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The Comoros

Vulnerability Profile

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Abbreviations

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
AfDB	African Development Bank
BCC	Central Bank of the Comoros
CDP	Committee for Development Policy
CGP	(Office of the Commissioner General for Planning
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CPAD	(Conference of Development Partners of the Comoros
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
ECP	Emerging Comoros Plan
EHCVM	Harmonized Survey on Household Living Standards
EVI	Economic Vulnerability Index
FDI	foreign direct investment
GDP	gross domestic product
GNI	gross national income
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INSEED	(National Institute of Statistics and Economic and Demographic Studies
KMF	Comoran franc
LDC	least developed country
PCI	Productive Capacities Index
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAP	structural adjustment programme
SCA2D	Stratégie de Croissance Accélérée et de Développement Durable (Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

Table of contents

Acknowledgements iv

Abbreviations v

Executive summary ix

1. Introduction 1

2. Economic situation analysis 5

2.1. Macroeconomic trends and productive structure of the economy 5

2.2. Migrant remittances and foreign direct investment 9

2.3. Economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis 11

2.4. Economic impact of the war in Ukraine 15

3. Areas of vulnerability 19

3.1. People 19

3.2. Prosperity 24

3.3. Planet 29

3.4. Peace 31

3.5. Partnerships 32

4. Development plans and international trade 35

4.1. Review of development plans and programmes 35

4.2. International trade and regional integration 39

5. Building resilience to vulnerabilities 49

5.1. Building productive capacities to reduce dependence on the outside world 49

5.2. Strengthening external and domestic resource mobilization capacity to finance development 50

5.3. Addressing environmental vulnerabilities 51

6. Strategic considerations for graduation with momentum 55

6.1. Structural transformation of production through the primary sector 55

6.2. Human capital development 55

6.3. Better allocation of migrant remittances 56

6.4. Climate adaptation 56

6.5. Strengthening the national statistical system 56

References 57

Figures

Figure 1 The Comoros and least developed countries: Real gross domestic product and real gross domestic product per capita, 1990–2024 6

Figure 2 Composition of the gross domestic product, 1974–2020 7

Figure 3 Composition of the primary sector, 2008-2020 7

Figure 4 Composition of the secondary sector, 2008-2020 8

Figure 5 Composition of the tertiary sector, 2008-2020 9

Figure 6 Migrant remittances, 2003-2020 10

Figure 7 Personal remittances received by the top ten African recipient countries 10

Figure 8 Border arrivals, 2017-2020 13

Figure 9 Composition of Government revenue, 2014-2024 14

Figure 10 Incidence of poverty and extreme poverty, 2020 20

Figure 11 Incidence of poverty in Moroni, the rest of Grande Comore, Anjouan and Mohéli 20

Figure 12 Human Assets Index and graduation threshold, 2005–2025 21

Figure 13 Gross national income per capita, 2000-2024 25

Figure 14 Debt-to-gross domestic product ratio, 2012-2024 26

Figure 15 Funding sources, 2024 budget 27

Figure 16 Cost of electricity in the Comoros and other African countries 28

Figure 17 Trade balance of the Comoros, 1990-2024 40

Figure 18 Composition of imports of goods, 2005-2020 40

Figure 19 Composition of exports of goods, 2005-2024 42

Figure 20 Intra-African imports, 2016–2019 average 43

Figure 21 Intra-African exports of goods, 2016–2019 average 44

Figure 22 Trade in services, 2005-2021 44

Figure 23 Composition of exports of services, 2005-2022 45

Tables

Table 1 Prices of petroleum products 15

Table 2 Measures of multidimensional poverty in the Comoros 21

Table 3 Composition and values of the Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index, 2024 26

Table 4 Main hazard exposures..... 29

Table 5 Composition of Comoran imports of goods by country, 2018 41

Table 6 Composition of exports of goods by country, 2018..... 42

Boxes

Box 1 Grands mariages: the lavish customary wedding..... 11

Box 2 The paradoxical rise in remittance inflows to the Comoros in 2020 during the COVID-19 crisis..... 12

Box 3 The Conference of Development Partners of the Comoros (CPAD)..... 39

Executive summary

The Union of the Comoros is a small island developing State (SIDS) located in the Indian Ocean, at the northern entrance of the Mozambique Channel. Although the country has experienced multiple political crises, it has been spared from major conflict. The Comoros is nevertheless unable to achieve stable growth and sustainable development. Moreover, its economy is reeling from the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Kenneth in 2019, the COVID-19-induced shutdown of activity in 2020–2021, and persistent inflationary pressures caused by the war in Ukraine.

The Committee for Development Policy (CDP) appraised the Comoros as pre-eligible for graduation from least developed country (LDC) status on the basis that it met two of the three graduation criteria at the 2021 triennial review: income (as measured by gross national income – GNI – per capita), and human assets. However, it fell well short on the third criterion, economic and environmental vulnerability. This report presents the vulnerability profile of the Comoros, as mandated in United Nations General Assembly resolution 59/209 of 20 December 2004. It provides an analytical assessment of the preparedness of the Comoros for graduation from the LDC category. The report analyses macroeconomic trends, structural changes in the country's economy, areas of vulnerability, and development challenges on the path to graduation, It also provides policy recommendations for resilience-building.

This *vulnerability profile* is especially timely: the Comoros deposited its instrument of ratification for membership of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in February 2023 and joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in August 2024. Also, the government has recently unveiled its ambitious Emerging Comoros Plan (ECP) for 2030. It also comes after the launch of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022–2026 between the Government of the Comoros and the 22 United Nations institutions active in the country.

The main areas of vulnerability of the Comoros are detailed below:

- Dependence on diaspora remittances. Migrant remittances are the main source of foreign currency inflows, far exceeding inflows from foreign direct investment (FDI) and official development assistance (ODA). Around 40 per cent of Comoran households receive diaspora remittances. However, these funds are primarily used to support household consumption and to fund lavish customary weddings (*grands mariages*) rather than for investment.
- Import dependency and export concentration. The Comoros is heavily dependent on imports to meet much of its internal demand. National statistics show that the country's main goods exports are three cash crops – cloves, vanilla and ylang ylang (essential oil) – which together account for the bulk of primary commodity exports.
- Institutional weaknesses. The business landscape is dominated by microenterprises and small businesses, which possess limited entrepreneurial skills and technological capabilities and offer little scope for innovation. Domestic resource mobilization capacity, both public and private, is weak.

These various vulnerabilities have implications across five dimensions: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnerships.

I. Social vulnerabilities

In 2024, the Comoros had an estimated population of about 867,000. The country's main demographic vulnerability is its extremely youthful population: 47.2 per cent of Comorans are under 20 years of age. Despite this small population, successive programmes have consistently failed to tackle poverty. In 2020, the poverty rate remained exceptionally high at 44.8 per cent,

according to estimates by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic and Demographic Studies (INSEED). On top of this, the poverty rate has trended upwards since 2014, when it stood at 42.0 per cent (INSEED, 2014, 2020). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 19.4 per cent of the population was vulnerable to multidimensional poverty between 2012 and 2023 (UNDP, 2025).

Although the Comoros has met the human capital criterion for graduation from the LDCs category in the 2021 and 2024 triennial reviews, health and education remain areas of high concern. A lack of adequate health infrastructure means that many Comorans are forced to travel to neighbouring countries to receive the care they need, relying on diaspora remittances to fund the exorbitant out-of-pocket costs. In the Comoros – as in many African countries – a mismatch between the education system and labour-market needs leads to a high level of unemployment.

Despite the Comoros having one of the highest electricity costs in Africa, the country has faced constant power cuts since the mid-1990s, with some localities left without power for days.

II. Economic vulnerabilities

The Comoros met the income criterion for LDC graduation in the 2021 and 2024 triennial reviews. Despite this, real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita growth has been slow since 1990. The primary sector is struggling to realize its full potential. The Comoros relies on imported food to meet domestic demand, leaving the population food-insecure. Despite its geographical position, the country imports hundreds of tons of fish and fishing products each year to meet local demand. Moreover, data from the National Directorate of Agricultural and Livestock Strategies (DNSAE, 2022) show that the Comoros relies on imports to meet 80 per cent of demand for red meat and almost all demand for poultry (99 per cent).

The secondary sector, which accounted for just 10 per cent of GDP between 2008 and 2020, is poorly developed, leading to a very low level of industrialization. Moreover, agro-industry is by far the largest component of the secondary subsector. The tertiary sector is dominated by trade. The country has continuously had a trade deficit. In 2024, exports of goods amounted to 14.3 billion Comoran francs (KMF), whereas imports in the same year stood at KMF 138.8 billion (BCC, 2024). In 2019, the Comoros was among the eight African countries that exported more services than goods (UNCTAD, 2022). However, exports of services plummeted in 2020 as tourism ground to a halt, largely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating the country's vulnerability to external shocks.

III. Environmental and governance-related vulnerabilities

The Comoros is highly vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change. Environmental disasters and export concentration are the main reasons why the country falls short on the third criterion for LDC graduation: economic and environmental vulnerability. The World Bank's 2005 *Natural Disaster Hotspots* report (Dilley et al., 2005) found that almost 60 per cent of the territory of the Comoros was at risk of natural disasters and that 54.2 per cent of the population lived in areas at risk. This high environmental vulnerability affects the agricultural sector and is, in itself, an impediment to the socioeconomic development of the Comoros. Statistics from General Directorate of Civil Security of the Comoros show that more than 60 per cent of food crops and more than 30 per cent of cash crops were destroyed by Tropical Cyclone Kenneth in 2019. The Government estimated the total cost of the damage caused by the cyclone at more than $185 million.

The Comoros is currently ranked among those African States spared by armed conflict, with a prevailing climate of peace. However, the country has not been spared by political violence. In

view of its strategically important location on shipping routes, the Comoros is also prone to seaborne threats such as piracy, drug trafficking and migrant smuggling.

In 2017, 15 international partners, including seven bilateral, were listed in the Development Assistance Database for the Comoros and in its Public Investment Programme. Although the Comoros benefits greatly from its partners, budget vulnerability remains a pressing concern, and development partners make a substantial contribution to the State budget.

To address these vulnerabilities, the Comoros will need to build productive capacities in order to reduce its dependence on the outside world, strengthen external and domestic resource mobilization capacity to finance its development with better allocation of migrant remittances, bolster its human capital, adapt to climate change, improve its national statistical system, and strengthen regional and international partnerships.


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1. Introduction

The Comoros is an archipelago located in the Indian Ocean, close to Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion and Seychelles. According to the Constitution of the Comoros, the territory of the Union of the Comoros is formed by four islands: Grande Comore *(Ngazidja)*[1], Mohéli *(Mwali)*, Anjouan *(Ndzuwani)* and Mayotte *(Maoré)*[2]. Grande Comore, by far the largest and most populous island, is home to Moroni, the country's capital. According to UNCTAD data, the Comoros had an estimated population of 867,000 in 2024, which is predominantly young, with under-20s accounting for just over 47 per cent of the population (UNCTADstat, consulted in October 2025).

The Comoros is one of the world's poorest countries. Its economy is based on subsistence agriculture and fishing. Since gaining independence on 6 July 1975, the Comoros has not experienced the same dynamic development as its neighbours, Mauritius and Seychelles. It is one of 31 countries appearing on the World Bank's list of fragile and conflict-affected States. Between 1975 and 2022, the country experienced 21 attempted military coups d'état: four were successful and two resulted in the assassination of the President.

These recurring political upheavals have weighed on the performance of the Comoran economy. One major consequence of this poor performance is the country's heavy reliance on the outside world: the Comoros depends on imports to meet domestic demand and households are increasingly reliant on diaspora remittances. According to the Central Bank of the Comoros (BCC), imported food accounts for more than 40 per cent of household consumption (BCC, 2020). This dependence leaves the country's population vulnerable and at high risk of food insecurity: the National Institute of Statistics and Economic and Demographic Studies (INSEED) scores the rate of food insecurity at 0.34, on a scale from 0 (terrible) to 1 (excellent) (INSEED, 2020).

This report presents the vulnerability profile of the Comoros, as mandated in paragraph 3 (b) of United Nations General Assembly resolution 59/209 of 20 December 2004, which states as follows: "*After a country has met the criteria for [LDC] graduation for the first time, the Secretary-General of the United Nations will invite the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to prepare a vulnerability profile on the identified country, as described in paragraph 3 (a)*[3] *above, to be taken into account by the Committee for Development Policy at its subsequent triennial review.*" The report is intended to be used as a reference document for the deliberations of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) on the preparedness of the Comoros for graduation from the LDC category.

[1] Ngazidja, Mwali, Ndzuwani and Maoré are the local names of the four islands according to the Constitution of the Comoros.

[2] The island of Mayotte, with an area of 375 km², is administered by France. The Union of Comoros exercises sovereignty over the other three islands. For the purpose of this study, statistics on the Comoros refer to the islands of Grande Comore, Mohéli and Anjouan.

[3] Paragraph 3 (a) states as follows: "When the Committee for Development Policy, in its triennial review of the list of least developed countries, identifies a country that meets the criteria for graduation for the first time, it will submit its findings to the Economic and Social Council."

