15 a day (2017 PPP) per cent of population for 2023 .....	22
Figure 26: Estimate Total population and estimate population living with up to US\$2.15 a day in 2023, million .....	22
Figure 27: Human Development Index in 2021 in West Africa.....	23
Figure 28: Women Empowerment Index 2022 in West Africa.....	24
Figure 29: Global Gender Parity Index 2022 in West Africa.....	24

## List of tables

Table 1: Inflation and economic growth in West Africa, per cent .....	11
Table 2: Current account deficits (percentage of GDP) .....	13

Table 3: Fiscal balance and debt in West Africa ..... 14

## Introduction

West Africa has been facing both global and regional challenges that have important socioeconomic impact. The global economy continues to recover from recent crises, such as the Covid-19 crisis, inflationary pressures and the consequences of the war between Russia and Ukraine. Africa in general, and West Africa in particular, has not been spared, given its dependence on northern countries for food, fertilizers and energy. After the 2019 pandemic, global economic growth fell from 6.3% in 2021, to 3.5% in 2022, and is set to slow by a further 0.5 percentage points in 2023, due to rising food and fuel prices. Africa's economic growth has not remained on the sidelines of this deceleration, falling from 4.2% in 2021 to 3.6% in 2022, with an estimated 4% in 2023, due to the lingering effects of the multiple crises that have occurred recently. Beyond these recent crises, which have affected the entire global economy, Africa in general and West Africa in particular has been confronted with structural challenges, such as climate change, insecurity, governance, economic concentration and demographic trends, which are also obstacles to economic recovery. West Africa has the highest total fertility rate in the world, which poses the challenge for countries to provide basic services, such as education and health, to a growing population. Coupled with this, in recent years, West Africa has been confronted with security and governance challenges. In this context, it is possible to highlight operations by armed groups, violent extremists and criminal networks, as well as coups d'état. Since 2020, there have been a total of six military coups d'état, raising concerns about an increase in military seizures of power, to the detriment of democratic ones. The direct consequences include the loss of human life and physical destruction, all of which hinder the economic development of African states and seriously threaten their security and stability. The insecurity and governance challenges also impact the delivery of education and health services, job creation and investments, creating a vicious cycle with hunger and displaced people needing humanitarian assistance.

The aim of this ECA annual report is to review the socio-economic situation in West Africa in 2023, and the forecasts and prospects for 2024. This will involve taking stock of the impacts of the global economic crisis, the Russia-Ukraine war, the effects of security and governance in the sub-region on the sub-region's socio-economic sectors, and lasting structural problems. Indicators include: inflation rate, GDP, economic structure, governance and growth rate, mortality rate, poverty and inequality, unemployment rate, access to education and health services.

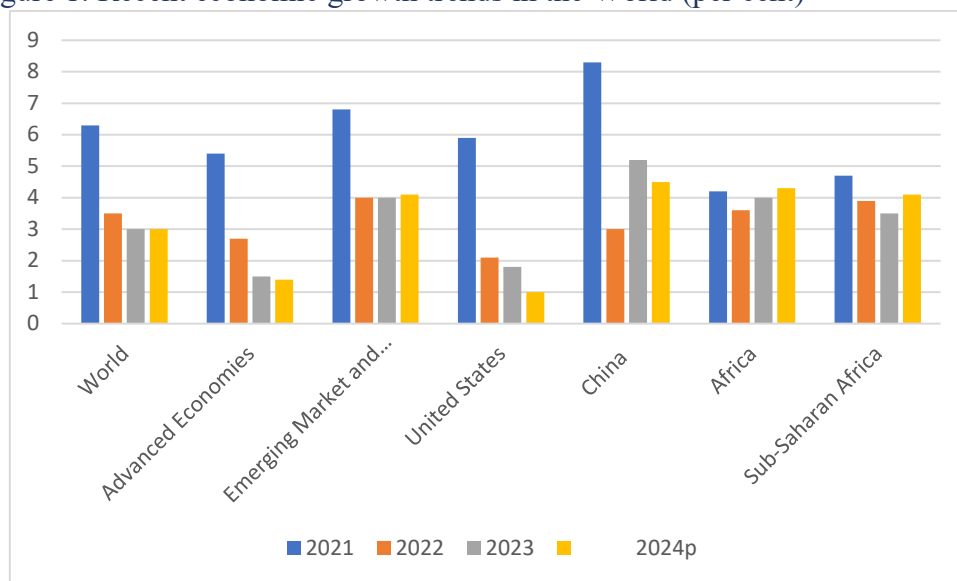
This report adopts an approach specific to the West African context, based on an analysis of facts stylized from data collected in countries and sub-regions as well as on international platforms. The report is divided into three parts: the first reviews the international economic environment and its implications for Africa; the second examines the West African economic situation and prospects to 2023; and the third looks at some social issues in West Africa, followed by the conclusion and policy recommendations for the sub-region.

## I- International Economic Environment

### 1.1 The world and regional Economy

1. The global economy continued to be heavily impacted by the prolonged effects of the Covid 19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the resulting inflationary pressures and disruptions of supply chains in particular on food and energy. From a recovery of 6.3% in 2021, global economic growth has slowed to 3.5% in 2022 and is expected to slow by a further 0.5 percentage points in 2023, due to rising food and essential fuel prices. This has led to a drop in economic momentum as energy, food and raw material prices rise. The 2023 FAO’s Food Outlook estimates that the global food bill will rise to \$1.98 trillion in 2023, up 1.5 percent from 2022. Global growth is projected to decelerate from an estimated 3.5 percent in 2022 to 3.0 percent in both 2023 and 2024 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Recent economic growth trends in the World (per cent)



Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook, July 2023 and ECA calculations. Data for 2023 and 2024 are projections.

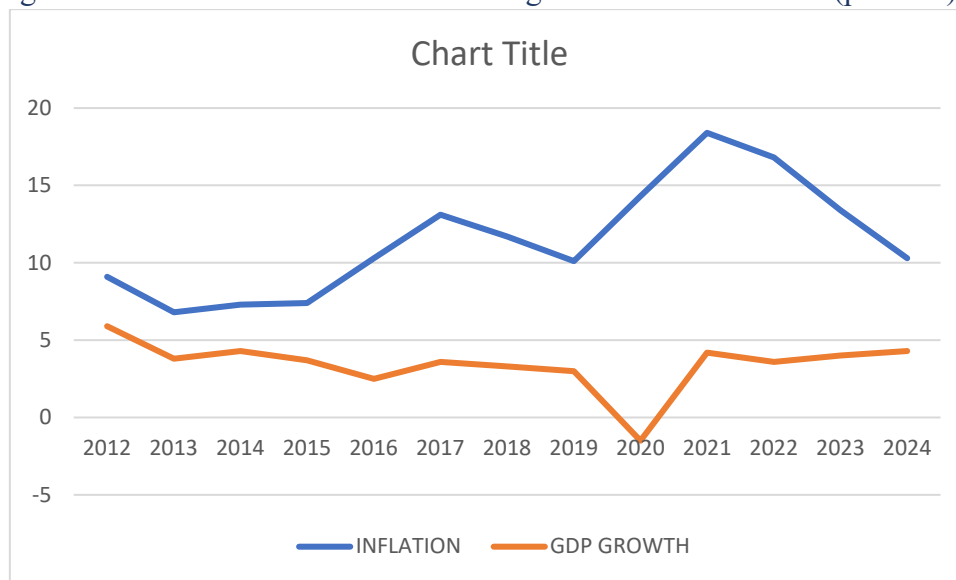
2. Growth decelerates in all the major trading partners of the West African countries including the Euro Area, the United States and China. Growth forecast for advanced economies is projected to decelerate from 2.7 percent in 2022 to 1.5 percent in 2023, and 1.4 percent in 2024. The European Union economy has been heavily impacted by the disruptions in energy supply, due to its high reliance on Russian fossil fuels, which continues to fuel inflation pressure. The

deceleration of growth in the United States estimated at 1.8 per cent in 2023 against 2.1 per cent in 2022, is weakening the global demand. The tight monetary stance through higher interest rates to control the inflation pressures contributed to the slow growth observed during the review period. Growth in China is estimated at 5.2% in 2023, a recovery from the 3% growth observed in 2022.

3. Consecutive to the rising of energy, food, and commodity prices, the global headline inflation reached a historical peak of 8.7 percent in 2022, but it is expected to fall to 6.8 percent in 2023 and 5.2 percent in 2024. This is driven by the rise in central bank policy rates to fight inflation.

The economic growth in Africa resumed to 4.2 percent in 2021 before slowing down to 3.6% in 2022, due to the prolonged effects of the multiple crises that recently occurred, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the climate change. This performance is still well below the SDG economic growth target of 7.0 per cent for least developed countries (SDG 8.1)<sup>1</sup>. The continent is faced with structural challenges, such as climate change, insecurity, governance, economic concentration, and demographic trends which also pose challenges to economic recovery. In particular, the war in Ukraine continued to trigger sharp increases in energy, food, and agricultural inputs prices, and further exacerbated the inflation pressure on the continent. The average inflation stood at two digits level since 2016 and has risen sharply to 18.4 per cent in 2021 before declining to 16.8% in 2022 and 13.4% in 2023. The inflation is expected to continue declining to reach 10.3 per cent average in 2024 (Figure 2). Additionally, rising threats of insecurity and political crises across Africa, particularly in the Sahel zone and in countries like Sudan and Libya, are weakening economic performance and jeopardizing the achievement of sustainable development by 2030.

Figure 2: Recent economic and inflation growth trends in Africa (per cent)



Source: ECA’s calculations from IMF, World Economic Outlook, April 2023, and countries data

<sup>1</sup> 33 Least Developed Countries out of the 46 are in Africa

## 1.2 Trends of selected international commodities prices

- West Africa is endowed with mining and agricultural resources which constitute an important part of its export earnings. The region is also abundantly endowed with solar and wind for renewable energy. The West African countries are ranked among the world top producers of coco, with Cote Ivoire as the largest producer, and Nigeria and Ghana as major producers of oil and gold respectively.

Although the subregion produced 73 million tons in 2021, there is still a gap covered by imports up to around 22 million tons.

- Elevated commodity prices, particularly for energy and metals, are expected to benefit energy and mineral exporters, but the region's net energy importers are facing a much higher fuel import bill, which is undermining their fiscal space. In addition, upward volatility of food and fertilizers prices constitute a major socio-economic risk for the West African countries, which are net importers of food and fertilizers products. Insecurity, climate change and economic shocks are affecting household food security, notably through a drop in production, especially in insecure areas, while access to agricultural markets is negatively impacted by the constraint of rising staple food prices, reduced purchasing power, and market dysfunction in areas affected by insecurity.
- Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Mali are the region top producers of gold which has seen its price fluctuating to an average of 1800 \$ per ounce in 2021. With the crisis in Ukraine, gold price reached a peak of 1947.8 \$ per ounce in March 2022, and slowly declined \$1,859.90 per ounce in July 2023. Still, gold price is maintained above 1600 dollars which has never been reached since March 2013. This trend of the gold price is reflected in the metal price index trend during the same period (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3: Evolution of gold price (\$/toz)

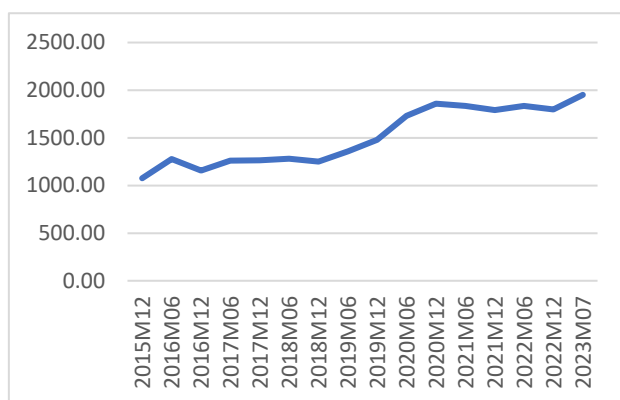
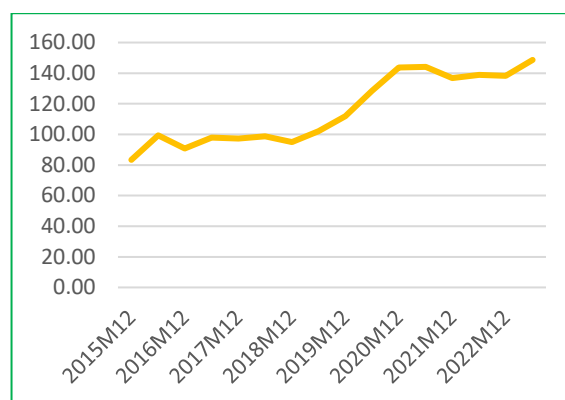


Figure 4: Evolution of metal price index



Source: World Bank Commodity Price Data (The Pink Sheet), July 2023

- Energy (coal, crude oil, and natural gas) price index was very volatile during the period 2020 to 2022. The index reached its highest level in June 2022 consecutive to the compounded impacts of the economic recovery of 2021 and Ukraine war. As of July 2023, the energy price index is slightly declining to reach its December 2021's level.



8. In the West African region, Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Niger are the main oil producers. Oil price was negatively impacted by the drop in global demand in 2020 following the Covid-19 pandemic and it stood at 39.50\$ per barrel in June 2020. Oil price increased sharply in 2021 following the global economy recovery and reached 72.87\$ per barrel in December 2021. The disruption mainly caused by the Ukraine war further exacerbated oil price which crossed the 100.0 \$ per barrel threshold with a peak standing at 116.8 \$ in June 2022 before declining to 78.07\$ in December 2022. The oil price has so far been stable as it stood at 79.0\$ in July 2023 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Evolution of crude oil price (\$ per barrel)

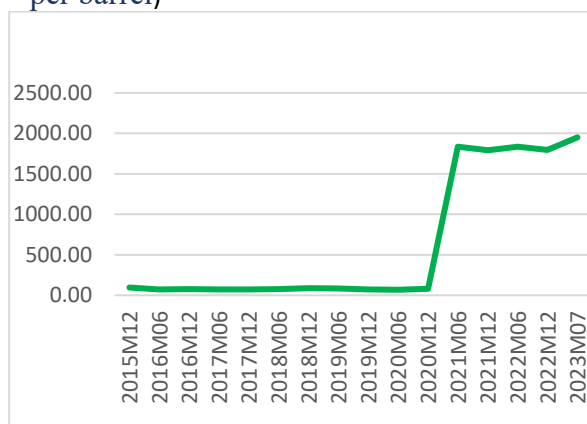
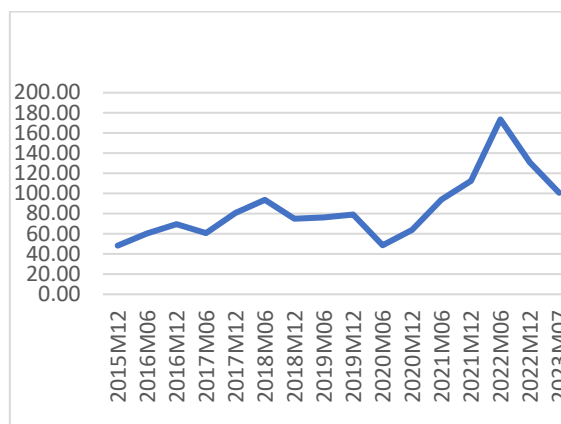


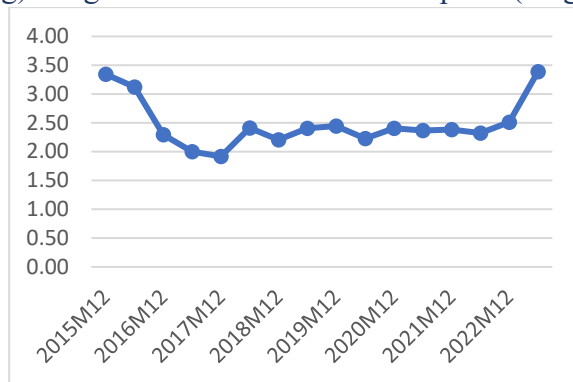
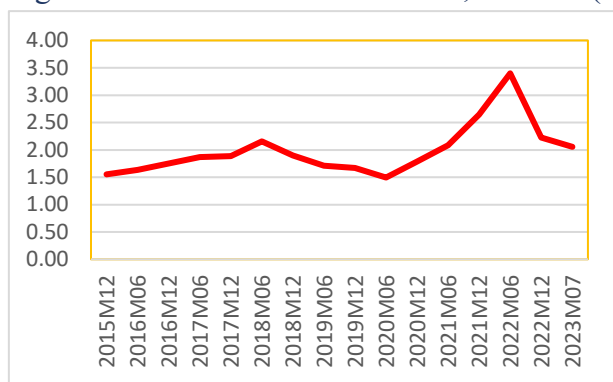
Figure 6: Evolution of energy price index



Source: World Bank Commodity Price Data (The Pink Sheet), July 2023

9. Cotton and cocoa constitute two major agricultural products of the region. Benin, Burkina Faso, and Mali are the largest producers of cotton in the region, and Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana are ranked among the top world producers of cocoa. The unpromising macroeconomic situation and global demand led to a decrease of cotton price index and a timid increase of the Cocoa prices (Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 7: Evolution of Cotton Price, A Index (\$/kg) Figure 8: Evolution of Cocoa price (\$/kg)



Source: World Bank Commodity Price Data (The Pink Sheet), July 2023

10. Food and fertilizers prices have both reached their highest level in June 2022, which stood at 151.50 and 252.9, respectively (figures 9 and 10). Food price increased by 56 per cent between

December 2015 and July 2023. During the same period, the fertilizers price index increased from 96.25 in December 2015 to 145.65 in July 2023, suggesting an increase of 51 per cent.

Figure 9: Evolution of fertilizer price index

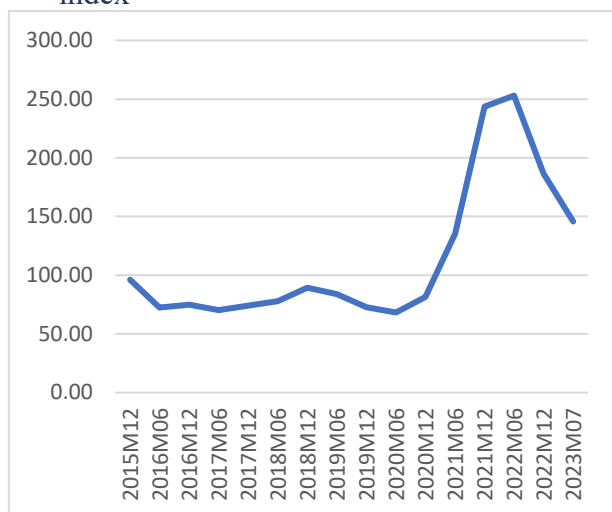
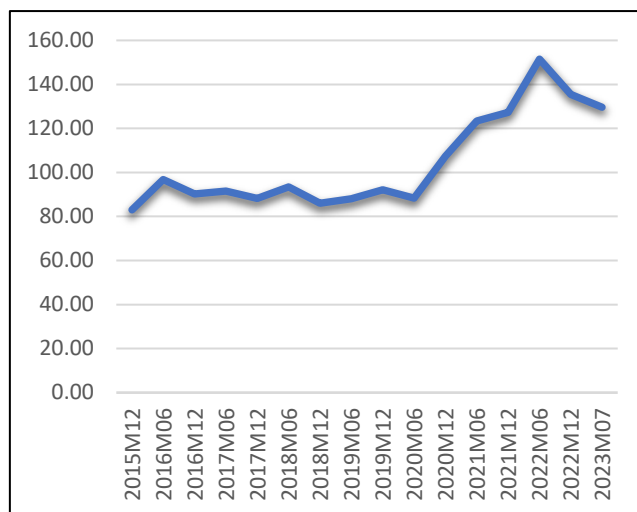


Figure 10: Evolution of food rice index



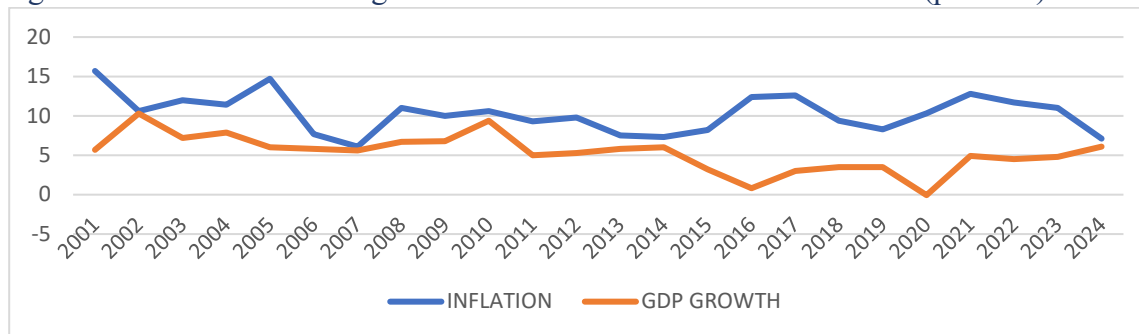
Source: World Bank Commodity Price Data (The Pink Sheet), July 2023

## II- The West African Economy in 2023 and outlook

### 2.1 Growth and inflation dynamics at the subregional level

11. The economic performance in West Africa remains weak as growth resumed slowly in 2021 at 4.4 per cent from the decline of 0.6 percent experienced in 2020 due to the detrimental effect of the COVID pandemic on the economy. The subsequent crisis of the Ukraine war further worsened the growth perspectives of the subregion with its impacts on the global demand, commodities, foods, and fertilizers prices. The region’s GDP growth rate stood at 4.5 % in 2022 and is expected to slightly increase to 4.8 % in 2023 and to reach 6.1% in 2024. In recent years, West Africa has been facing geopolitical problems such as governance and terrorism.