At its 2021 triennial review, the CDP appraised the Comoros as pre-eligible for graduation from the LDC category on the basis that, at the time of the assessment, it met two of the three graduation criteria: income and human assets. The country's human assets index (HAI) score was 67.2, versus a graduation threshold of 66. On the same occasion, its GNI per capita stood at $1,369, which was above the graduation threshold of $1,222. However, it fell well short on the third criterion: economic and environmental vulnerability. Here, the graduation threshold is an Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index (EVI) score of 32. Although the Comoros is less vulnerable than the average for countries in the category (37.7 versus an LDC average of 39.1), its score remains well above the threshold. At the 2024 triennial review, the Comoros again met the income and human assets criteria, while not meeting the economic and environmental vulnerability criterion. However, the CDP deferred the decision on a possible recommendation for the graduation of the Comoros to the 2027 triennial review, due to the country's continued high vulnerability to external economic and environmental shocks.

Graduation would imply the Comoros losing preferential treatment – a package of international support for LDCs focusing in particular on market access, technical assistance and access to technological assistance, as well as special treatment by the United Nations in certain areas. The World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB) allocate credit at preferential conditions according to countries' income. However, even at higher income levels, the Comoros may continue to benefit from treatment from the International Development Association and the World Bank as a "small State". It can also access the African Development Fund, operated by the AfDB, in its capacity as a fragile and conflict-affected State.

This report analyses a series of key indicators on the performance of the Comoros with respect to LDC graduation, within the wider context of the country's structural transformation and its persistent vulnerabilities. This contextualized analysis aims to go beyond a basic assessment of the performance of the Comoros against LDC graduation criteria and to focus more specifically on the long-term transformation process by examining growth indicators, productive capacities and selected sectoral indicators.

This *vulnerability profile* is especially timely: the Comoros joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in August 2024, and, in February 2023, deposited its instrument of ratification for membership of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and the Government has recently unveiled its ambitious Emerging Comoros Plan (ECP) for 2030.

This report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 presents an economic situation analysis, focusing on macroeconomic trends, structural changes in the country's economy, migrant remittances and FDI. It also examines the effects of external shocks the COVID-19 crisis and the war in Ukraine. Chapter 3 addresses areas of vulnerability. The analysis is framed by five indicators: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnerships. Chapter 4 examines development issues and priorities, the trade environment and regional trade integration. Chapter 5 focuses on resilience-building, while general policy recommendations for strategic considerations for graduation with momentum are provided in Chapter 6.



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2. Economic situation analysis

Since gaining independence in 1975, the Comoros has struggled to maintain economic stability, experiencing growth cycles of differing natures. Although the archipelago has lived through multiple political crises affecting its economy, it has been spared from continuous political violence in recent times. However, its economy is reeling from the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Kenneth in 2019, the COVID-19-induced shutdown of activity in 2020–2021, and persistent inflationary pressures caused by the war in Ukraine. This chapter examines the economic situation in the country, structural changes in its economy and the economic impact of external shocks.

2.1. Macroeconomic trends and productive structure of the economy

2.1.1. Macroeconomic trends

The Comoros experienced negative rates of economic growth in some years during the 1990s. The decline in GDP per capita during this period has been attributed to the debt crisis and to difficulties implementing the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank's structural adjustment programme (SAP), with the socioeconomic and political instability caused by this programme believed to have had an adverse impact on economic growth.

Figure 1 shows that real GDP, expressed in constant 2015 dollars, rose from $453 million in 1990 to $1,323 million in 2024. The growth has not been consistent, however, with real GDP dipping temporarily in some years then immediately rising again. The evidence suggests that this upward trend is attributable largely to population growth,[4] given that the population of the Comoros almost doubled from 445,000 in 1990 to 867,000 in 2024.

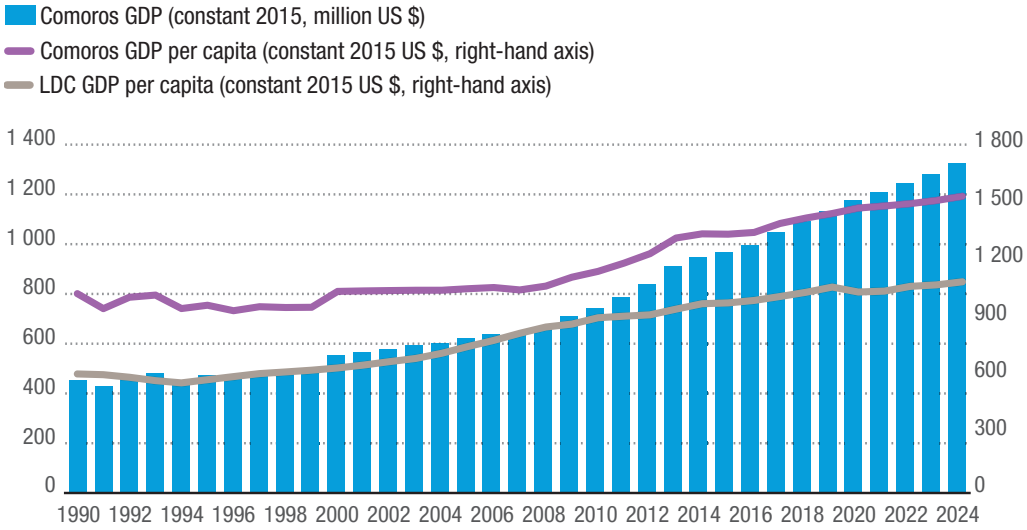
After remaining largely unchanged in the first decade of the 21st century, GDP per capita increased substantially until 2019. However, this growth slowed down during the COVID-19 pandemic. Weak public and private investment in recent decades appears to be the main reason behind this poor economic performance. Total investment accounted for 16.1 per cent of GDP between 2011 and 2017, compared with an Africa-wide average of 23.1 per cent (World Bank, 2019).

Public investment is constrained by low government revenues, the majority of which is spent on civil servants' salaries: payments to government employees account, on average, for 25 per cent of the total government budget and more than 52 per cent of domestic revenue. An analysis of the 2020, 2021 and 2022 Finance Acts shows that the lion's share (80 per cent) of public investment expenditure is financed by development partners. Private investment, meanwhile, is further constrained by an unattractive business environment, weak capacity to mobilize national savings[5] and unpredictable government policies that sap the confidence of private investors.

[4] The annual population growth rate in the Comoros has slowed from 2.44 per cent in 1991 to 1.89 in 2024 (UNCTADstat).

[5] FDI in the Comoros amounted to 0.9 per cent of GDP between 2011 and 2017, compared with an average of 5.4 per cent across sub-Saharan Africa. In the same period, gross national savings represented an average of 4 per cent of GDP, well below the averages for both sub-Saharan Africa (13.6 per cent) and fragile States (11.2 per cent) (World Bank, 2019).

Figure 1
The Comoros and least developed countries: Real gross domestic product and real gross domestic product per capita, 1990–2024



Source: UNCTAD calculations based on data from World Bank, World Development Indicators database (accessed October 2025).

These weaknesses related to investment, which is the main driver of economic growth, are compounded by other structural bottlenecks that undermine total factor productivity, including a narrow productive base, limited human capital, inadequate air, land and sea transport infrastructure, and the prohibitive cost of electricity, telecommunications and other infrastructure services. According to World Bank estimates, total factor productivity growth was flat between 2000 and 2017 and negative before then (World Bank, 2019).

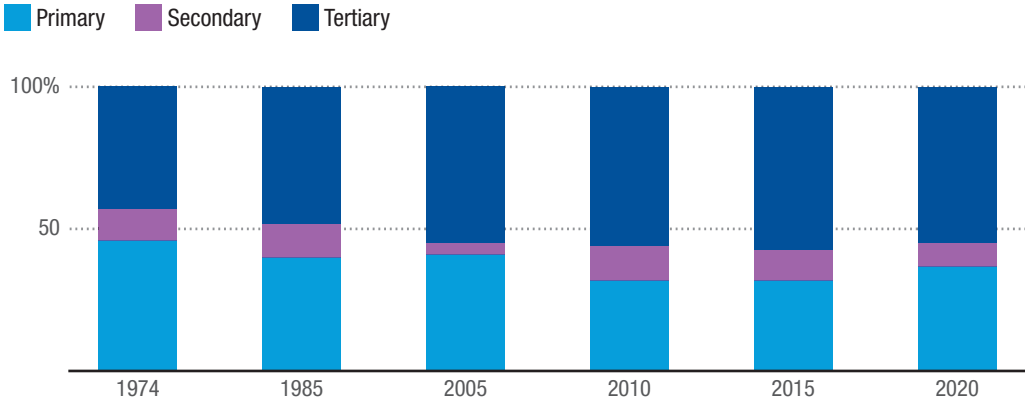
Between 1990 and 2024, real GDP per capita in the Comoros was consistently higher than the LDC average. However, real GDP per capita grew much more slowly in the Comoros than across LDCs as a whole. Real GDP per capita growth was also much slower in the Comoros than in the neighbouring small island developing States (Mauritius and Seychelles), as well as in other small island States such as Cabo Verde. One reason for this stagnation of GDP is the country's very low level of industrialization, with the secondary sector making only a negligible contribution. The primary and tertiary sectors, which together account for about 90 per cent of output, are largely unstructured and unmodernized, further weakening the economy.

2.1.2. Productive structure of the economy

The economy of the Comoros is little diversified, heavily reliant on the outside world and dominated by the informal sector, which accounts for more than 60 per cent of GDP. Moreover, it is dependent on a non-mechanized, low-yield primary sector and on a tertiary sector that is struggling to develop.

Data on the productive structure of the Comoran economy show that, in 1974, agriculture represented 46 per cent of GDP (figure 2), while services and industry accounted for 43 per cent and 11 per cent respectively. Despite various revitalization and diversification initiatives taken by the authorities in the 50 years since independence, the productive structure of the economy remains largely as it was under colonial rule. As of 2020, the economy was still heavily reliant on the primary and tertiary sectors, which together accounted for more than 91 per cent of GDP, while the contribution of industry was negligible, at just 8.4 per cent.

Figure 2
Composition of the gross domestic product, 1974–2020
(Percentage)

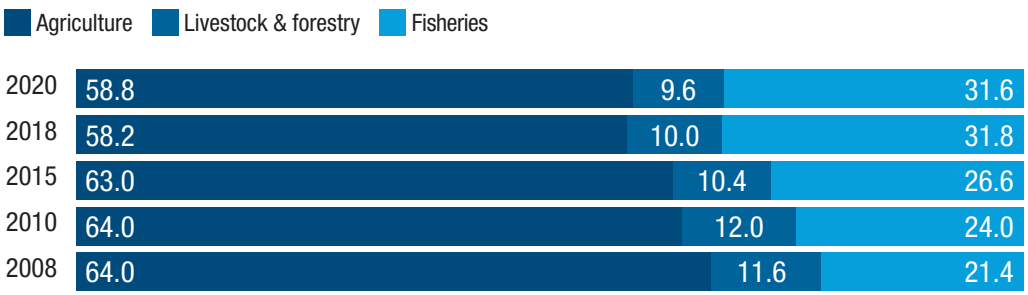


Source: INSEED (2020).

Between 2008 and 2020, the primary sector represented 35.4 per cent of GDP on average, significantly higher than the average for sub-Saharan Africa over the same period (23.7 per cent). Also in 2020, agriculture accounted for the majority of primary sector output, at 62 per cent (figure 3). Food crops such as banana, taro, cassava and sweet potato make up a large share of agricultural production. These crops are typically grown on small family-owned plots and for household consumption. By contrast, commercial agriculture is dominated by three cash crops – cloves, vanilla and ylang ylang – which are grown for export and, together, have accounted for the bulk of Comoran exports in the past two decades.

Despite being identified as a key growth sector in the ECP, fisheries still account for a relatively small share of primary-sector GDP (27 per cent). According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), about 8,500 people are employed directly or indirectly in the subsector, which is largely unmodernized and dominated by small-scale fisheries (UNECA, 2022). The Comoros has 160,000 km² of sea area yet is a net importer of fish and fishing products. According to the National Directorate of Agricultural and Livestock Strategies, local production is estimated at 16,000 tons per year, whereas the country's fishing grounds have an estimated potential yield of 33,000 tons per year (DNSAE 2022). With domestic production struggling to meet local demand, the Comoros imports more than 200 tons of fish and fishing products a year on average, which contributes to food insecurity and further deepens the country's trade deficit.

Figure 3
Composition of the primary sector, 2008-2020
(Percentage)



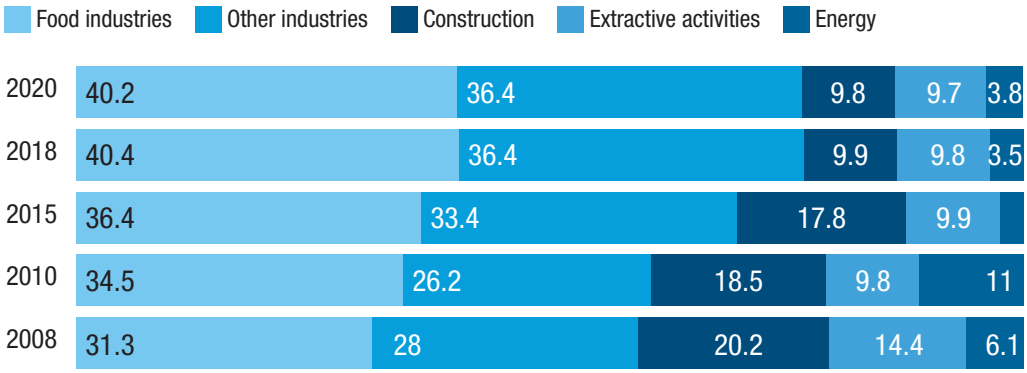
Source: INSEED (2020).