Figure 11: Recent economic growth and inflation trends in West Africa (per cent)



Source: ECA’s calculations from IMF, World Economic Outlook, April 2023, and countries data

12. The average inflation rate in West Africa has soared above the two digits level from 2021 with an average inflation rate of 10.3% and 12.8% in 2022 (Table 1). This dynamic was exacerbated

in all the countries of the region by the Ukraine war on energy and foods prices. The average inflation rate is expected to slightly decline to 11.0% in 2023 and to retrieve a single digit level at 7.1% in 2024. In UEMOA member states, inflation is expected to 4.7 per cent average in 2023 against 7.2 per cent average in 2022, above the community convergence rate of 3.0 per cent. According to 2022 WAMZ Macroeconomic Developments and Convergence report. The average inflation rate in West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) countries stood at 19.7 per cent in 2022 and the inflationary pressures would persist in 2023, mainly on account of increased food and fuel prices.

**Table 1: Inflation and economic growth in West Africa, per cent**

	Inflation, in per cent					GDP growth, in per cent				
	Estimates			Projection		Estimates			Projection	
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Benin	3.0	1.7	5.0	3.0	2.0	3.8	7.2	5.7	6.0	5.9
Burkina Faso	1.9	3.9	14.2	1.5	2.3	1.9	6.9	4.5	4.9	5.9
Cabo Verde	0.6	1.9	6.5	4.5	2.0	-14.8	7.0	4.0	4.4	5.4
Côte d'Ivoire	2.4	4.2	5.5	3.7	1.8	2.0	6.7	6.4	6.2	6.6
The Gambia	5.9	7.4	11.3	11.3	8.7	0.6	4.3	5.0	5.6	6.3
Ghana	9.9	10.0	27.2	45.4	22.2	0.5	5.4	3.6	1.6	2.9
Guinea	10.6	12.6	12.7	8.1	7.5	4.9	3.8	4.6	7.6	5.7
Guinea-Bissau	1.5	3.3	5.5	11.3	3.0	1.5	5.0	4.5	4.5	5.0
Liberia	17.0	7.8	6.9	6.9	5.9	-3.0	5.0	3.7	4.3	5.5
Mali	0.5	3.8	8.0	5.0	2.8	-1.2	3.1	3.8	5.0	5.1
Niger	2.9	3.8	4.5	2.8	2.5	3.6	1.3	6.6	6.1	13
Nigeria	13.2	17.0	18.9	20.1	15.8	-1.8	3.6	3.2	3.2	3.0
Senegal	2.5	2.2	7.5	5.0	1.9	1.3	6.1	4.8	8.3	10.6
Sierra Leone	13.4	11.9	25.9	37.8	25.9	-2.0	4.1	2.4	3.1	4.8
Togo	1.8	4.3	7.6	5.3	2.9	1.8	5.3	4.5	5.5	5.5
<b>ECOWAS</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>-0.06</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>6.1</b>

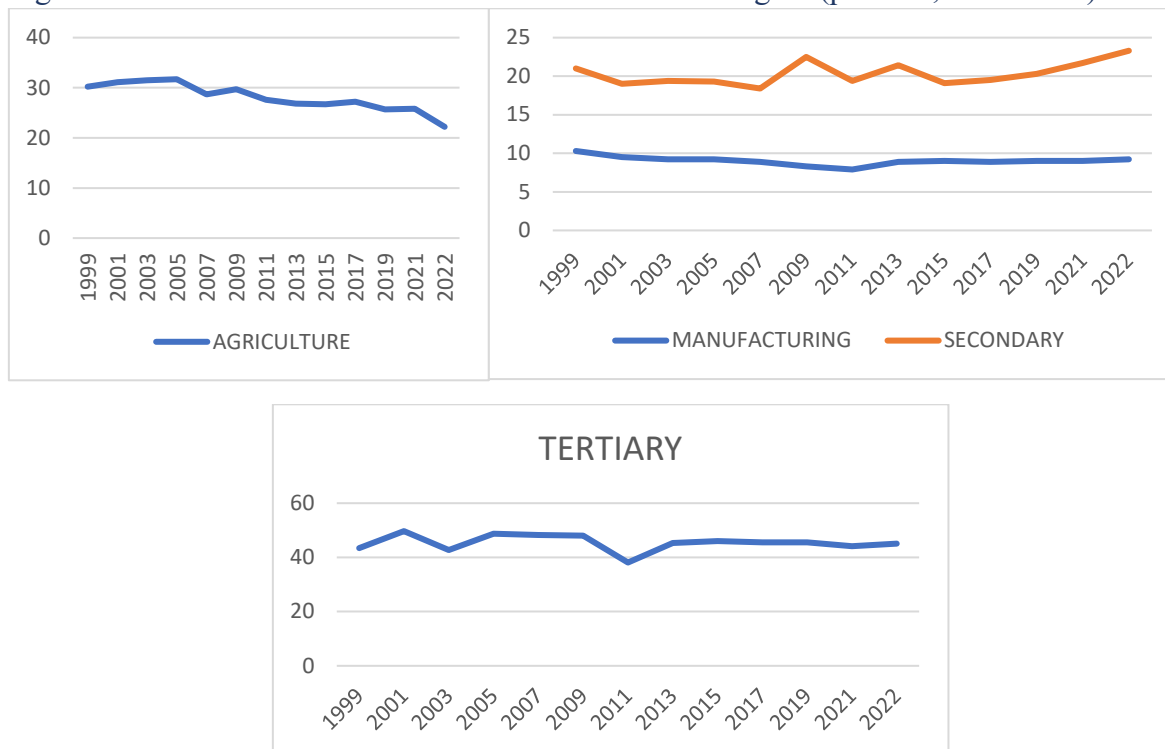
**Source:** ECA, based World Economic Outlook, April 2023

## 2.2 Production structure

13. The economy in West Africa is dominated by the primary (agriculture) and tertiary sectors, which together accounted for 77.3 per cent of the GDP in 2022. The tertiary sector has the highest share of the economy at 45.1 per cent in 2022, followed by the secondary sector (23.3 per cent) and agriculture (22.2 per cent). The secondary sector is mainly extractive while

manufacturing share in the GDP, a key driver of industrialization and structural transformation, stood at 9,2% in 2022.

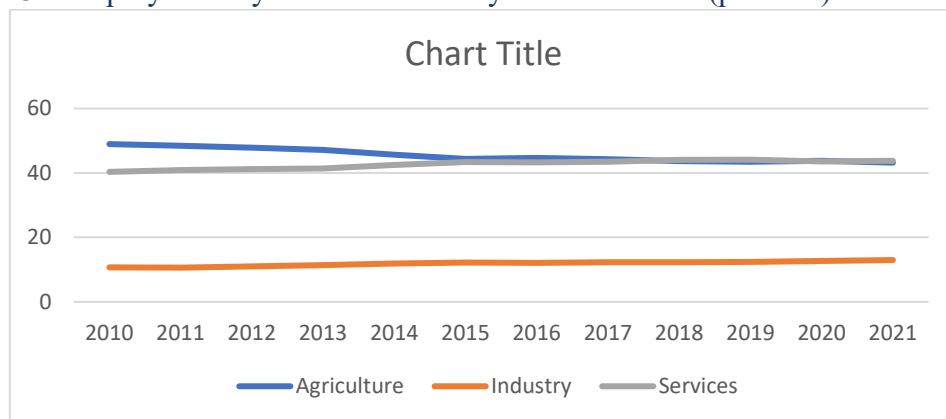
Figure 12: Sectorial evolution of GDP in the ECOWAS region (per cent, 1999-2022)



Source: ECA, based on World Bank database

14. The change in the production structure in West Africa indicates a movement from agriculture and manufacturing to services. Agricultural production remains insufficient to respond to the increasing challenge of food insecurity in the region. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2023), an unprecedented 42.5 million people were projected to face acute food insecurity during the lean season (June-August 2023), compared to 38.3 million people in 2022. Food insecurity has been exacerbated by the Ukraine- Russia crisis, the political instability and conflicts, and high food prices which together worsened the region's macroeconomic situation.
15. The employment by economic activity has been the shift of labour from agriculture to the tertiary sector which comprised mainly urban informal service economy. In 2021, the share distribution was 43.7% for primary (agriculture), 13.0% for secondary and 43.8% for tertiary sectors (Figure 13). In addition to these factors, other contextual factors are affecting household food security in the Sahel and West Africa. The main factors are insecurity and conflicts leading to forced population displacement, regional and global climatic and economic shocks, and the impacts of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. These factors have a low-to-medium negative impact on food consumption and livelihood trends, both in the current and projected periods. In some areas of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, there are strong negative impacts. It should also be noted that feelings of insecurity among farmers prevent them from fully engaging in agricultural activities.

Figure 13: Employment by economic activity in West Africa (per cent)



Source: ECA' calculations, based on data from ILOSTAT.

### 2.3 Trade and current accounts

16. The current account of the region has worsened from -1.7 per cent of GDP in 2021 to -7.0 per cent of GDP in 2022. All the countries of the region have experienced a current account deficit in 2022. Four countries (The Gambia, Liberia, Niger, and Senegal) experienced current account deficits above 10 per cent of GDP in 2022.