The livestock subsector, meanwhile, represents 11 per cent of agricultural GDP on average. Given the use of outdated rearing practices, coupled with extremely limited output, the Comoros is forced rely on imported red meat to meet 80 per cent of domestic demand. The majority of Comoran livestock farmers rear goats (71 per cent), followed by cattle (21 per cent) and sheep (8 per cent). Poultry rearing remains marginal despite various initiatives by the authorities to boost production. As a result, the estimates from National Directorate of Agricultural and Livestock Strategies that almost all domestic demand for chicken meat (99 per cent) is met by imports (DNSAE, 2022).

The secondary sector, meanwhile, is little developed. On average, it accounted for 10.7 per cent of GDP between 2008 and 2020, while its contribution to growth between 2015 and 2020 was an estimated 0.1 per cent. The sector mainly comprises small and medium-sized enterprises engaged in food processing activities.

Between 2008 and 2020, the largest subsector was the food industry,, which accounted for at least 36.6 per cent of secondary sector output on average. This was followed by other industry subsectors, at an average of more than 34 per cent. Construction represented 15.2 per cent of secondary sector GDP over the period, while the extractive and energy subsectors made smaller contributions, at 10.7 per cent and 5.2 per cent respectively (figure 4).

Figure 4
Composition of the secondary sector, 2008-2020
(Percentage)

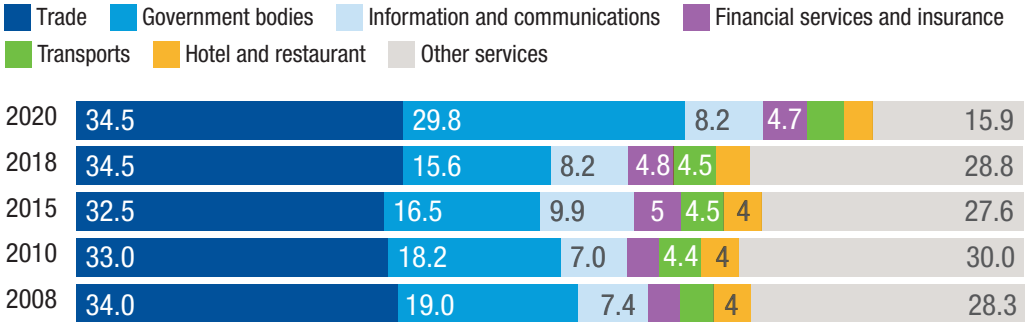


Source: INSEED (2020).

Finally, the tertiary sector accounted for more than 55 per cent of total GDP on average between 2008 and 2020. According to INSEED, average annual growth of the sector stood at 2.7 per cent between 2015 and 2020, while its contribution to growth over the same period was an estimated 1.1 per cent (INSEED, 2020). Despite being relatively more diversified than the primary and secondary sectors, the tertiary sector is dominated by trade (33.8 per cent) – especially retail trade and government bodies (19.8 per cent). The information and communications subsector represents a smaller share. Figure 5 shows the composition of the service sector.

Figure 5 also shows that two subsectors – financial services and insurance, and transport – are poorly developed, accounting for 4.3 per cent and 4.1 per cent of the tertiary sector, respectively. Tourism, although identified as a key growth sector in the ECP, is struggling to develop and its contribution to tertiary sector GDP remains marginal.

Figure 5
Composition of the tertiary sector, 2008-2020
(Percentage)



Source: INSEED (2020).

2.1.3. Productive capacities

Knowing a country's productive capacities is essential to intervene to accelerate its sustainable economic development. Several studies have shown that the sustainability of a country's economic growth is largely determined by its productive capacities. These capacities are involved all along the supply chain and include the capacity to produce goods and services, to process these outputs, and to utilize them in a way that achieves the highest level of added value (UNCTAD, 2006).

The Comoros has seen a steady, gradual improvement in its Productive Capacities Index (PCI) over time, scoring above the median for Africa and LDCs between 2000 and 2022. Despite this, the PCI of the Comoros ranked 148th out of 194 economies included in the dataset in 2022, suggesting a need for improvement across all PCI dimensions and indicators in order for the country to strengthen its productive capacities and boost its competitiveness. The main factors constraining the productive capacities of the Comoros relate to information and communication technology, and structural change, with the country achieving low scores across these components. Conversely, the Comoros achieved a relatively high score for the private sector component in 2022.[6]

2.2. Migrant remittances and foreign direct investment

Chronic political instability has left state institutions weakened and discredited, creating a business environment that is not conducive to investment. The Comoros, is struggling to reassure investors and, consequently, to attract the structural investments needed to put the country on the path to development. Despite government-led initiatives to shape a healthier business environment, FDI remains low: annual inflows averaged just $4.7 million between 2014 and 2024, which compares unfavourably with the figures for Mauritius ($446.3 million) and Seychelles ($175.3 million) over the same period.[7]

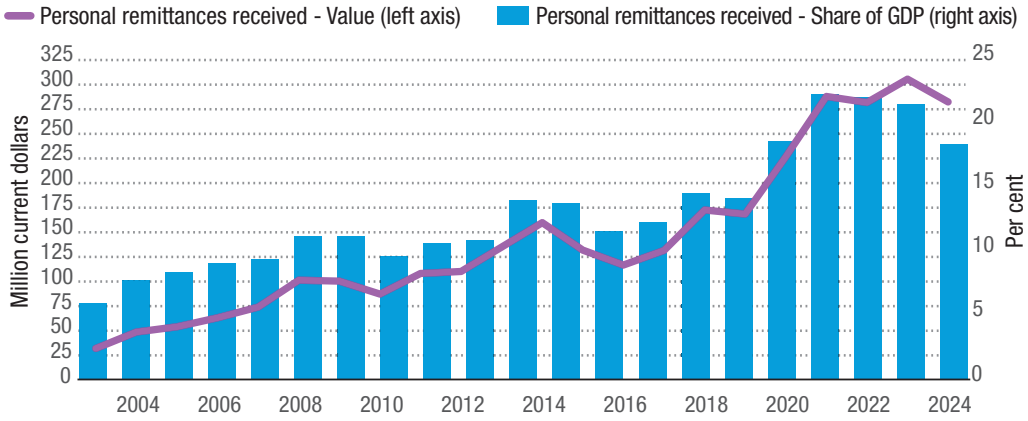
This unattractive business environment, coupled with weak capacity to mobilize domestic resources, both public[8] and private, has compromised the country's performance, resulting in poor private sector development and, consequently, the creation of few decent jobs. This challenging economic and sociopolitical

6 UNCTAD, UNCTADstat database.
7 UNCTAD, UNCTADstat database.
8 According to the World Bank's *Systematic Country Diagnostic* (2020), national savings rates in the Comoros stand at an estimated 5.9 per cent of GDP, half the average for sub-Saharan Africa. The tax burden averaged an estimated 7 per cent between 2000 and 2017.

climate, characterized by political instability, uncontrolled population growth and weak economic growth, has prompted many young Comorans to emigrate, perpetuating a long-standing national tradition.

According to estimates by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank, the AfDB and other international institutions, there were between 150,000 and 200,000 Comorans living in metropolitan France in the 2000s. These migrants, who retain a strong attachment to their country of origin, transfer a large part of their income back home. Migrant remittances have been rising sharply since the turn of the millennium (figure 6). Inflows to the Comoros jumped from $32 million in 2003 to $282 million in 2024. These remittances also increased as a share of GDP over the same period, from 6 per cent in 2003 to 18 per cent in 2024.[9]

Figure 6
Migrant remittances, 2003-2020

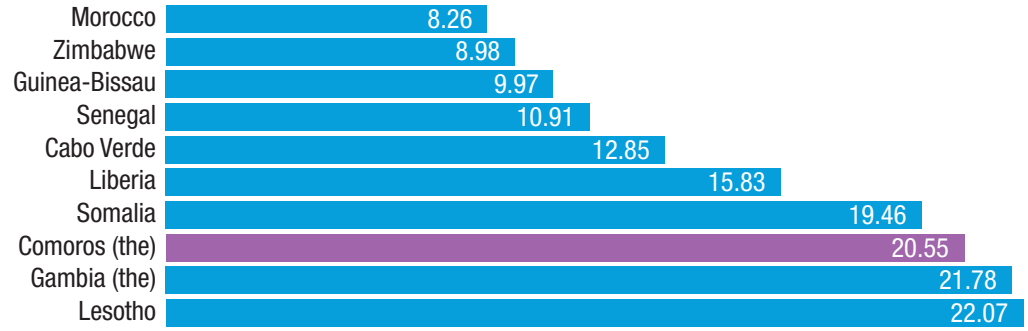


Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations based on data from World Bank, World Development Indicators database (accessed October 2025).

As a result of this high contribution, the Comoros is more dependent than most other countries on migrant remittances, which are the main source of foreign currency inflows, far exceeding inflows from FDI and official development assistance.

According to the 2014 National Survey of Employment, the Informal Sector and Household Consumption in the Comoros (EESIC), 40 per cent of Comoran households receive diaspora remittances.

Figure 7
Personal remittances received by the top ten African recipient countries
(Percentage of GDP, 2022–2024 average)



Source: UNCTAD calculations based on data from World Bank, World Development Indicators database (accessed September 2025).

[9] According to the BCC, the figures for these migrant remittances are much higher, both in absolute terms and as a share of GDP. The data indicate that remittance inflows increased from KMF 23.6 billion in 2004 to KMF 40.5 billion in 2010 and to KMF 106.2 billion in 2020, while on average, between 2004 and 2020, these remittances equated to 20.6 per cent of GDP.

In 2022–2024, the Comoros ranked 13th[10] globally in terms of the contribution of remittances to GDP. By the same metric, it ranked third in Africa, behind Lesotho and the Gambia and ahead of Somalia, Liberia, Cabo Verde and Senegal.

Although INSEED surveys show that these inflows make a major contribution to poverty reduction, they are largely used to fund the organization and hosting of lavish customary weddings, namely *grands mariages* (box 1).

Box 1
Grands mariages: the lavish customary wedding

The lavish customary weddings, known as *grands mariages* or *anda*, are a social obligation in the Comoros, especially on the island of Grande Comore. A man who hosts a *grand mariage* – an elaborate and protracted process – is thereafter considered a *grand notable*, or a person of high standing. This status confers numerous social and financial benefits, including the right to speak in public and, therefore, to play a part in local decision-making, as well as entitlement to a lifelong customary income. Anyone who has not hosted a *grand mariage*, regardless of age, education or professional status, is only permitted to speak in public with the permission of the *grands-mariés*, i.e. those who have hosted such a wedding. The hosting of these customary weddings also determines each family's social standing within the village community: the more *grands-mariés* there are within a clan, the greater its power within the community. Families seek to outdo each other in terms of how much they spend on their children's *grand mariages*, since prestige and social status are derived from spending more than the previous *grand-marié*.

Currently, a *grand mariage* costs between €20,000 and €100,000, although the exact cost varies by location and individual. The weddings are funded via a system of donations and counter-donations from family members and friends, varying between €300 and €2,000 in value. These contributions are viewed as savings that the donors hope to recover when the time comes for their own *grand mariage*.

Although these lavish celebrations help to stimulate household consumption, they have an impact on the proper functioning of government bodies. During the *grands mariages* season, public-sector organizations all but shut down as many civil servants are absent from work and others leave the office before the end of the normal working day. Moreover, *grands mariages* do not contribute enough to economic and sustainable development: the overwhelming majority of the associated spending goes on imports and final consumption, with investments making up only a tiny proportion of this expenditure.

Despite the challenging economic environment, characterized by a low level of development and rapid population growth, the Comoros was classified in 2024 as a lower-middle-income country (GNI per capita of $1,690 in 2024, Atlas method). According to the World Bank,[11] this economic paradox is to a large degree explained by the ever-increasing weight of migrant remittances (World Bank, 2019).

2.3. Economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis

Since the end of 2019, the global news headlines have been dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a major public health crisis affecting the entire world, with adverse repercussions for the global economy. The Comoros was spared the worst of the pandemic.[12] However, the restrictions imposed by the Government to contain the

[10] Among countries with data available in World Bank, World Development Indicators database.

[11] *Towards a More United & Prosperous Union of Comoros: Systematic Country Diagnostic*.

[12] The Comoros has experienced two waves of infections since reporting its first case of COVID-19 in April 2020. As of November 2025, the country had recorded 9,109 cases and 160 deaths.

spread of the disease put the brakes on the country's economy, stalling the growth recorded in three preceding years.[13]

The Comoran economy, which is heavily dependent on the outside world and faces a series of natural and structural vulnerabilities, was impacted, through various channels, by multiple shocks that simultaneously and negatively affected both supply and overall demand.

On the supply side, economic activity was affected by the curfew imposed on workers, which saw productive activity contract, as well as by the closure of the borders and the disruption of value and supply chains. These factors led to weak economic growth, estimated at 0.2 per cent in 2020 (BCC, 2020). Although this economic growth rate was above the Africa-wide average of -2 per cent, it was well below both the official forecast of 4.4 per cent and the average population growth rate of about 2.2 per cent.

At the same time, household income was impacted by a number of factors, including the disruption of foreign trade, redundancies linked to the contraction of productive activities (especially in the hospitality and travel industries), and a reduction in working hours across the Comoran workforce, the vast majority of whom work in the informal sector.[14] As a result, household final consumption expenditure decreased despite the mitigating impact of financial inflows from the diaspora (box 2). It is also worth noting the likely effects of this drop in household consumption in terms of both increasing poverty and widening inequalities, especially given that these remittance inflows are unevenly distributed in favour of the island of Grande Comore, which is the origin of 95 per cent of the Comoran diaspora.

Box 2
The paradoxical rise in remittance inflows to the Comoros in 2020 during the COVID-19 crisis

Despite almost all international organizations, the World Bank included, predicting a decline in remittances from migrants to their countries of origin, monthly data produced by the BCC confounded this prediction, showing that remittance inflows jumped from 80.2 billion Comoran francs (KMF) in 2019 to KMF 106.2 billion in 2020 – an increase of 32.5 per cent (BCC, 2019, 2020).

This unexpected rise is likely attributable to the following factors:

i) There was a groundswell of solidarity among migrants perceived as having the strongest attachment to their family, who wanted to support their relatives and friends back home through the crisis. In most cases, migration from the Comoros is organized through the extended family, with attachment to the family unit being one of the main selection criteria. In other words, the most altruistic family member is the one who emigrates.

ii) The closure of the borders forced migrants to send remittances via formal, rather than informal channels, which allowed the BCC to better account for these inflows.

iii) The suspension of *grands mariages*, largely funded by the diaspora, meant that families no longer had to spend remittances on hosting these customary weddings and could instead use the funds to navigate through the crisis. In the run-up to these weddings, Comorans living in France make several trips to China, Türkiye or Persian Gulf States to buy gold and other items for the ceremony. In 2020, however, migrants were able to send a large portion of the money they would have spent on these purchases back to the Comoros in the form of remittances.

[13] Between 2017 and 2019, the average annual growth rate was estimated at 3.3 per cent.

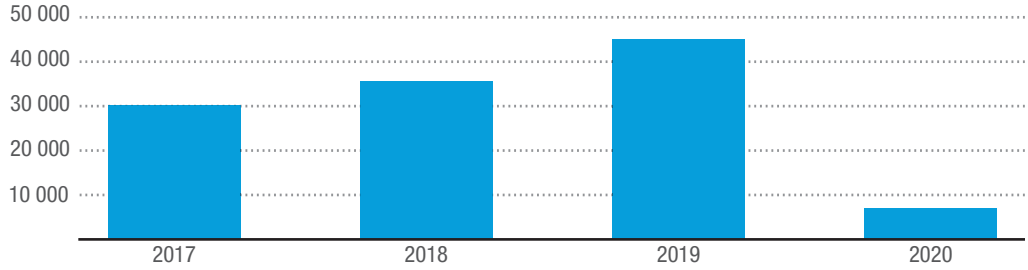
[14] According to the EESIC, 75 per cent of all jobs are in the informal sector.

Although the crisis affected almost all parts of the Comoran economy, INSEED research indicates that those sectors most heavily dependent on the outside world were hit hardest, especially trade, tourism and hospitality, and transport.

With customary weddings suspended and, more importantly, the borders closed, members of the diaspora cancelled their holiday plans. The associated reduction in household demand put a strain on retail traders, who rely on the season of traditional festivities for a large part of their turnover. According to a survey, more than 79 per cent of business saw a significant dip in turnover – an estimated 37 per cent relative to 2019 (INSEED and World Bank, 2021). Consequently, most of these businesses struggled to keep up their repayments to banks, which had knock-on effects in the banking sector: according to the Central Bank of the Comoros (BCC) estimates, the ratio of bad debts surpassed 20 per cent (BCC, 2020). Faced with this situation, the government and the BCC were forced to step in[15] to try to cushion the impact of the crisis on the banking sector.

Although the contribution of tourism to GDP remains marginal, averaging 3 per cent over the past 20 years, it is identified as a key growth driver in the ECP and offers numerous development opportunities for the Comoros. However, the restrictions introduced to contain the spread of COVID-19 had cascading negative effects on this potentially profitable sector. As figure 8 below shows, the number of visitors to the Comoros[16] fell from 45,077 in 2019 to 6,959 in 2020. This sharp decline in visitor numbers posed an immense challenge to the hospitality and travel industries, which reportedly lost up to 80 per cent of their income (INSEED and World Bank, 2021).

Figure 8
Border arrivals, 2017-2020
(Number of persons)



Source: INSEED and World Bank (2021).

The pandemic also impacted agriculture, which accounted for at least 36.7 per cent of national GDP in 2020 and employed a large proportion (38 per cent) of the workforce. According to INSEED, farmers and fishermen reported losing more than 40 per cent of their income. BCC statistics also show an adverse effect on Comoran exports, which consist almost exclusively of agricultural products and fell from KMF 17.9 billion in 2019 to KMF 9.6 billion in 2020.[17]

The crisis also had negative repercussions for public finances, as the various support programmes and restrictive measures introduced by the authorities triggered

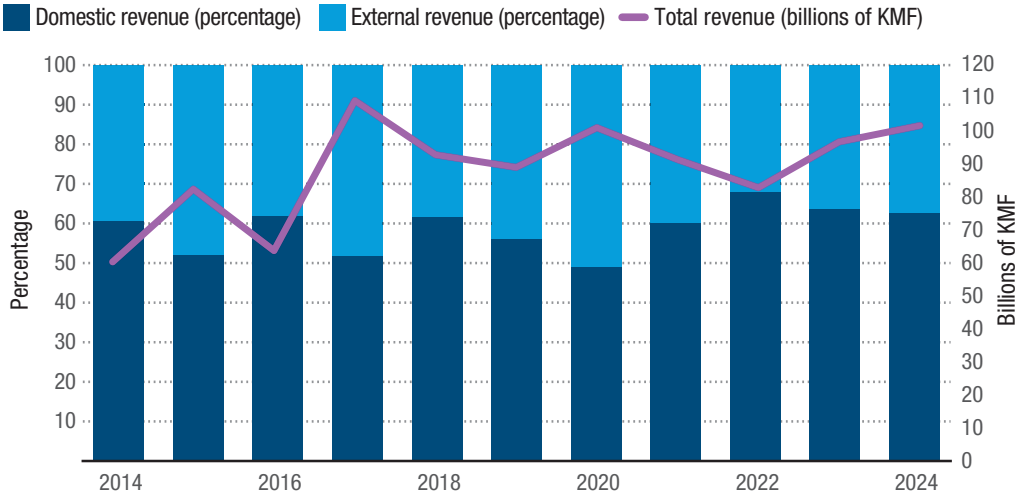
[15] A number of measures were taken, including the creation of a guarantee fund worth KMF 5 billion to support business owners, the restructuring – without charges or penalties – of bank loans to business affected by the pandemic, and the reduction of the BCC's reserve requirement from 15 per cent to 10 per cent.

[16] Some 30,733 of the 45,077 inbound tourists recorded in 2019 (68.2 per cent) were from Europe, and the vast majority of these were Comoran migrants living in France.

[17] In the 2020 vanilla growing season, more than 8 tons of vanilla sat in storage because it could not be sold on international markets. In addition, many processors and packers were unable to keep up their repayments to banks: the National Vanilla Office of the Comoros estimated these unpaid debts at more than KMF 600 million.

additional government expenditures, while at the same time constraining domestic resource mobilization capacity since the State was forced grant various tax and customs exemptions/reductions. However, during the pandemic, the State received relatively large monetary contributions that enabled it to cope with the financial imbalances caused by the public health crisis. In 2020, budget aid and partner support amounted to an estimated KMF 51.5 billion, or 51 per cent of total government expenditure (BCC, 2020). These external inflows helped to keep the budget deficit at a relatively acceptable 3.6 per cent of GDP.

Figure 9
Composition of Government revenue, 2014-2024



Source: BCC (2021, 2024).

In terms of social sectors, the crisis had a major impact on education. Many schools were closed because they were considered sites of significant transmission, keeping thousands of schoolchildren out of the classroom. According to INSEED surveys, more than 73 per cent of households reported disruptions to their children's education during the pandemic. The closures also placed financial strain on private schools which, according to estimates by the Ministry of National Education of the Comoros, are attended by at least 46.3 per cent of children in lower secondary education and 64.9 per cent of children in upper secondary education. A significant proportion of these schools (25 per cent) reported a sharp drop in the rate of tuition fee collection, which led to delays in paying staff.

The crisis left Comoran households significantly worse off. According to INSEED, more than 48 per cent of households struggled to afford food, while many had problems paying electricity and water bills (59 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively). INSEED surveys also reveal that 27 per cent of households struggled to keep up repayments on bank loans and 24 per cent were forced to postpone important medical appointments and procedures because they lacked the financial means to pay for them (72–87 per cent) or because they feared falling ill (60 per cent).

It is also worth examining the effect of the pandemic on the outcomes of the Conference of Development Partners of the Comoros (CPAD), held in Paris on 2 and 3 December 2019. The conference, which aimed to mobilize funds to finance the ECP, resulted in commitments totalling an estimated $4.3 billion, of which $1.5 billion from bilateral and multilateral partners and $2.8 billion from the private sector (Comores, 2020c). To date, there has been no empirical assessment of the impact

of the pandemic on the outcomes of the CPAD. But after hopes were set high, the results have failed to live up to expectations: the conference seems to have had little tangible impact and few of the commitments made, especially by private sector donors, have been honoured (Comores, 2020c).

When faced with uncertainty, investors tend to make trade-offs by delaying or abandoning investment projects considered more risky and less profitable. Given the prevailing global context and the unattractive business environment in the Comoros, many of the investment projects announced in Paris will be cancelled or, at best, postponed.

2.4. Economic impact of the war in Ukraine

Since February 2022, the global news headlines have been dominated by the war in Ukraine.[18] Although the Russian Federation and Ukraine are not leading economic powerhouses, they are key exporters of commodities such as energy products, grain, fertilizer and sunflower products. According to some estimates, these two countries together account for more than 25 per cent of global wheat exports and almost half of global sunflower product exports. In terms of energy, the Russian Federation alone produces more than 20 per cent of the world's gas, and before the war, accounted for at least 10.5 per cent of global oil exports. The suspension of Ukrainian exports and the sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation have therefore had an adverse impact on the global economy (UNCTAD, 2024).

Although the Comoros is heavily dependent on the outside world, its trade links with the Russian Federation and Ukraine are negligible. Neither country is among its main trading partners, and neither is a source of investment, tourists or migrant remittances. As such, the direct impact of the crisis on the Comoran economy have been very limited.

However, given its fragility and heavy dependence on the outside world, the Comoran economy could be indirectly impacted by the war in Ukraine through various channels, including soaring energy prices and the consequent rise in food and fertilizer prices.

Before the war in Ukraine, the Comoros was hit by two major shocks: Tropical Cyclone Kenneth and the COVID-19 crisis, both of which had a disruptive impact on the national economy. This new political and economic crisis is further weakening the economy and pushing up inflation, to the detriment of the Comoran population.

In response to soaring oil prices[19] caused by the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the Comoran authorities were forced to adjust fuel prices. This was done by way of an interministerial decree, signed on 31 May 2022, which fixed the prices of oil products (table 1).

Table 1
Prices of petroleum products

Product	Price per litre before May 2022 (KMF)	Price per llitre after May 2022 (KMF)	Change (per cent)
Petrol	600	750	25
Diesel fuel	450	650	44
Kerosene oil	250	350	40

Source: Comores (2022).

[18] According to estimates, the economies of the Russian Federation and Ukraine account for 2.0 per cent and 0.2 per cent of the global GDP respectively.

[19] The price of oil (Brent, per barrel) jumped from $75 in September 2021 to $116 in March 2022.

All else being equal, the rising cost of petroleum products and the disruption of supply chains have accelerated the inflationary trend that began in 2021. Food, transport, electricity and other commodity prices have soared. This steep rise in prices will hamper the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a persistent crisis likely to amplify inequalities, increase poverty and unemployment rates, exacerbate human pressure on the environment, cause the main social indicators to decline, all of which could trigger a political crisis with multifaceted impacts on the Comoran population.

Moreover, the climate of uncertainty and the inflationary pressures caused by the crisis could undermine the confidence of investors, especially those who announced their intention to invest in the Comoros at the CPAD in Paris in December 2019. The outbreak of the war in Ukraine could therefore lessen the expected economic benefits of the conference, which aimed to mobilize funds to kick-start the recovery of the Comoran economy.