Table 2: Current account deficits (percentage of GDP)

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Benin</b>	-4.6	-4.0	-1.7	-3.1	-3.9
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	-4.1	-3.3	4.3	-1.4	-3.0
<b>Cabo Verde</b>	-5.1	0.3	-16.6	-13.1	-6.2
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	-3.9	-2.3	-3.2	-4.3	-6.0
<b>The Gambia</b>	-8.1	-2.1	-4.7	-4.6	-11.2
<b>Ghana</b>	-3.0	-2.7	-3.1	-3.3	-2.7
<b>Guinea</b>	-1.6	-2.3	17.6	26.3	-5.6
<b>Guinea-Bissau</b>	-3.6	-8.8	-2.6	-5.6	-4.4
<b>Liberia</b>	-25.6	-41.8	-12.5	-24.6	-16.4
<b>Mali</b>	-5.7	-4.8	-3.3	-3.6	-6.7
<b>Niger</b>	-12.6	-12.2	-13.2	-11.6	-14.0
<b>Nigeria</b>	1.5	-3.3	-4.0	-0.8	-0.2
<b>Senegal</b>	-9.6	-8.0	-9.3	-10.2	-11.3
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	-12.4	-14.3	-6.8	-12.3	-7.7
<b>Togo</b>	-2.6	-0.8	-0.3	-0.1	-6.2
<b>ECOWAS</b>	<b>-0.9</b>	<b>-3.7</b>	<b>-3.5</b>	<b>-1.7</b>	<b>-7.0</b>

Source: ECA, based on UNCTADStat and AfDB African Economic Outlook 2023.

Africa's contribution to global trade remains very low with a merchandise trade share of exports of 2.6 percent and imports of 2.8 percent, respectively in 2022. The contribution of West Africa to Africa's trade is 20 per cent<sup>2</sup>, below of its GDP contribution to the production of the continent estimated at 26.5<sup>3</sup> per cent. The

<sup>2</sup> UNECA, SRO WA, Assessing regional integration in West Africa, June, 2023

<sup>3</sup> UNECA, SRO WA, ICE 2021, Concept Note

countries with the highest global volume of trade in West Africa were Nigeria, Cote D’Ivoire, Ghana and Guinea, accounting around 80 per cent of West Africa exports.

The intra -ECOWAS and intra-African trade are expected to increase in the context of the implementation of AfCFTA agreement. To this regard, West African countries early engaged to develop and adopt AfCFTA national strategies. As of September 2023, 13 out 15 ECOWAS member states, ECOWAS and UEMOA developed AfCFTA strategies. These strategies are under implementation with the effective support of UNECA and development partners, in particular ITFC/ISDB, EIF/WTO, EU, UNDP.

## 2.4 Public finance

17. The average fiscal deficit of the West Africa economy has slightly improved from 6.5 per cent in 2020 to 6.3 per cent in 2022. Overall, the fiscal deficit has improved in all the countries. Only The Gambia and Guinea met the community convergence criteria of fiscal deficit less than 3.0 per cent in 2023. The fiscal deficits for Burkina Faso, Ghana, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo have crossed the threshold of 5.0 per cent of GDP in 2023, suggesting a considerable reduction of countries’ fiscal space to respond to socio-economic investments in a context of multiple crises and an increasing social demand.

18. Although, the average government debt to GDP ratio remained below the community convergence criteria of 70 per cent, it has increased by 23.2 percentage points from 2020 to 2023. Further, six countries did not meet the debt to GDP ratio convergence criterion in 2022, namely Cabo Verde, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Senegal, and Sierra Leone (Table 3). This points out the debt sustainability issues in the West Africa region, with in particular Ghana in debt stress and the Gambia and Sierra Leone in high risk of debt stress, yet there is no coherent response worldwide to the growing debt problem, hitting especially the developing countries.

Table 3: Fiscal balance and debt in West Africa

	Overall Fiscal Balance (percentage of GDP)				Government Debt to GDP Ratio (per cent)			
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Benin</b>	-4.7	-5.7	-5.6	-4.3	46.1	49.9	52.4	52.8
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	-5.7	-6.4	-10.4	-7.8	46.4	52.4	54.3	58.0
<b>Cabo Verde</b>	-9.1	-7.3	-4.5	-5.0	145.1	142.3	127.4	120.2
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	-5.6	-5.0	-6.7	-5.1	47.6	52.1	56.8	63.3
<b>Gambia, The</b>	-2.2	-4.6	-4.8	-2.7	85.9	83.8	84	73.0
<b>Ghana</b>	-15.3	-11.4	-9.9	-7.3	79.1	82.1	88.8	98.7
<b>Guinea</b>	-3.1	-1.7	-0.7	-2.3	47.5	42.5	33.4	30.0
<b>Guinea-Bissau</b>	-9.6	-5.7	-5.5	-3.8	76.5	78.5	79.5	76.5
<b>Liberia</b>	-3.8	-2.4	-6.9	-4.9	58.7	53.2	55.4	57.1
<b>Mali</b>	-5.4	-5.0	-4.8	-4.8	47.3	51.9	53.2	54.1
<b>Niger</b>	-5.3	-5.9	-6.8	-5.3	45.0	51.2	51.1	52.5
<b>Nigeria</b>	-5.6	-6.0	-5.5	-5.3	34.5	36.6	38	38.8
<b>Senegal</b>	-6.4	-6.3	-6.1	-4.9	69.2	73.2	75	73.1
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	-5.8	-7.3	-10.9	-6.2	76.3	79.3	98.8	92.2
<b>Togo</b>	-6.9	-6.0	-7.3	-6.1	60.3	63.7	68	68.5
<b>ECOWAS</b>	-6.5	-6.4	-6.3	-5.1	44.0	47.2	67.7	67.2

Source: ECA based IMF, World Economic Outlook, July 2023.

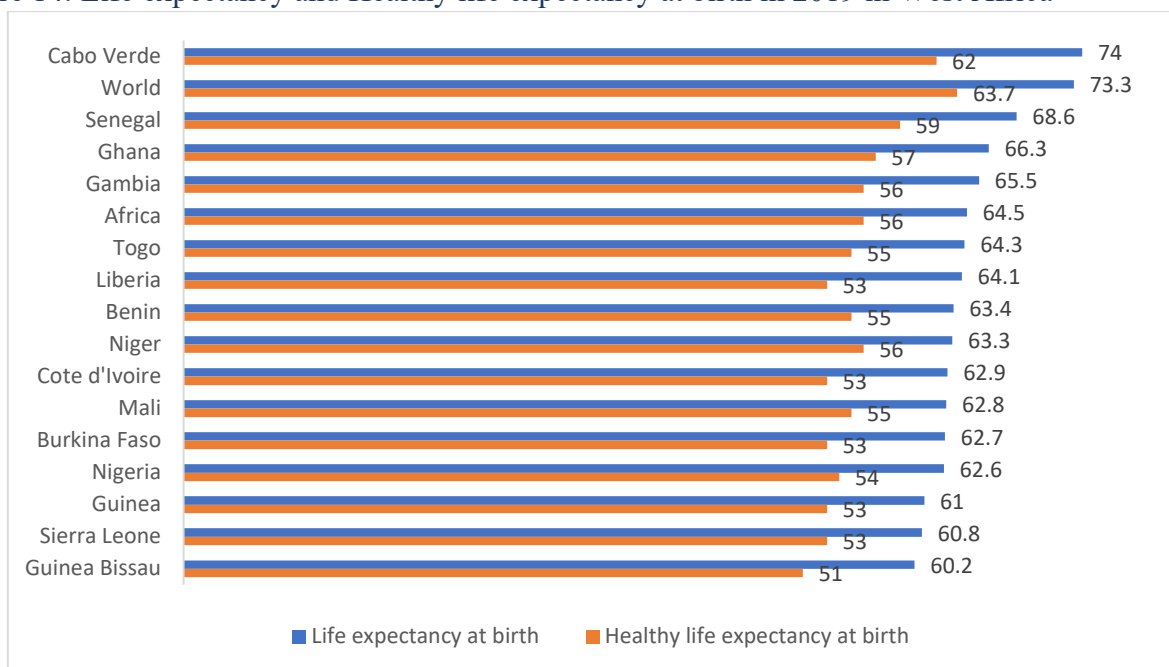
### III- A review of selected social issues in West Africa

Social and economic issues are intertwined, given that the economic situation and the fiscal space influence in the availability of resources for investment. The selected indicators- health, education, labour, poverty and gender<sup>4</sup>- are key to advance the Social Development Goals until 2030, which are under risk of not being achieved, and to harness Demographic Dividend in the region.

#### 3.1 Health situation

19. Health is a key dimension of human capital. In terms of life expectancy and healthy life expectancy, there is a great disparity among West African countries. The life expectancy at birth in 2019 for West Africa ranged from 60.2 years in Guinea Bissau to 74 years in Cabo Verde (Figure 14), being the later higher than the world average (73.3 years). Only four countries (Cabo Verde, Senegal, Ghana and Gambia) have better life expectancy than the African average (64.5 years). Healthy life expectancy at birth in 2019 varied from 51 years in Guinea Bissau to 62 years in Cabo Verde, amounting eleven years difference.

Figure 14: Life expectancy and Healthy life expectancy at birth in 2019 in West Africa



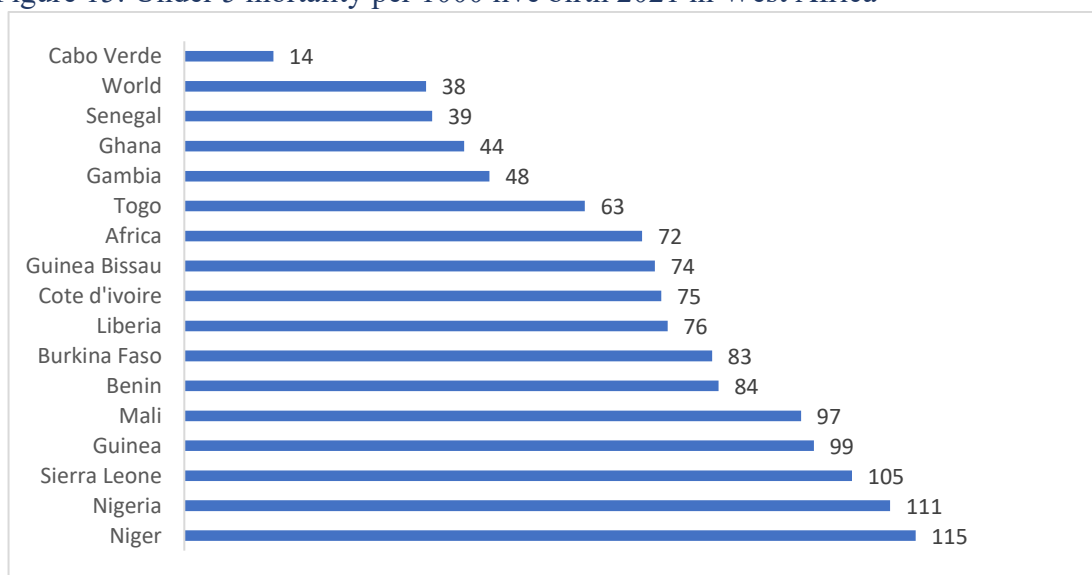
Source: Elaborated by ECA based on the World Health Statistic Report 2023, consulted in August 2023.