Another important factor is the strength of the dollar, which gained value in the wake of the political and economic upheaval caused by the war in Ukraine. Between January and July 2022, the dollar appreciated 11 per cent against the euro to reach parity. The rapid strengthening of the dollar against the euro has resulted in the de facto depreciation of currencies pegged to the euro, including the Comoran franc. The devaluation of the Comoran franc against the dollar raised the cost of repaying the national debt, the majority (70 per cent) of which is denominated in dollars. This additional cost is further weakening public finances and preventing the Government from making the socioeconomic investments necessary for economic recovery.

Given that international trade is largely conducted in dollars, the currency's appreciation has also fuelled inflation, leaving the Comoros – one of the world's most import-dependent countries – facing soaring prices for basic goods. However, a lack of production capacity has prevented the country from boosting exports as a way to capitalize on the technical depreciation of its own currency.

The protracted crisis could, in the long run, cause a reduction in the official development assistance, which is a key income source for fragile States such as the Comoros. The future is uncertain, however, given that these contributions vary according to the prevailing economic context in donor countries, and that France, the European Union and other leading donors to the Comoros have been heavily affected by the conflict. Moreover, since 2024 total official development assistance has declined strongly (OECD, 2025).

The protracted war in Ukraine could also lead to a decline in migrant remittances. A large part of the population depends on these remittances, which are the country's main source of foreign currency inflows. The vast majority of these remittances (95 per cent) come from France, which is particularly exposed on account of its economic and trade ties trade ties to the parties involved in the conflict. A deterioration of the economic environment in France could place financial strain on members of the Comoran diaspora living there, leaving them with less money to send back to their country of origin.



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3. Areas of vulnerability

3.1. People

3.1.1. Demographics

The population of the Comoros grew rapidly between the 1950s and the 2000s, at which point the growth rate slowed, largely as a consequence of the population planning policy introduced by the authorities in the 1980s.[20] The upsurge in migration to France during this period was another contributing factor. Between 2003 and 2017, the population of the Comoros increased from 575,660 to 758,316, respectively, according to the results of the general population and housing censuses of 2003 and 2017 (Commissariat général au Plan des Comores, 2003b; INSEED, 2017), equating to an average annual growth rate of 2 per cent. By comparison, population growth averaged 2.5 per cent between 1991 and 2003.

In terms of geographical distribution, at the time of the most recent census (conducted in 2017), 50 per cent of the population lived on Grande Comore, with the islands of Anjouan and Mohéli accounting for 43.2 per cent and 6.8 per cent of the population, respectively. Data from the same census showed that men outnumbered women, with a sex ratio of 101.4 men per 100 women (INSEED, 2017).

The main vulnerabilities stemming from the demographics of the Comoros are twofold: its extremely young population and patterns of rural-urban migration.

According to the 2017 census, almost half of Comorans were under 20 years of age (49.4 per cent), with over-65s accounting for an estimated 5.43 per cent of the population (INSEED, 2017). The youthful profile of the Comoran population could be attributed to a combination of two factors: a high birth rate[21] and a relatively low life expectancy at birth.[22] There was also a further acceleration in rural-urban migration between 2003 and 2017, which saw the urban population increase from 28 per cent to 40 per cent of the total population over the period (Commissariat général au Plan des Comores, 2003b; INSEED, 2017).

3.1.2. Poverty trends

This rapidly expanding population, coupled with weak economic growth in recent decades, has prevented the authorities from effectively tackling poverty, which remains a persistent scourge characterized by an erratic trend pattern. According to the Harmonized Survey on Household Living Standards (EHCVM), and based on the national poverty line,[23] the proportion of people living in poverty fell from 45 per cent in 2004 to 42 per cent in 2014, only to increase again to 44.8 per cent in 2020 (Direction de la Statistique, 2004; INSEED 2014, 2020). As of 2020, at least 339,726 Comorans (44.8 per cent of the population) lived below the national poverty line, while 12.33 per cent lived in extreme poverty and struggled to meet their basic nutritional needs (estimated at 2,400 kcal per day) (INSEED, 2020).

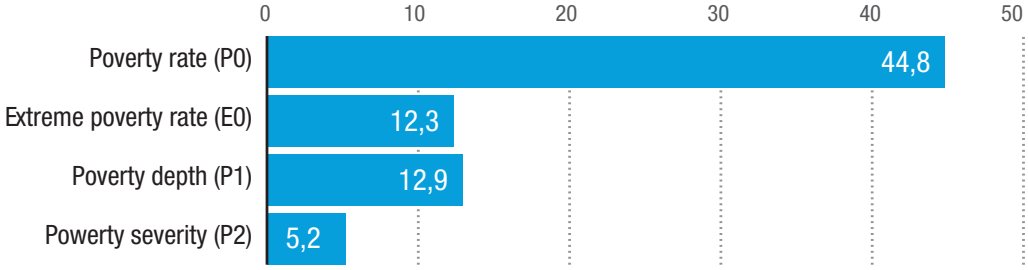
[20] The awareness-raising campaign accompanying the planning policy talked about "spacing" rather than "limiting" births in order to gain the support of religious authorities and conservative sections of Comoran society.

[21] The infant mortality rate (deaths in the first year of life) dropped sharply between 1980 and 2003, from 121 to 79 deaths per 1,000 live births.

[22] Life expectancy at birth was 68.4 years in 2017 – higher than the Africa-wide average (49 years) but lower than the average for other continents.

[23] The poverty line, which is set according to the cost of basic needs, is KMF 55,493 per person per month.

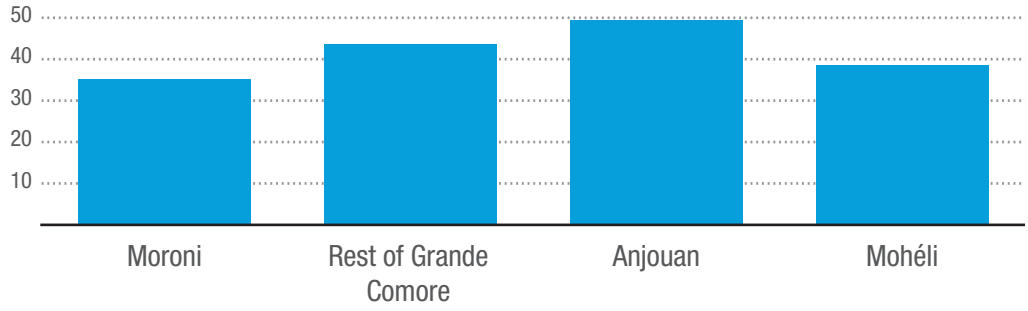
Figure 10
Incidence of poverty and extreme poverty, 2020
(Percentage of the population)



Source: INSEED (2020).

The EHCVM also reveals that poverty is unevenly distributed across space, with significantly higher rates in rural areas (50.3 per cent) and on the island of Anjouan (49.4 per cent) than in urban areas (32.8 per cent), in Moroni (35.2 per cent) and on the island of Mohéli (38.4 per cent).

Figure 11
Incidence of poverty in Moroni, the rest of Grande Comore, Anjouan and Mohéli
(Percentage of the population)



Source: INSEED (2020).

The wide gap in living standards between the islands is largely attributable to migrant remittance inflows, which are unevenly distributed in favour of Grande Comore. According to the 2020 EHCVM, poverty tends to affect people living in large families (of more than 10 people), those with a low level of educational attainment and working primarily in agriculture, and those not in receipt of remittances (INSEED, 2020).

Inequality in per-capita consumption has fallen sharply in the past three decades. The Gini coefficient, which meaures inequality, fell from 0.55 in 2004 to 0.45 in 2014, and again to 0.33 in 2020 (INSEED, 2020). Disparities in annual per-capita consumption are most pronounced on the island of Anjouan (0.342), in urban areas (0.34) and in Moroni (0.338). By contrast, the gap is narrower on the island of Mohéli (0.27) and on the rest of Grande Comore (0.318).

According to UNDP estimates (2025), the composite Multidimensional Poverty Index value for the Comoros was 0.084 between 2012 and 2023. Again, according to UNDP (2025), between 2012 and 2023, some 5.7 per cent of Comorans lived in severe multidimensional poverty and 19.4 per cent of the population was highly vulnerable to multidimensional poverty. Deprivations in the standard of living contributed 42.9 per cent to multidimensional poverty in the Comoros, with education- and health-related deprivations making contributions of 34.4 per cent and 22.7 per cent, respectively (UNDP, 2025).

Table 2
Measures of multidimensional poverty in the Comoros

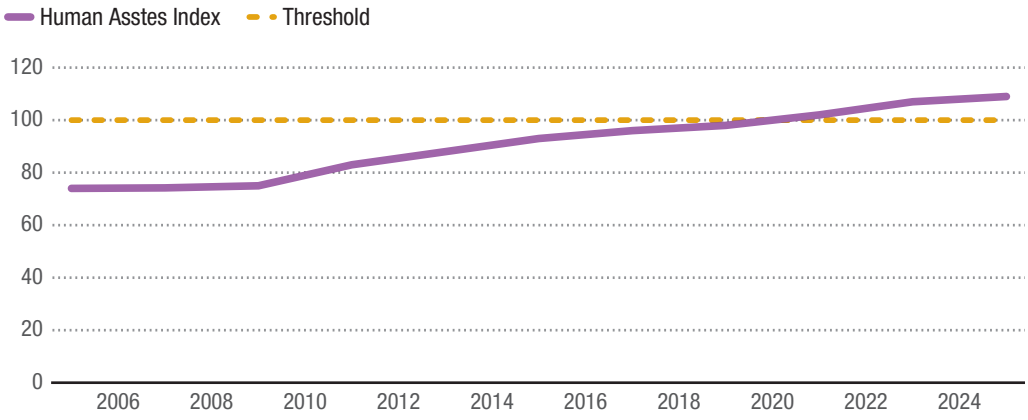
Measures of multidimensional poverty	Index value (2012–2023)	**0.084**
	Multidimensional poverty rate (2012–2023)	**19.2**
	Number of people living in poverty (2022)	**160,000**
	Severe poverty rate (2012–2023)	**5.7**
	Share of the population vulnerable to severe poverty (2012–2023)	**19.4**
Contribution to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (2008–2019)	Health	**22.7**
	Education	**34.4**
	Standard of living	**42.9**

Source: UNDP (2025).

3.1.3. Human Assets Index and Human Development Index

Increased investment in human capital is considered to be beneficial not only in helping to reduce poverty, but also in stimulating growth. Various macroeconomic studies have established a strong positive correlation between economic growth and human capital (Schulz, 1961; Becker, 1964; Lucas, 1988; Barro, 1991; Mankiw, Romer and Weil, 1992). Based on a study of 157 countries, Collin and Weil (2018) showed that investment in human capital has a much greater influence on growth than investment in physical capital.

Figure 12
Human Assets Index and graduation threshold, 2005–2025
(Percentage of graduation threshold)



Source: UNCTAD calculation based on data from the Committee for Development Policy secretariat (available at https://policy.desa.un.org/themes/least-developed-countries-category/ldc-data) (accessed October 2025).

The Human Assets Index is a composite measure that captures the contribution of education and health to human capital development. In 2005, the human assets index score of the Comoros was 26 per cent below the LDC graduation threshold. However, as figure 13 shows, steady progress has been observed since 2006: the country reached 97 per cent of the graduation threshold level in 2018, which it surpassed (102 per cent) in 2020. In 2025, the country's score was 9 percent above the graduation threshold.

The following section examines the indicators underpinning this improvement in the country's human assets index score, namely the maternal mortality ratio, the under-five mortality rate, the prevalence of stunting, the gross secondary school enrolment ratio, the adult literacy

rate and the gender parity index for gross secondary school enrolment.

According to the UNDP *Human Development Report 2025*, the Comoros ranks in the "medium human development" category (UNDP, 2025). In 2023, the country's Human Development Index (HDI) score – a composite index comprising life expectancy at birth, years of schooling and GNI per capita – was 0.603, with a lower value among women than among men. Despite a steady increase in this score since the index was first calculated (0.465 in 2000 to 0.558 in 2021), the Comoros has slipped four places down the ranking since 2014 (PNUD, 2022). In 2023, the Comoros ranked 152nd out of 193 countries by the HDI, ahead of its neighbour Madagascar, which ranked 183rd (UNDP, 2025). However, the Comoros lags well behind its other neighbours: Seychelles, 54th place and Mauritius, 73rd, fell within the "very high human development" group. In Africa, the Comoros ranked 21st out of 55 countries (UNDP, 2025).

3.1.4. Health

Despite persistent challenges, the Comoros has made great strides on the health front in recent decades, with significant improvements across almost all health-related indicators (the maternal mortality ratio, the under-five mortality rate and the prevalence of stunting). As a result, life expectancy at birth has risen sharply, from 54 years in 1980 to 65.5 years in 2003, and to 68.4 years in 2017 (INSEED, 2017).

On the issue of maternal health, available data show a steep fall in the maternal mortality ratio over the past two decades. According to data from the Demographic and Health Survey/Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (DHS/MICS) series, the rate fell from 517 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1996 to 172 in 2012 (Mondoha et al., 1997; DGSP/Comores and ICF International, 2014). In 2018, the rate was 142 deaths per 100,000 live births.[24] These encouraging results can be attributed to a number of factors, including high attendance at prenatal consultations by pregnant women (92 per cent), the resulting rise in the share of births taking place in hospitals (75 per cent), and the introduction of support and awareness-raising policies for pregnant women, as well as training programmes for health-care personnel. This sharp decline in the maternal mortality ratio could also be linked to the decrease in the total fertility rate which, as a consequence of population planning policies introduced in the 1980s, fell from 6 children per woman in 1991 to 4.18 children per woman in 2017 (UNDP, 2001; INSEED, 2017). Although the Comoros has made strides on maternal health, further progress is needed if the country is to achieve target 3.1 of Sustainable Development Goal 3, which aims to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030.

It is also important to stress that improved maternal health is a key determinant of child survival. As such, the neonatal and under-five mortality rates have also tracked downwards in recent years. The under-five mortality rate, expressed in deaths per 1,000 live births, fell from 86 in 2003 to 40 in 2015. Meanwhile, the neonatal mortality rate, expressed in the same way, fell from 23 in 2015 to 12 in 2019 (Comores, 2020b). These somewhat encouraging figures can largely be explained by improved socioeconomic conditions and the widespread availability of preventive care and treatment for the leading causes of child mortality. Other determining factors include the education and empowerment of Comoran women.

The prevalence of stunting is another key indicator of the general health status of the population. Child and adolescent malnutrition remains a major barrier to building a healthy, economically productive population. According to the 2012 DHS/MICS, 43 per cent of infant and child deaths were linked to malnutrition, with severe malnutrition a factor in 9 per cent of cases (DGSP/Comores and ICF International,

[24] Data for 2018 are provided by the Department of Family Health of the Comoros.

2014). Successive governments have sought to tackle the problem of malnutrition in order to reduce the infant mortality rate. These efforts have produced relatively encouraging results in recent years: available data show that the prevalence of stunting in children under 5 years of age fell from 40 per cent in 1996 to 31.1 per cent in 2012 (World Bank, 2019). An in-depth analysis of the survey findings reveals that stunting first and foremost affects children from households facing multiple forms of deprivation, especially poverty and low maternal education.

Although the Government of the Comoros is making substantial efforts and allocating a large part of its budget to the health sector,[25] there remain numerous challenges on the path to shaping a sector that better meets the increasingly pressing needs of the country's people, and to tackling the disaffection felt by a large share of the population towards the national health system. Many Comorans, with financial assistance from their children living elsewhere, are forced to travel abroad to receive the care they need, in particular to neighbouring countries such as Madagascar, Mauritius and the United Republic of Tanzania. Together, these trips cost an estimated KMF 7 billion per year (Nations Unies Comores, 2022).

Successive governments and development partners, such as the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the World Bank, have taken various initiatives aimed at addressing these shortcomings. Examples include the ongoing project to establish a generalized health insurance system, and the adoption of a universal health coverage law in 2017.

3.1.5. Education

Since 1975, successive governments have gone to great lengths to combat illiteracy, to reduce school dropout rates and to make education accessible to all Comoran children. Progress made in recent decades has delivered tangible results.

Statistics show a steady improvement in the gross lower secondary school enrolment ratio, which increased from 35 per cent in 2000 to 70 per cent in 2018, although this is still well below the ratio in middle-income countries (91 per cent) (World Bank, 2019). The secondary school completion ratio, as measured by the proportion of pupils passing the baccalaureate exam, is 34 per cent. Turning to the adult literacy rate, data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)[26] [27] show that, in 2021, some 75.8 per cent of Comorans were literate, up from 47.9 per cent in 1980. The figures also reveal a disparity in literacy rates between men (79.9 per cent) and women (72.2 per cent)[28].

Recent decades have seen sustained investment in education from the Comoran authorities, village communities and the diaspora. It is a priority sector for the government, which allocates at least 18.6 per cent of its budget to education (Comores, 2022). Village communities, with support from diaspora organizations, also finance the construction of schools in their local area to facilitate access to education for their children and to encourage them to continue their studies. Some local areas even go so far as to recruit teachers themselves to fill gaps in Government provision. Although uncontrolled growth in the number of private schools appears to be contributing to lower educational standards, the existence of these institutions makes it much easier for children to access education and remain in school beyond primary level, thereby raising the gross secondary school enrolment ratio.

[25] According to the initial Finance Act of 2021, at least 21.9 per cent of government expenditure was allocated to the Ministry of Health in 2021.

[26] The adult literacy rate corresponds to ages 15 and above.

[27] http://data.uis.unesco.org/.

[28] http://data.uis.unesco.org/.

Gender inequality is a key challenge in the Comoran education system. The primary school completion ratio is much higher among men (90 per cent) than women (70 per cent) (World Bank, 2019). Conversely, this gap seems to narrow – or even reverse in favour of women – at the secondary level: the gender parity index stands at 1.08 girls per boy at the lower secondary level, and 1.14 girls per boy at the upper secondary level (Comores, 2020b). Turning to higher education, available data show that, on average between 2015 and 2019, women accounted for at least 51.5 per cent of students enrolled at the University of the Comoros (Comores, 2020b). These figures suggest that the dropout rate among women is higher at primary school but lower beyond primary level.

Despite encouraging progress in the education sector in recent years, there is a clear mismatch between provision and labour-market needs. As such, many university graduates struggle to find employment in an increasingly tight labour market.

3.1.6. Labour-market participation and employment

The share of the working-age population (between 15 and 65 years of age) in employment has risen steadily since 2000, with data showing that this figure increased from 49 per cent in 2003 to 56.1 per cent in 2017 (Commissariat général au Plan des Comores, 2003b; INSEED, 2017). Consequently, the female labour-market participation rate has also climbed consistently in recent years, from 32 per cent between 1980 and 2003 to a peak of 48.8 per cent in 2017. However, the central civil service, which remains by far the largest formal employer in the Comoros, is struggling to absorb the many young workers who enter the labour market each year. This structural imbalance is entrenching a stubbornly high unemployment rate, which rose from 14.3 per cent in 2003 to 22.13 per cent in 2017 (Commissariat général au Plan des Comores, 2003b; INSEED, 2017).

Unemployment rates are unevenly distributed across islands and geographical areas. Census data from 2017 show that 21.8 per cent of the working-age population on the island of Anjouan was unemployed, while unemployment rates on the islands of Grande Comore and Mohéli were 21.7 per cent and 27.5 per cent, respectively; in the same year, rates of unemployment where higher among people living in rural areas (23.04 per cent) than among those living in urban areas (20.21 per cent) (INSEED, 2017). The employment crisis affects all socio-professional groups, including the most highly educated. The evidence suggests that young people, especially those with the highest qualifications,[29] are struggling to find employment because of inadequacies in the Comoran education system, including a lack of vocational training, as well as limited opportunities in the civil service and weak private-sector job creation.

3.2. Prosperity

3.2.1. Gross national income (GNI) per capita

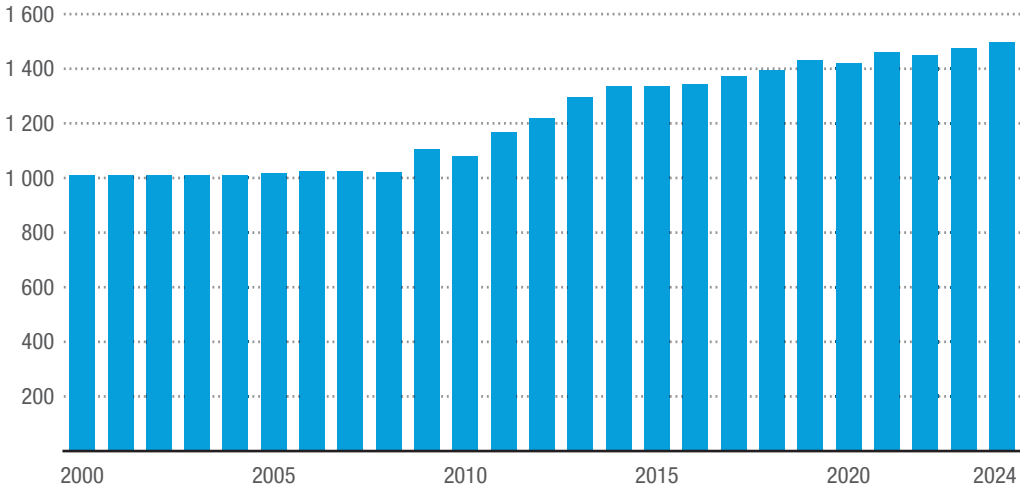
Data on GNI per capita reveal that the Comoros has recorded convincing results since the beginning of the millennium. While the gross national income per Comoran inhabitant (constant 2015 dollars) experienced a very moderate increase from 2000 to 2009, rising from $1,008 to $1,105, it experienced a booming growth from 2010 to 2019, rising from $1,080 to $1,432. It should be noted that there was a slight stagnation between 2014 and 2016. In 2020, GNI per capita fell,

[29] Unemployment rates are higher among the more highly educated than among those with a lower level of education. In 2005, 36.8 per cent of people between 20 and 24 years of age with a university degree were unemployed; in the same age bracket, unemployment rates were 35 per cent among those who had completed secondary education, 22.3 per cent among those who had finished primary school, and 20 per cent among those with no education (UNDP, 2005).

mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, before rising to $1,498 in 2024.

Looking at the overall picture, the GNI per capita of the Comoros rose sharply between 2000 and 2024[30]. This upward trend can largely be attributed to the steady rise in migrant remittance inflows which, according to the BCC, increased from KMF 31.5 billion in 2000 to KMF 49.5 billion in 2010, and to KMF 111.2 billion in 2021. This uptick in remittance inflows was largely driven by two factors: a rise in the number of Comorans choosing to emigrate, and the fact that a higher share of these inflows came via formal channels following the liberalization of the money transfer market.[31] Over time, this upward trend brought the Comoros to achieve the income graduation threshold for graduation from the LDC category, first at the triennial review in 2021 and again at the triennial review in 2024.

Figure 13
Gross national income per capita, 2000-2024
(Constant 2015 dollars)



Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations based on data from World Bank, World Development Indicators database (accessed October 2025).

3.2.2. Economic and environmental vulnerability index (EVI)

Since the calculations of all indicators of the EVI are based on the definitions of LDC criteria applicable to the corresponding year, the EVIs are not comparable between different years, due to data revisions, changes in data sources, methodological changes and changes in composition of composite indices (CPD, 2021). Therefore, we focus on the Comoros EVI in 2024. The EVI is composed of four indicators on economic vulnerability and four on environmental vulnerability, with all eight indicators having an equal weight of one eighth of the overall index (CDP, 2024).

[30] The new method adopted by INSEED to account for national wealth has also led to an upward revaluation of GNI per capita. The Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT) recommends abandoning the 1968 System of National Accounts in favour of the 1993 version.

[31] Western Union first set up operations in the Comoros in 1998, while MoneyGram entered the market in 2008.

Table 3
Composition and values of the Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index, 2024

Vulnerability index		Components	Value	Max-min
Economic vulnerability index	50.7	Share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in GDP	37.3	61.6
		Remoteness and landlockedness	64.0	67.5
		Export concentration	8.0	66.6
		Export instability	3.5	7.0
Environmental vulnerability index	23.3	Share of population living in low elevated coastal zones	13.2	37.8
		Share of population living in drylands	0.0	0.0
		Agricultural instability	1.8	1.8
		Victims of disasters (%)	1.1	53.6
EVI	37.0			

Source: CDP triennial review dataset, available at: https://policy.desa.un.org/themes/least-developed-countries-category/ldc-data (accessed October 2025).

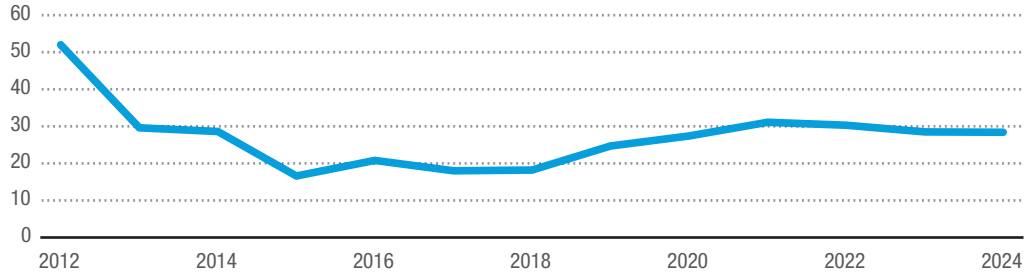
In 2024, the EVI for the Comoros stood at 37.0, above the graduation threshold of 32.0 for the vulnerability criterion. While this indicates a relatively high level of vulnerability, the Comoros remains less vulnerable than the average LDC, whose mean EVI was 40.6). While the EVI of the Comoros is primarily driven by economic vulnerability, the country's greatest source of vulnerability lies in its exposure to disasters, when examining the individual components of the index. According to CDP (2024) estimates, the disaster-related component of the EVI stood at 50.7 in 2024, compared with an Environmental Vulnerability Index score of 23.3. The Comoran economy is vulnerable mainly because of its geographical position (remoteness) and its exports concentration. The primary sector, which accounts for more than one third of GDP, further contributes to the archipelago's economic vulnerability. In environmental terms, the Comoros' vulnerability is driven mainly by disaster-related impacts, as the country does not exhibit high levels of agricultural instability nor a large share of its population living in arid areas.