20. In term of under-five mortality ratio in 2021, Cabo Verde had the lowest rate at 14, while Niger had the highest rate in the region with 115 deaths per 1,000 live birth (Figure 15). Five countries (Cabo Verde, Senegal, Gambia, Ghana, and Togo) have lower rate than the African average (72 deaths). Except for Cabo Verde, all countries of the region are far from reaching the Sustainable Development Goal target 3.2 of reducing under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births. To achieve this target, 60% of the West African countries need to reduce to 1/3 the current level. The spiralling of insecurity in the region can hinder the progress on this area.

<sup>4</sup> Data for Africa and the world used for comparison when available, and this data in the graphics is highlighted in different color.

According to UNOWAS, operations by armed groups, violent extremists and criminal networks has led to the closure of around 7,000 health centres in West Africa and Sahel<sup>5</sup>.

Figure 15: Under 5 mortality per 1000 live birth 2021 in West Africa



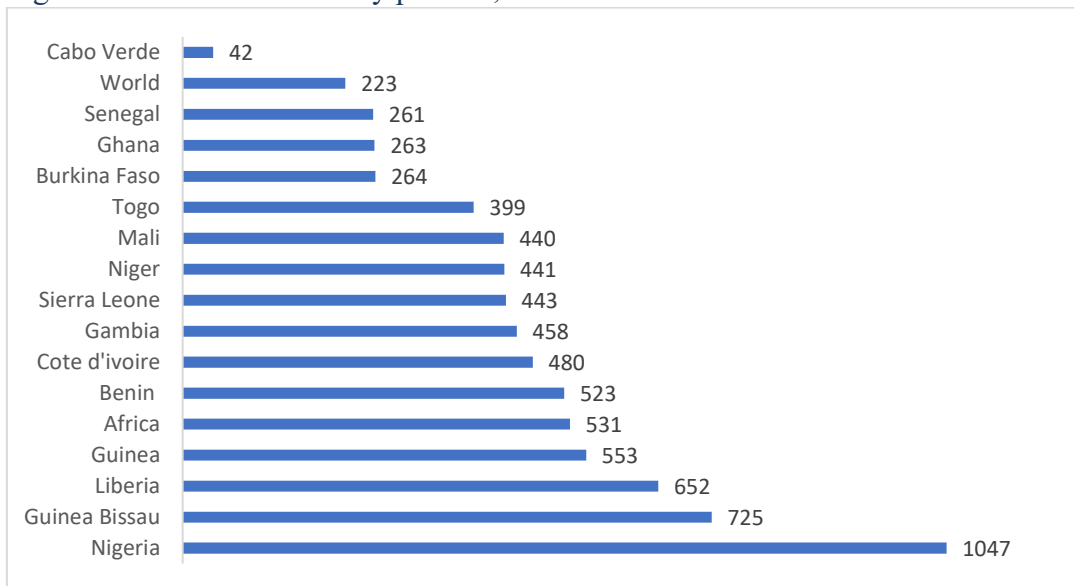
**Source:** Elaborated by ECA based on the World Health Statistic Report 2023, consulted in August 2023.

21. The SDG target 3.1 is to reduce the maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births in 2030. Although two thirds of the West African countries have lower rate than the African average (531), they are far from reaching this target, and the figures in 2020 ranged from 42 deaths per 100,000 live births in Cabo Verde to 1047 in Nigeria (Figure 16). Cabo Verde is the only country in West Africa which has already reached the target. Senegal, which had the second lowest rate in the region in 2020, still needs to reduce to more than 1/3 the current level.

<sup>5</sup> UN News. 'Unprecedented' insecurity in West Africa and the Sahel, Security Council hears. 10 January 2023.

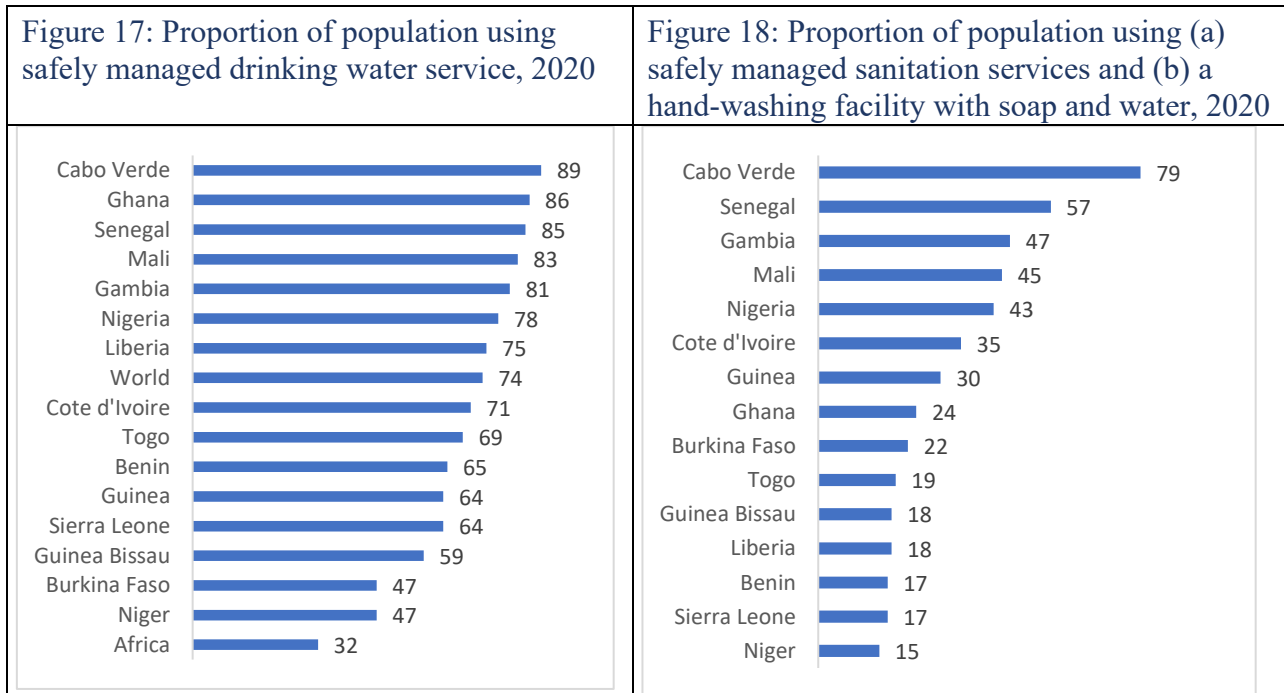


Figure 16: Maternal mortality per 100,000 live births in 2020 in West Africa



**Source:** Elaborated by ECA based on the World Health Statistic Report 2023.

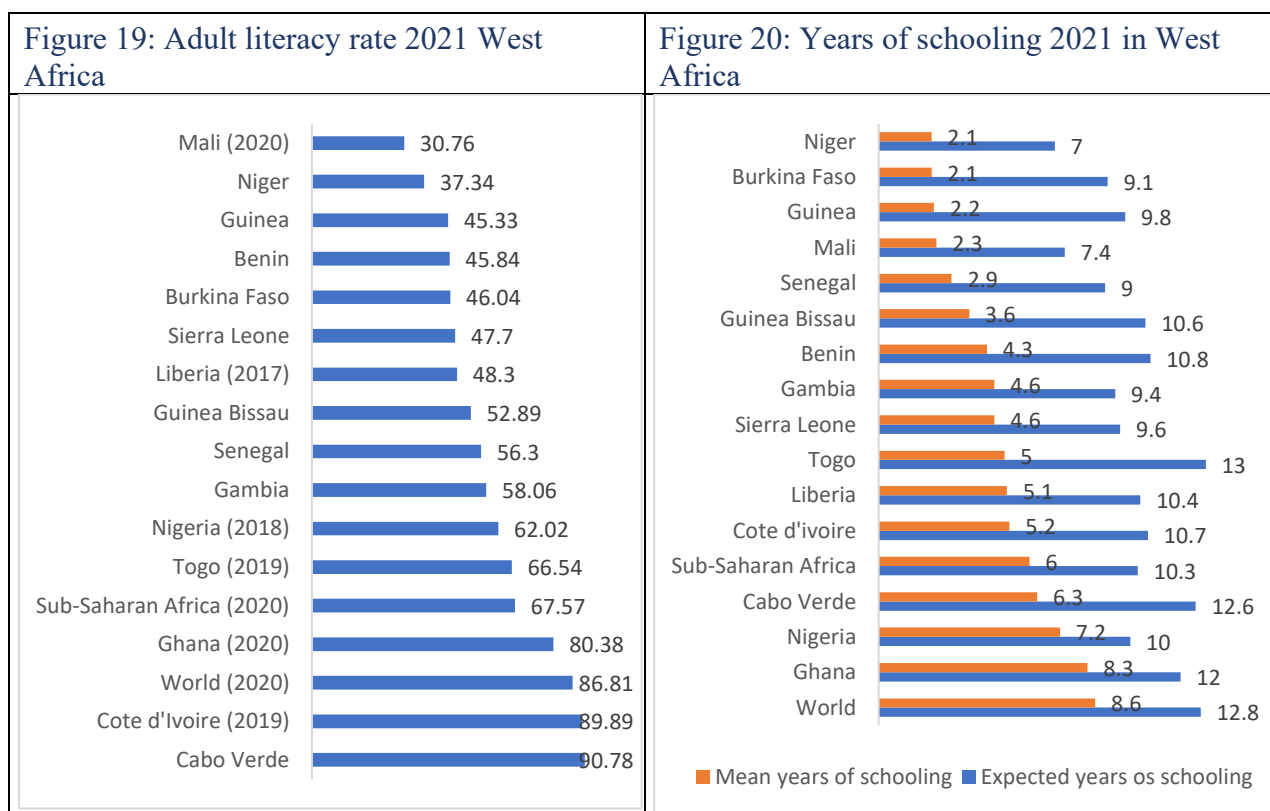
22. Having access to safely managed drinking water service (SDG 6.1.1) and safely managed sanitation services and hand-washing facility with soap and water (SDG 6.2.1 a, b) are crucial for improving the quality of life, preventing diseases, and advancing development. West Africa is lagging in achieving both SDGs, especially in terms of sanitation. Only two out of the 15 countries had more than 50% of the population with safely managed sanitation services (Cabo Verde and Senegal), while six countries (Niger, Sierra Leone, Benin, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, and Togo) have less than 20% of the population with access to these services in 2020 (Figure 18). For safely managed drinking water services in 2020, two countries (Burkina Faso and Niger) had less than 50% of the population with access (Figure 17).



**Source:** Elaborated by ECA based on data of the Atlas of African Health Statistics, 2022.

### 3.2 Education situation

23- Advancing literacy rates is part of the effort to enable people to play an effective role in development by participating in society and improving access to the labour market. There are great disparities in adult literacy rate in West Africa (Figure 19). Seven countries in the region have an adult literacy rate lower than 50 per cent, with data ranging from 30.8 per cent in Mali (2020 data) to 90.8 per cent in Cabo Verde. (2021 data). Only Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Cabo Verde present rates above the average for Sub-Saharan Africa (67.57 per cent in 2020). More effort is needed in West Africa to reach the SDG target 4.6 to ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy by 2030. Insecurity has a deep impact in education. In February, some 10,000 schools were closed or non-operational in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria, due to violence (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023). Violence led to the closure of 6,134 schools in Burkina Faso, an increase of 44% on the previous year, when 4,258 schools were closed. Nearly one in four schools in the country is now closed, affecting over a million pupils and 31,077 teachers.



**Source:** Elaborated by ECA based on data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, consulted in August 2023, and on data from UNDP, Human Development Report 2021/2022.

23. Literacy and years of schooling are intertwined indicators, and both have deep impact in the employment opportunities for workers. In 2021, mean years of schooling ranged from 2.1 in Niger and in Burkina Faso to 8.3 in Ghana (Figure 20). The mean years of schooling are lower than the world average (8.6 years) in all countries and only Ghana, Nigeria and Cabo Verde have higher figures than the average for Sub-Saharan Africa (6 years). This is far below the expected years of schooling in all countries.

### 3.3 The Employment situation

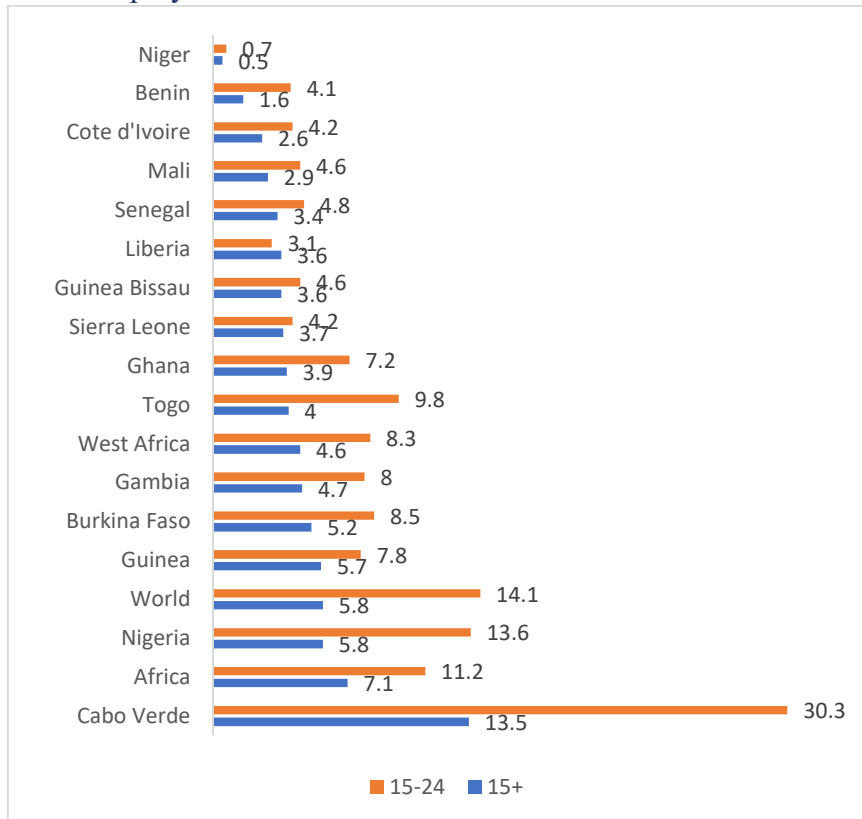
24. In 2023, the working-age population (15 to 64 years old) stood at an estimated 240,3 million people in West Africa<sup>6</sup>. Of this total, the labour force represents 155,1 million, comprising around 148 million people in employment and an estimated 7,1 million not employed. The estimated world unemployment rate in 2023 is 5.8%, while in Africa and West Africa it is, respectively, 7.1% and 4.6%, maintaining almost the same rate of 2022 (Figure 21). However, this performance hides a high prevalence of informal and non-decent work.

25. Estimates for 2023 indicate that in West Africa, except for Liberia, the unemployment rate among young population (between 15 and 24 years) is higher than for the general population (above 15 years), being the average unemployment for youth in West Africa estimated at 8.3 per cent, and for the general population at 4.6 per cent. Four out of the fifteen countries (Cabo

<sup>6</sup> All data from ILO Modelled Estimates (ILOSTAT), nov. 2022, consulted in August 2023.

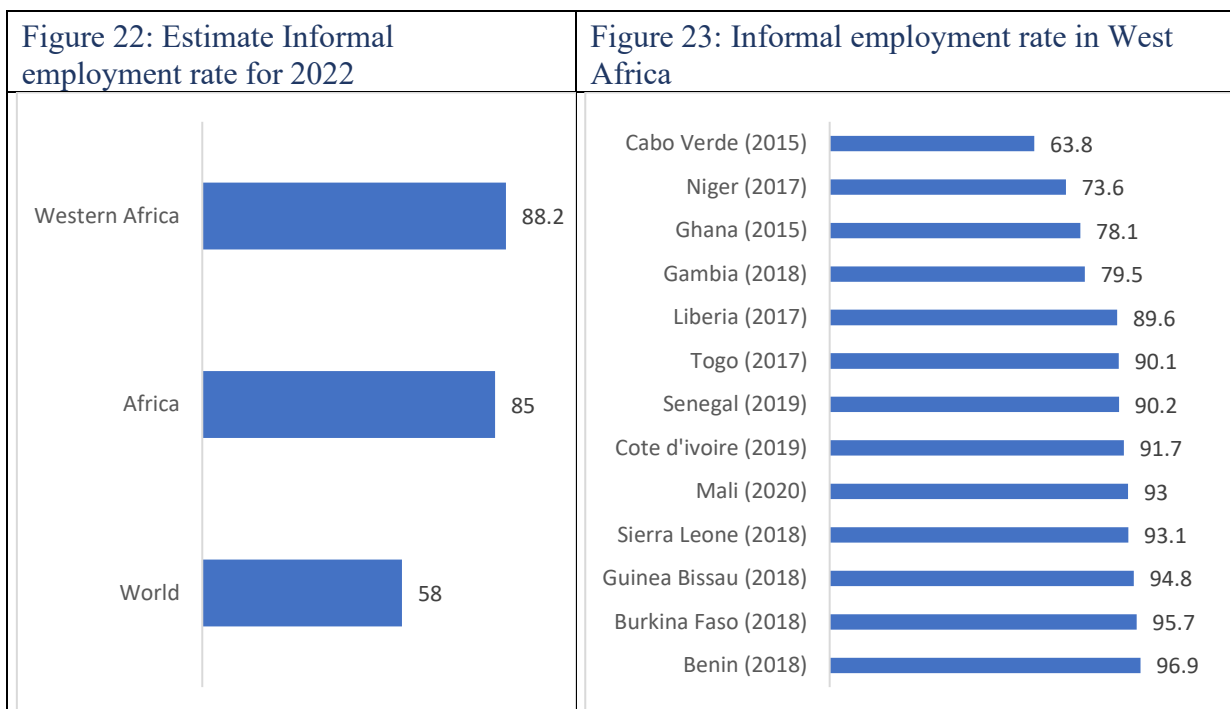
Verde, Nigeria, Togo, and Benin) experienced an unemployment rate among young population that is more than double that of the general population (Figure 8). Governance challenges and instability have an important impact in the job creation capacity, which must be addressed.

Figure 21: Unemployment estimate rates for 2023 in West Africa



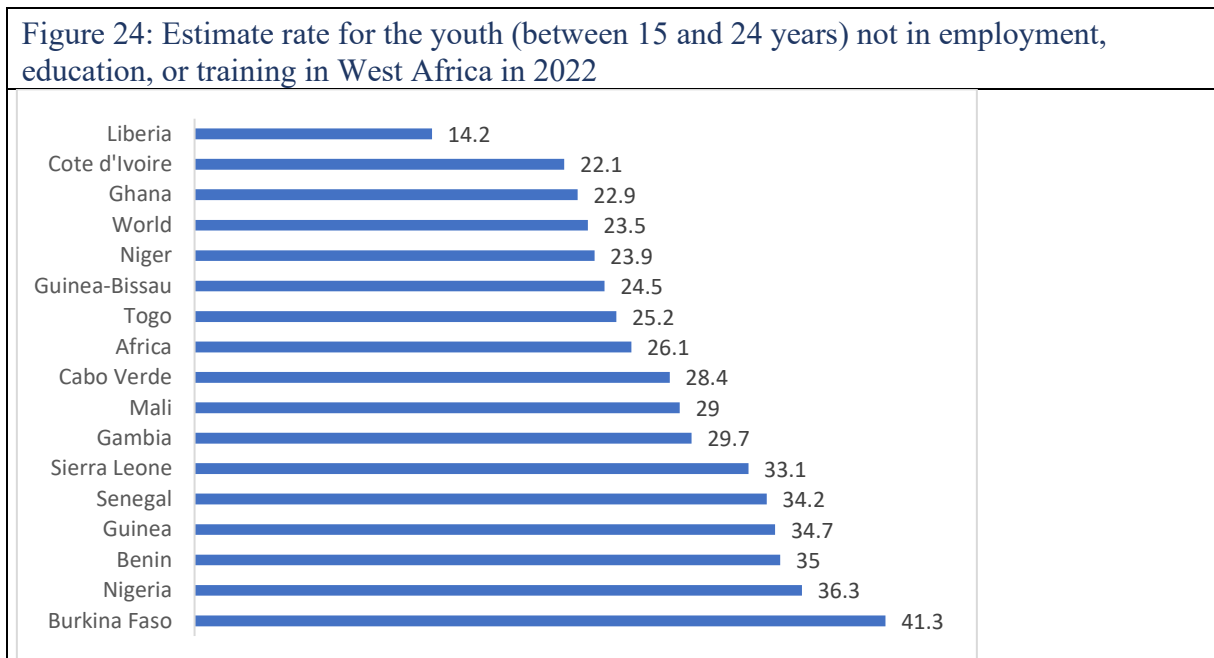
Source: Elaborated by ECA based on data from ILO Modelled Estimates, consulted in August 2023.