3.2.3. Other economic vulnerabilities

Public debt

After gaining independence in 1975, the Comoros was forced to turn to bilateral and international donors to compensate for a shortfall in the domestic resources needed to support its development. This steadily growing public debt burden left the country unable to honour its commitments to its creditors, prompting the Government to open talks with the IMF and the World Bank. In the early 1990s, these talks culminated in the implementation of a SAP, which delivered mixed results. Total public debt consequently spiralled to 52 per cent of GDP.

Figure 14
Debt-to-gross domestic product ratio, 2012-2024
(Percentage)



Source: BCC (2016, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2024).

This high debt burden left the government with limited room to manoeuvre, resulting in a sharp fall in public investment which, in turn, made the Comoros more vulnerable. In 2012, the Comoros benefited from debt relief on a substantial share of its external debt - most of which was owed to multilateral creditors (76 per cent) - under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. After a sharp, but short-lived decline between 2012 and 2014, the public debt burden began to rise again from 2015, reaching 31.1 per cent of GDP in December 2021, before declining somewhat to 28.4 per cent of GDP by December 2024.[32]

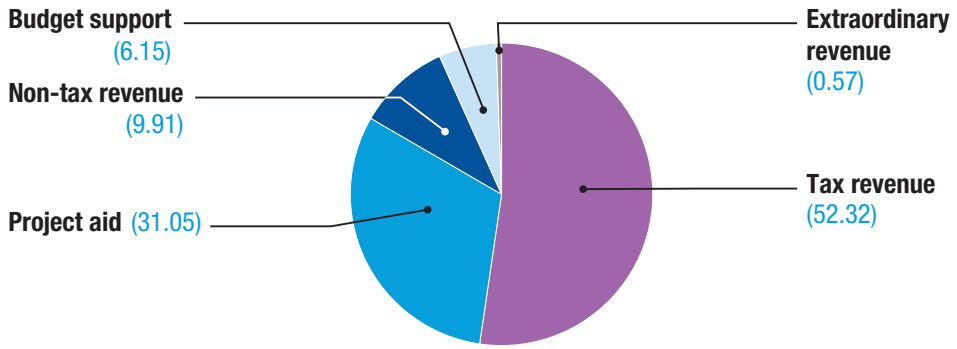
In view of the country's steadily high or rising debt burden, low level of resource mobilization,and recurring arrears, the IMF and the World Bank consider the Comoros to be at "high" risk of debt distress,[33] while their overall debt is assessed as sustainable. According to their projections, one of the four external debt indicators temporarily breaches its threshold—debt service-to-exports in 2026—while the debt service-to-revenue ratio will reach its threshold that same year. The present value of both debt-to-GDP and debt-to-exports remain below their respective thresholds and are expected to follow a declining path beyond 2026 (IMF, 2024).

Weak domestic and external resource mobilization

The Comoros, which is now classified as a lower-middle-income country, is struggling to mobilize the domestic public resources needed to finance its socioeconomic development. With its budget under severe strain, the government relies heavily on support from development partners to finance budgetary expenditures. Despite recent efforts to broaden the tax base, the tax burden remains among the lowest in the franc zone. Between 2001 and 2019, the average tax burden stood at 10.3 per cent, well below the franc zone's lower benchmark of 20 per cent.

Development partner contributions continuously account for more than one third of the annual budget, and these partners finance some two thirds of public investments. A large share of government revenue, the majority of which still comes from customs duties, is used to pay civil servants' salaries, with the public-sector wage bill representing at least half of current spending and government revenue.

Figure 15
Funding sources, 2024 budget
(Percentage)



Source: BCC (2024).

[32] As of 2024, external debt represented 81.9 per cent of total debt, with internal debt accounting for 18.1 per cent. The main multilateral creditors are the World Bank (30 per cent), the (15 per cent), and the IMF (14 per cent), while the lion's share of bilateral debt is owed to three partners: the Saudi Fund for Development (46 per cent), the Export-Import Bank of India (29 per cent), and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (23 per cent).

[33] As of 30 September 2025. See https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/dsa/dsalist.pdf.

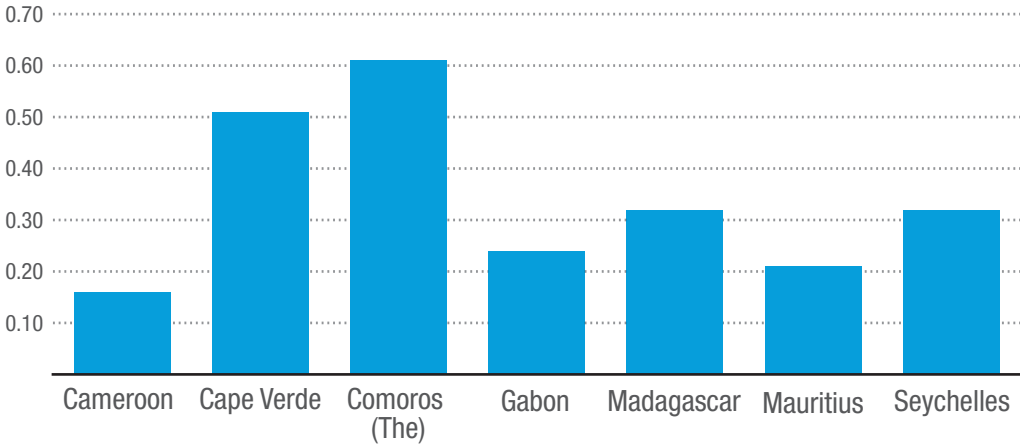
Moreover, weak capacity to mobilize national savings to finance development is a major concern for which an appropriate solution needs to be found. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), bank liquidity in the Comoros remains limited, amounting to about KMF 47.8 billion in 2019 (PNUD, 2022). This lack of liquidity constrains bank lending: in 2020, total loans granted to the private sector represented just 14.9 per cent of GDP, versus an Africa-wide average of 61.8 per cent. Another constraint is the country's limited ability to attract FDI. According to UNCTAD data, between 2007 and 2017, average annual FDI in the Comoros amounted to $8.1 million, or 0.84 per cent of GDP. This is significantly lower than the average volumes of FDI attracted over the same period by neighbouring small island States, such as Mauritius ($382 million, 3.4 per cent of GDP) and Seychelles ($196 million, 17.4 per cent of GDP). A sectoral breakdown of recent FDI into the Comoros shows that these inflows are heavily skewed towards sectors, such as tourism, fisheries and the cement industry.

Although diaspora remittances have increased steadily over recent decades and constitute the country's main source of foreign currency inflows, these funds are largely used to improve the living conditions of migrants' families. Recipients tend to allocate these remittances primarily to consumption - particularly the financing of customary weddings (box 1) - as well as to community-led investments, for their community, such as electrification and the construction of schools, roads, meeting halls, mosques and water supply facilities.

The energy problem

The Comoros has one of the highest rates of access to electricity in Africa: the electrification rate exceeds 65 per cent, compared with a continent-wide average of 38 per cent (World Bank, 2019). However, MAMWE (the state-owned electricity company) faces persistent technical and financial challenges that prevent it from ensuring a reliable supply. As a result, the country has faced constant power cuts since the mid-1990s, with some localities left without power for days. Since 2016, the government has made efforts to increase the electricity supply rate.

Figure 16
Cost of electricity in the Comoros and other African countries
(Dollars per kilowatt-hour)



Source: Author calculations based on data from World Bank, World Bank, World Development Indicators database (accessed October 2024).

Despite a modest improvement in supply, the cost of electricity remains one of the highest in the Indian Ocean region, if not in Africa. In 2016, the price per kWh in the Comoros was an estimated $0.61, versus $0.21 in Mauritius and $0.32 in

Madagascar and Seychelles. Following the measures taken in May 2022 in response to rising fuel prices, the cost of electricity is estimated to have increased by more than 40 per cent in 2022.

These steep prices and ongoing problems at MAMWE (the state-owned electricity company) are further impediments to economic growth. They discourage both domestic and international investment and raise local production costs, thereby reducing the competitiveness of domestically produced goods relative to imports, which continue to increase.

3.3. Planet

The Comoros is a small island developing State (SIDS) located at the northern entrance of the Mozambique Channel. Owing to its location and its status as an archipelago, the country is extremely vulnerable and predisposed to natural disasters including floods, cyclones, sea-level rise and earthquakes.

Table 4
Main hazard exposures

Hazard	Frequency	Likely intensity	Affected area(s)
Volcanic eruption	Every 10 years	Very high	• Anjouan: Nyoumakélé and Sima • Mohéli: entire island • Grande Comore: north and north-east
Cyclone/storm	Every 10 years	High	Nationwide: all islands
Flood	Once a year	High	Nationwide: all coastal areas
Tsunami	Every 100 years	High	Local: any location on the islands
Bushfire	Once a month	Medium	Local: any location on the islands
Drought	Once a year	Medium	Regional: any location on the islands

Source: Comores (2017b).

In the 2023 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Country Index (ND-GAIN), the Comoros ranks 166th of 187 countries, highlighting its sharp vulnerability to climate change and its low readiness to adapt to it. Since 1980, the Comoros has experienced 18 extreme natural shocks, further weakening its economy and society (Nations Unies Comores, 2020).

A 2018 climate change vulnerability assessment by Agence Française de Développement (AFD) predicted that the country's environmental risk factors would increase in the future. Meanwhile, the World Bank's 2005 Natural Disaster Hotspots Report found that 59 per cent of the territory of the Comoros was exposed to natural disaster risk, with 54.2 per cent of the population residing in affected areas. Estimates indicate that, between 2005 and 2021, at least 50 per cent of the population was affected by a natural disaster (Dilley et al., 2005). Volcanic activity on Mount Karthala is an ever-present threat to the people of the Comoros, especially those living in central and southern Grande Comore. Two eruptions, in 1978 and 2005, caused extensive damage and affected more than half of the island's population.

The floods that hit the island of Grande Comore in 2012 severely damaged essential infrastructure and led to extensive crop destruction, exacerbating food insecurity. The worst natural disaster in recent decades occurred in April 2019, when Tropical Cyclone Kenneth – a category 3 storm – hit the country. The cyclone brought violent winds and torrential rain, with devastating consequences for almost all parts of the islands, affecting more than 40 per cent of the population. Estimates by the General Directorate of Civil Security of the Comoros attributed 6 deaths and 17,153 injuries to the cyclone, which also left 11,969

people displaced, destroyed 4,954 homes and damaged a further 7,013 homes.

The agricultural sector, which employs a large part of the population, was hit especially hard by the cyclone: statistics from the General Directorate of Civil Security of the Comoros show that more than 60 per cent of food crops and more than 30 per cent of cash crops were destroyed, severely impacting the population. The government estimates the total cost of damage caused by the cyclone at more than $185 million (KMF 82 billion), while the cost of rebuilding damaged infrastructure and strengthening the country's resilience to future disasters stands at an estimated $277.5 million.

This high environmental vulnerability is, in itself, an impediment to the socioeconomic development of the Comoros. According to World Bank (2017a), the combined average cost of natural disaster-related losses is estimated at $5.7 million per year, equivalent to 0.9 per cent of GDP and 2.8 per cent of the total government budget in 2017. The residential sector experiences 80 per cent of these combined losses, the public sector 10 per cent, and the commercial sector 6 per cent. The majority of these losses are caused by tropical cyclones (64 per cent) and floods (35 per cent) (World Bank, 2017a).

Unsustainable exploitation of terrestrial and lagoon ecosystems, and the impact of population growth, have left the natural environment of the Comoros in a vulnerable state. In addition, the country is characterized by low adaptive capacity and resilience. The climate hazards to which the country is exposed are therefore growing in both intensity and frequency. Marine ecosystems, meanwhile, are severely impacted by unsustainable exploitation. Marine pollution, sand dredging, coral mining and destructive fishing practices (blast fishing) are contributing to the degradation of coral reefs and the depletion of fish stocks. These practices also pose an existential threat to mangrove forests, which are shrinking with the passage of time: between 1980 and 2005, mangrove coverage declined from 125 ha to 115 ha (Nations Unies Comores, 2020).

These various threats have serious implications for human and animal populations, including rising temperatures, decreasing rainfall, the spread of vector-borne diseases, depleted water resources, biodiversity loss and rising sea levels. Their knock-on effects on the agricultural sector are also contributing to higher food insecurity.

Consequently, environmental resilience-building and disaster risk reduction are key concerns for the development partners of the Comoros. The government has made various commitments and taken several initiatives to address climate change and its consequences. Signalling that the environment is high on the national agenda, the Comoros has embarked on the process of joining the African Risk Capacity risk pool and has ratified a number of multilateral environmental agreements including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as the framework conventions on biodiversity and desertification.