26. The informal employment rate is high in West Africa, ranging from 63.8 per cent in Cabo Verde (2015) to 96.9 per cent in Benin (2018). It is important to highlight that even though some countries, such as Benin and Niger, present low levels of unemployment, all countries have high informal employment rate (Figure 23). West Africa has higher estimate rate of informal employment in 2022 (88.2 per cent) than the average for Africa (85 per cent) and for the world (58 per cent).



**Source:** Elaborated by ECA based on data from ILO Modelled Estimates, consulted in August 2023.

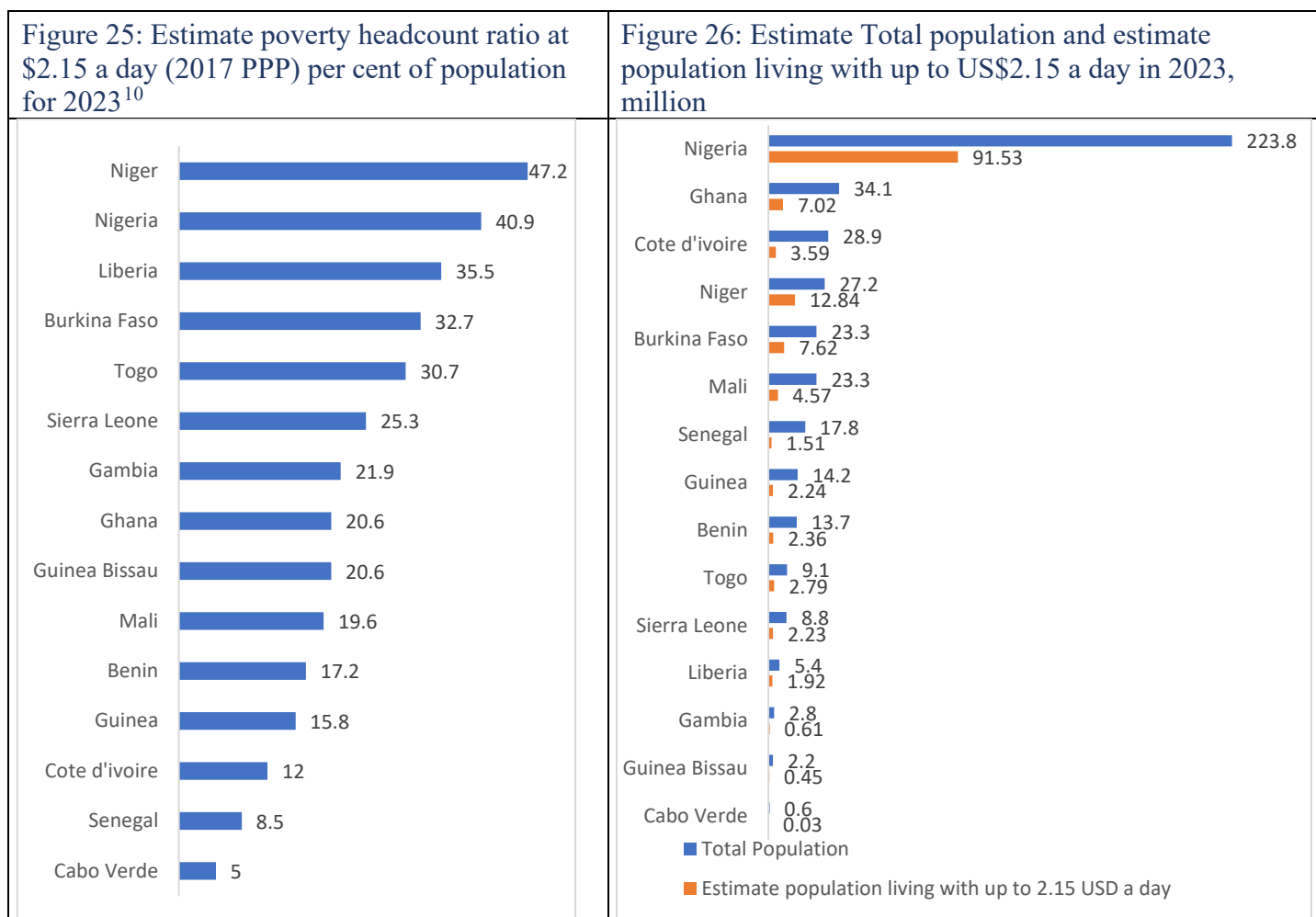
27. The average estimate share of youth (between 15 and 24 years) not in employment, education, or training in West Africa in 2022 is 29 per cent, ranging from 14.2 per cent in Liberia to 41.3 per cent Burkina Faso. This rate is higher than the estimates for Africa (26.1 per cent) and for the World (23.5 per cent). Youngs play an important role in harnessing demographic dividend. Therefore, reducing the rate of youth not in employment, education or training is part of a development strategy crucial for countries in the region.



**Source:** Elaborated by ECA based on data from ILO Modelled Estimates, consulted in August 2023.

### 3.4 The poverty profile

28. The population of West Africa is estimated at 435.2 million in 2023<sup>7</sup>. An estimated 32.47 per cent of this population is living on less than 2.15 a day in 2023<sup>8</sup>, amounting to 141.32 million people living in extreme poverty in the region<sup>9</sup>. Achieving SDG 1.1 by eliminating extreme poverty in all its forms in West Africa by 2030 remains a challenge. According to the estimates for 2023, only three countries (Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal and Cabo Verde) have less than 15 per cent of their population living with up to 2.15 USD a day. Insecurity is one of the emerging issues that has a negative impact in fighting poverty.



**Source:** Elaborated by ECA based on the World Bank, Macro Poverty Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa, 2023. Consulted in August 2023.

<sup>7</sup> ECA calculation based on the World Bank, Macro Poverty Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa, 2023.

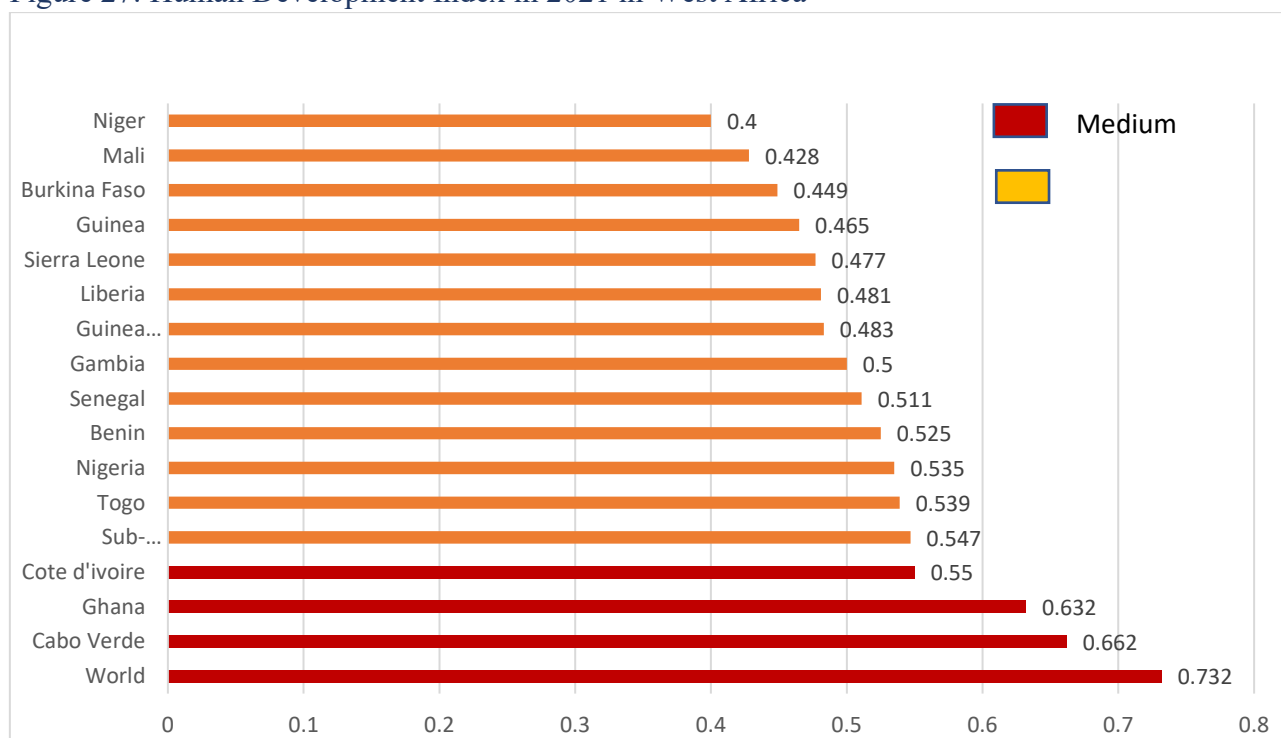
<sup>8</sup> The World Bank updated the global poverty lines in September 2022. The new extreme poverty line of \$2.15 per person per day, which replaces the \$1.90 poverty line, is based on 2017 PPPs.

<sup>9</sup> ECA calculation based on World Bank estimates for total population in 2023 and projection of poverty headcount ratio at \$2.15 a day (2017 PPP) per cent of population. Macro Poverty Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Data for Nigeria based on the National Poverty Line, according to the World Bank, Macro Poverty Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa, 2023.

29. The Human Development Index (HDI) of the region is between 0.4 and 0.662<sup>11</sup>, among the lowest on the continent, with twelve of the fifteen countries in the low human development cluster in 2021 (Figure 27). Only Cabo Verde, Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana are in the medium human development cluster. Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea are the lowest performers for human development in the region. In comparative terms, the HDI for Sub-Saharan Africa is 0.547 and for the World 0.732. There is much room for improvement, especially regarding life expectancy at birth and mean years of schooling, as analysed in previous sections. Security and governance challenges are important components to be addressed in order to create a stable environment for progress.

Figure 27: Human Development Index in 2021 in West Africa



Source: Elaborated by ECA based on UNDP, 2022 data from the Human Development Index 2021/2022.

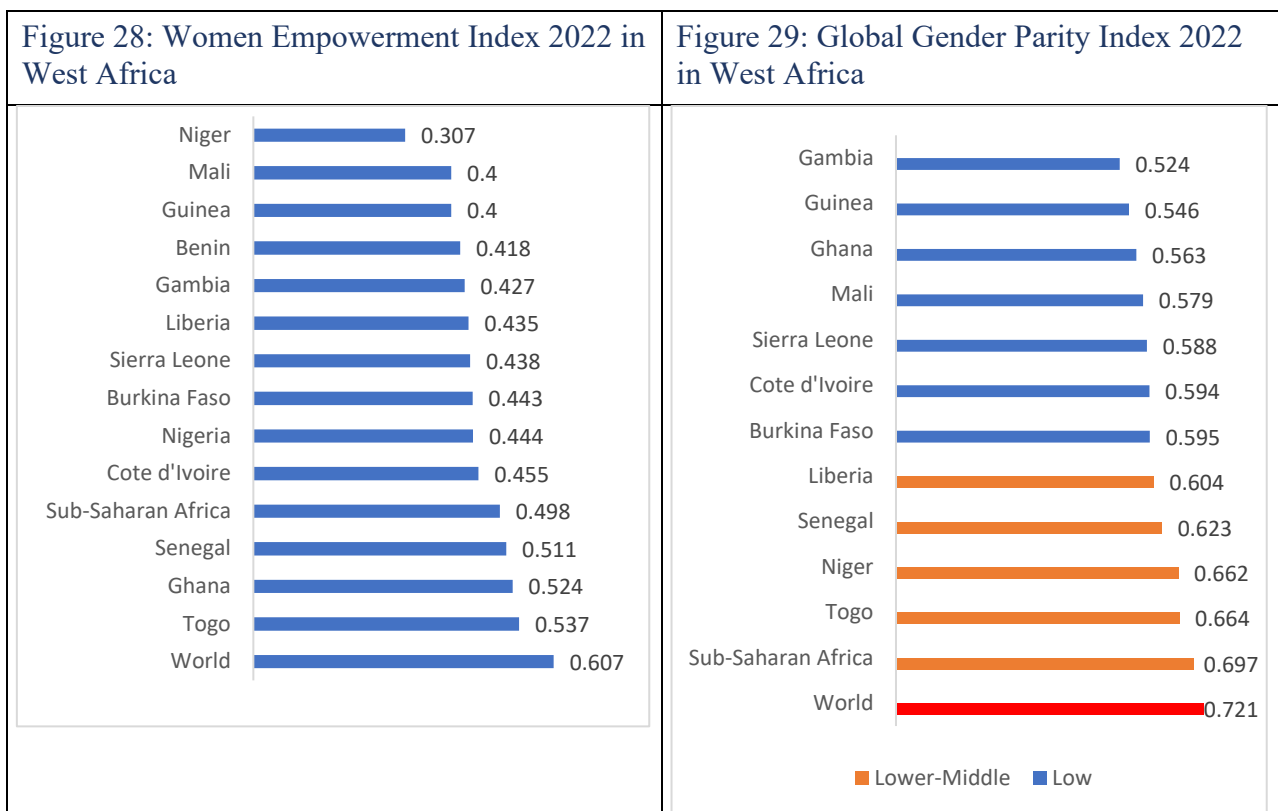
### 3.5 Women empowerment and Gender Parity

30. According to the 2022 Women Empowerment Index<sup>12</sup>, all the fifteen countries of West Africa are classified as Low, ranging from 0.307 for Niger to 0.537 for Togo, being the world average 0.607 (Figure 16). This index captures women’s power and freedoms to make choices and seize

<sup>11</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2021/2022*

<sup>12</sup> Calculated by UNDP. It is a composite index that measures the level of women’s empowerment across five dimensions: life and good health (two indicators); education, skill-building and knowledge (two indicators); labour and financial inclusion (two indicators), participation in decision-making (three indicators); and freedom from violence (one indicator).

opportunities in life. In terms of the Global Gender Parity Index<sup>13</sup> 2022, four countries are classified as lower-middle (Togo, Niger, Senegal, Liberia) and the other eleven countries as low (Figure 17). All countries have lower figures if compared to Sub-Saharan Africa and the World. Despite having the lowest classification among the countries for Women Empowerment, Niger is the second in gender-parity, which suggests that the lack of opportunities is not restricted to women. Togo has the best result for both measures in 2022 in West Africa, but all countries of the region should improve their results.



**Source:** elaborated by ECA based on UNDP. The Paths to Equal, 2023. Consulted in August 2023.

### 3.6 Social Issues Factsheet

In a nutshell, social issues in West Africa presented above can be summarized as follows:

<sup>13</sup> Calculated by UNDP. It is a composite index that assesses the relative achievements between women and men in four dimensions: life and good health (one indicator); education, skill-building and knowledge (two indicators); labour and financial inclusion (two indicators); and participation in decision-making (three indicators).





**4** countries have better life expectancy than the African Average (64.5 years)

**14** Countries present unemployment among the youth higher than for general population



More than **50%** of the countries need to reduce to **1/3** the current under-5 mortality rate to meet SDG 3.2

**88.2%** Is the West Africa estimate rate of informal employment



Only **2** countries have more than 50% of the population with safely managed sanitation services

**29%** of youth not in employment, education, or training



**7** countries have an adult literacy rate lower than 50%

**32%** of the population living on less than 2.15 a day, amounting 141.32 million people living in extreme poverty

### 3. 7 Rising humanitarian and food insecurity issues

33. Mounting insecurity threats and political crises remains a key challenge for West African countries. The sub region has experienced a series of coups and unconstitutional changes of Government between 2020 and 2023 often resulting of various sanctions which affected the populations. The security situation also remained precarious, particularly in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, due to persistent attacks on military and civilian targets. Terrorism continued to spread southwards towards coastal countries, with new incursions into Benin and Togo. Coastal countries have responded to growing insecurity by strengthening bilateral cooperation.

34. These situations exacerbated the food insecurity situation and worsen the number of Internal displaced peoples (IDPs). Over the past six months, some 30,000 Malian refugees have fled to Burkina Faso and Niger, and more than 11,500 people have entered Mali and Niger from Burkina Faso. Some 8,450 people from north-western Nigeria have fled to Niger to escape the violence. There has also been a significant increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers in coastal countries. This state of affairs increases the vulnerability of populations, especially those in rural areas. Given the political situation in Burkina Faso, the transitional authorities have given priority to strengthening military resources in an attempt to remedy the security situation, allocating 28% of the national budget to the defense and security sector in 2023, an increase of 72% compared with 2022 (GRID 2023).

35. In June 2023, nearly 48 million people would be at risk from the food and nutrition crisis in the Sahel and West Africa during the lean season (June-August 2023) according to Food Crisis Prevention Network/ WFP, June 2023<sup>14</sup>. Due to insecurity, an estimated 3 million people in Burkina Faso are suffering from hunger. Of those affected, almost 650,000 are facing famine (level 5 in the integrated food insecurity classification), which means that people are already starting to die for lack of food.

36. The subregion also continue to experience in this context of spread of violence, terrorism the rising number of Internal displaced people (IDPs) and refugees, creating more vulnerabilities among West African populations. Some of the most important consequences of terrorist acts are loss of human lives and properties, including vital infrastructure, as well as reduction in job creation and in economic growth This is not to mention the environment of uncertainly, lack of confidence for investments due to the risk. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger tri-state area of the Sahel have been particularly affected by these military coups and have suffered the consequences of regional destabilization.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

37. The socio-economic performance of West Africa continued to be heavily impacted by the prolonged effects of the COVID-19 health pandemic, and the Ukraine-Russia conflict. In addition to these effects, West Africa has been confronted in recent years with problems of governance and insecurity, particularly in the Sahel region. These crises were added to the already vulnerable political, security situations The macroeconomic situation (growth, inflation, fiscal deficit, current account balance) social indicators of the region were particularly worsened by the Ukraine Russia

---

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.food-security.net/document/avis-pregec-juin-2023/>

conflict with its impacts on global demand and supply, energy, foods, and fertilizers prices. The economic growth of the region is projected at 4.8 per cent in 2023 and 6.1 per cent in 2024, amid high inflation pressure of 11.0 per cent and 7.1 per cent expected in 2023 and 2024 respectively. With the current dynamics, West African countries will face tremendous challenges towards the realisation of the key SDG targets on economic growth, poverty, health, and education.

38. Countries should to engage in sound macroeconomic policies to promote stable and sustainable growth. This shall include appropriate reforms for low inflation and a sustainable fiscal and debt sustainability policy.

39. Countries should leverage on the opportunity offered by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to reduce their heavy external dependence on strategic goods such as energy, food, and fertilizers through regional value chains, economic diversification, and industrialization.

40. Governments should invest in renewable energy such as solar, hydropower, tapping into the region's large resources endowment.

41. Countries should invest in health and education sectors to strengthen the human capital. This is crucial not only for achieving SDGs 3 and 4, given that West Africa is lagging, but also for harnessing the demographic dividend.

42. Countries should put in place appropriate and well targeted social protection mechanisms to face extreme poverty, in line with SDGs 1 and 2. They should also invest in job creation, training and opportunities for the youth, taking into account that they face higher unemployment rate than the general population. This also helps to harness the opportunity of accelerated economic growth brought by an increasing share of the population at working age.

43. Development policy has an essential role to play in supporting stability in order to reduce conflict and violence in the long term. To achieve this, countries should support for lagging regions, strengthen local governance, improve land management and stimulate job creation.

44. Countries should invest in bridging the gender gap and providing opportunities for women, in line with SDG 5. Gender equality promotes economic growth, increases private performance through entrepreneurship and job creation and reduces income inequality, which is crucial for fighting poverty and promoting development.

45. Progress in governance on the continent is most hampered by the deterioration of the security environment and democratic participation. Countries should put in place good governance policies to improve HDI performance.

## References

- European Union, Summer 2023 Economic Forecast: Russia's war worsens the outlook, September 2023
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Food Outlook, 2023
- FAO, GIEWS Crops prospects and Food Situation, June 2023
- Global Report on Internal Displacement 2023
- International Monetary Fund (IMF), African Economic Outlook, July 2023
- IMF, World Economic Outlook, July 2023; EMDE: Emerging Market and Developing Economies
- United Nations (UN), World Economic Situation Prospects as of mid-2023, 2023
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Human Development Report, 2021/2022
- World Bank, Commodity Price Data (The Pink Sheet), Updated on August 02, 2023
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics.
- International Labour Organization (ILO) Modelled Estimates (ILOSTAT), July. 2023.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Human Development Report 2021/2022.
- UNDP, The Paths to Equal: Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality, 2022.
- West African Monetary Zone Macroeconomic Developments and Convergence Report, December 2022.
- World Bank, Macro Poverty Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa, 2023.
- World Health Organization. Atlas of African Health Statistics 2022.
- World Health Organization. World Health Statistic Report 2022.
- Online Databases consulted: Ecowas Statistics, ILOSTAT, UNCTADSTAT, World Bank poverty data, World Development Indicators, UN World Population Prospects Division, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, October 2023