In line with its commitments as a party to the Paris Agreement, signed by members of the UNFCCC, the Government of the Comoros prioritized adaptation and mitigation in its nationally determined contributions for 2015 and 2020, which included measures such as resettling and protecting populations living in areas at risk, as well as establishing early warning and effective emergency response systems. The main aim of these initiatives is to increase the resilience of the Comoros to natural disasters.

Alongside its international commitments, the Comoros has passed a range of environmental laws, including the Framework Law on the Environment, the Law on Forest Management, the Law on the National System of Protected Areas, and the Law Banning the Production, Import, Sale and Distribution of Non-biodegradable Plastic Packaging and Bags. The 1993 National Environment Policy and the 2014 National

Action Plan for the Environment also align with the goal of combating global warming and better protecting the environment for current and future generations.

Despite a mismatch between the stated intentions of the government and the financial resources available to it, progress has been made in some areas, especially in terms of awareness-raising. Various community-led environmental protection initiatives have delivered tangible results, including locally introduced bans on logging, sand dredging and turtle poaching. However, the country's Second National Communication on climate change (Comores and AFD, 2018) reveals that the Comoros will need to redouble its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, especially carbon dioxide. Available data show that more than 20 per cent of the country's energy is derived from fossil fuels, primarily used for electricity generation and for road, sea and air transport.

3.4. Peace

3.4.1. A fragile peace in need of consolidation

The Comoros has been in a state of near-constant political crisis since gaining independence. However, armed clashes have been in recent decades, and the Comoros is currently ranked among African States that have been spared armed conflict. Comorans generally prefer to settle disagreements by way of consensus. As such, the Comoros has always stood apart from many other African countries in terms of the low numbers of deaths and displacements caused by political conflict.

The last major conflict in the archipelago was the separatist crisis of 1997 which, unusually, led to armed clashes between the two rival factions – the *rattachistes* and the *autonomistes*[34] – concerning the island of Anjouan. It is important to note, however, that these clashes resulted in only a handful of casualties (fewer than 10 deaths) and displacements. The crisis was resolved through political dialogue and the adoption of a new constitution, which established a new "rotating presidency" system and granted the islands significantly more autonomy.

Although clan and family allegiances are influential in calming political tensions, they can also contribute to the breakdown of the rule of law. The main judicial, administrative and political institutions of the State are strongly influenced by these networks of allegiance, of which the *grands notables* are among the most powerful.

These institutions, which are supposed to be the guarantors of the rule of law, are largely unable to break free from the influence of these networks, on which they are somewhat dependent. As a result, the Comoros scores poorly on governance indicators, providing little reassurance to the population. According to Transparency International (2025), corruption remains high in the Comoros which, in 2024, ranked 158th out of 180 countries in the organization's Corruption Perceptions Index, far behind Seychelles (18th), Mauritius (56th) and Madagascar (140th). In the 2023 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024), the Comoros ranked 40th out of 54 African countries, trailing its neighbours Seychelles (1st), Mauritius (2nd) and Madagascar (34th). With governance indicators at such dispiriting levels, the state and its institutions are becoming increasingly fragile and vulnerable. They are struggling to cope with the multiplicity of external and domestic threats facing the country.

3.4.2. Political risks

Despite three peaceful transitions of power since the introduction of the rolling presidency system, the political climate in the Comoros has deteriorated since the

[34] The *rattachistes* (unionists) supported continued union with France – the restoration of colonial rule – while the *autonomistes* (separatists) demanded wide-ranging autonomy for the island of Anjouan.

amendment of key provisions[35] of the 2001 Constitution following a referendum held in July 2018. The situation deteriorated further since the April 2019 presidential elections, which led to political unrest and protests, as well as the arrest of several politicians. With political divisions deepening, there is a real risk that the Comoros could enter a new cycle of political instability. Diverging interpretations of the new 2018 Constitution, especially the provisions relating to the rotating presidency system, could reopen old divisions between the islands and plunge the Comoros even further into political fragility and vulnerability.

The underrepresentation of women in political life is in itself a source of frustration that risks fuelling political tensions. In 2017, women accounted for just over 49 per cent of the population but held only 1 out of 15 ministerial posts. Women hold just 4 out of 24 seats (16.6 per cent) in the Assembly of the Union, the parliament of the Comoros, and lead only 7 of the country's 54 municipalities (Nations Unies Comores, 2020). The islands have experienced growing religious divisions[36] in recent years which, although low-level, could pose a threat to the social cohesion of nation.

In view of its strategically important location on shipping routes and its porous maritime borders, the Comoros is also prone to seaborne threats, such as piracy, drug trafficking and migrant smuggling. The Comoros has a marine policing unit, but its technical, financial and human resources are limited. Consequently, the force struggles to police transnational trafficking in the country's exclusive economic zone, which is estimated to span in excess of 160,000 km^2 and borders several neighbouring countries, including Madagascar, Mozambique, Seychelles and the United Republic of Tanzania.

In response, in February 2021, the authorities – with technical and financial support from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – enacted a new criminal code aimed at addressing the new challenges posed by transnational crime, including updated provisions specifically addressing maritime crime.

3.5. Partnerships

The Comoros has very few international partners: in 2017, only 15 partners, including 7 bilateral[37] were listed in the Development Assistance Database for the Comoros and in its Public Investment Programme (Nations Unies Comores, 2020). These development partners make substantial contributions to the Comoros, amounting to more than 50 per cent of the State budget (Comoros, 2020a, 2021, 2022). The Government therefore needs to undertake diplomatic efforts to diversify its partnerships.

The country should leverage its strategically advantageous location to facilitate its regional integration and to further broaden its partner base. Building the technical skills of Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff and setting up the necessary systems and processes to support effective diplomacy are essential preconditions for closer international and regional cooperation.

In order to strengthen its developmental diplomacy, the Comoros needs to focus on better training staff in two key areas: first, improving their proficiency in relevant foreign languages, especially English; and second, ensuring they have the technical acumen to understand how international and regional organizations operate, and how the political and legal systems in partner countries function. This could be achieved by scheduling initial and in-service training for key stakeholders in Comoran diplomacy.

[35] The constitutional amendments included removing the Vice President roles, abolishing the Constitutional Court and ending the rotating presidency system.

[36] The Comoros is an overwhelmingly majority-Muslim country, so these divisions stem from tensions between different Muslim groups.

[37] The country's bilateral partners are China, France, India, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The Comoros is also advised to use diplomatic channels to call for stronger representation in regional and international organizations, which in turn would help the country cement a stronger presence on the regional and global stages. To this end, Comoran diplomats, with support from their partners, could undertake a detailed analysis of the various international and regional cooperation organizations with a view to deriving maximum benefits from closer involvement.

As part of this active development diplomacy strategy, the Government is advised to work with its peers to remove regulatory and administrative barriers to cooperation between the Comoros and certain countries. In this regard, setting up more joint committees would help ensure that appropriate measures are taken to strengthen Comoran diplomacy and diversify the country's partner base. Prioritizing countries in the Global South would be a strategically wise move to mobilize additional resources in support of the development of the Comoros.

To ensure that Comoran diplomacy best serves the country's development, the authorities should increase civil society involvement in policy development and the work of joint committees as a way to better identify areas for cooperation and, consequently, facilitate the success of projects financed by development partners. Technical capacity-building for national institutions responsible for managing development assistance, together with that of civil society organizations, would ensure that assistance is better coordinated, increase the disbursement rate and raise the profile of initiatives supported by the country's development partners.

However, strengthening regional and international partnerships will require the Comoros to articulate its annual diplomacy objectives and determine its overarching priorities.

In the interest of clearer foreign policy orientation, the authorities could consider preparing a white paper on Comoran cooperation, to be updated annually or at regular intervals as appropriate. Such a document would detail the headline objectives of Comoran diplomacy, list those countries with which closer diplomatic relations are desired, and set out the key expected outcomes of this work for each year.

Pursuing a wider neighbourhood policy of this kind would ensure better integration of the Comoros into regional forums, such as the Indian Ocean Commission, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Such a policy would involve joint initiatives aimed at forging closer trade, academic, scientific and cultural ties, as well as joint projects of international scope aimed at developing shared maritime and airport infrastructure in order to open up transport links across the region.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4. Development plans and international trade

4.1. Review of development plans and programmes

Successive governments have drawn up various development strategies in an effort to tackle the socioeconomic challenges facing the country. This chapter provides a brief review of each of these strategies.

4.1.1 Interim Plan (1977–1978)

In 1977, the post-independence authorities launched the Interim Plan. It reflected the main policy choices of the Government, including laying the groundwork for accelerated and self-reliant development with two core objectives: a primary objective of achieving food self-sufficiency and a secondary objective of significantly boosting export earnings. This ambitious plan, which prioritized the agricultural sector, aimed to create thousands of jobs for young Comorans by achieving an average real economic growth rate above 3.5 per cent. The authorities stepped up their efforts in pursuit of the plan's objectives, mobilizing domestic resources on a larger scale.

However, these ambitious objectives were never achieved due to inadequate resource mobilization, weak human capital and an increasingly repressive political environment. Although agricultural production rose sharply during this period, the overall results of the plan were a mixed picture: unemployment soared, Comorans saw their purchasing power eroded, economic diversification was all but non-existent, and private initiative was constrained in favour of the excessive centralization of political and economic power. The plan was abandoned when the Government was overthrown in 1978.

4.1.2 Interim Development Plan (1983–1986)

In 1983, the new Government drew up the Interim Development Plan (1983–1986), which sets out a fresh approach to the challenges facing the country and aimed to create the conditions necessary to revive the economy. The main objective of this plan was to raise the living standards through an economic recovery that hinged on the mobilization of both domestic and external resources.

The Government set its sights high, aiming for average annual economic growth of 7.9 per cent, annual average export growth of at least 10.8 per cent and an average annual increase in household consumption of 9 per cent (Msa, 2002). To finance the plan, the Government organized the first international solidarity conference for the development of the Comoros, held in Moroni from 2 to 4 July 1984.[38] At the conference, partners committed to financing[39] more than 70 per cent of the total cost of the government's priority investments (KMF 125 billion).

Despite the promises made by its development partners, the Comoros failed to kick-start an economic recovery, owing largely to political problems that led to inadequate follow-up of the plan. In 1985, the country entered a difficult

[38] The conference was organized with technical support from UNCTAD and UNDP. It was attended by more than 20 delegations representing partner countries and multilateral organizations. The government sought to mobilise more than KMF 125 billion to finance identified priority investments between 1983 and 1990.

[39] In the form of loans and grants.

period characterized by a high debt burden coupled with weak economic growth.[40]

4.1.3 Structural Adjustment Programme (1990–1999)

Amid challenging economic conditions, the Comoros – like many other African countries – entered into open talks[41] with the IMF and the World Bank. These talks culminated in the implementation of a SAP, a package of structural reforms aimed at stabilizing macroeconomic indicators and liberalizing the private sector in order to spur an economic recovery. According to Msa (2002), the programme's quantitative targets were to limit average annual inflation to 4 per cent, reduce the overall Government deficit to 0.7 per cent of GDP, and achieve average real economic growth of 3 per cent. To meet these targets, the IMF and the World Bank recommended fiscal austerity policies that reduced the role of the State and promoted economic liberization, increased tax collection and increased public and private investment.

Overall, the outcomes of the SAP were mixed. On the sociopolitical front, the enforced economic liberalization and fiscal austerity prompted mass redundancies across Government and state-owned companies, a moratorium on civil service recruitment and a halt on career progression, while the issue of salary arrears[42] remained unresolved. The ensuing wave of deregulation led to the quasi-privatization of the main social sectors – health and education[43] – further deepening education[44] and health inequalities. The devaluation[45] of the Comoran franc in January 1994 exacerbated existing economic pressures.

Implemented under highly constrained political conditions, these reforms failed to produce the intended socioeconomic outcomes: economic growth remained weak (1.3 per cent), while domestic resource mobilization was limited (average mobilization rate of 79 per cent), the budget balance remained negative (averaging -2 per cent of GDP on average) and public debt expanded sharply, reaching more than KMF 86.3 billion by 1990 (Msa, 2002). As a result, Household living conditions deteriorated: the 1995 exploratory budget and consumption survey found that at least 50.6 per cent of the Comoran population was living in poverty.[46]

4.1.4 Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy Paper (2003–2014)

In 2003, as the country's key socioeconomic indicators worsened, the authorities prepared a new development strategy: the Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy Paper (PRSP).[47] This strategy reflected a policy choice of focusing domestic resources – human and financial – and development partner support towards strong and inclusive growth in order to significantly improve the living conditions of the Comoran population. Specifically, the authorities aimed to achieve

[40] Between 1981 and 1989, average annual real GDP growth dipped to about 1.6 per cent, well below the annual population growth rate of about 2.8 per cent. Consequently, over this period, average annual real per-capita growth was negative (-1.2 per cent).

[41] The talks began in Moroni in November and December 1990, and continued in Washington, D.C. between February and May 1991.

[42] Between 1982 and 2009, civil servant salaries went unpaid for a total of 23 months.

[43] In the 1990s, Comoran schoolchildren suffered "three lost years" (1990, 1994 and 1998) and had several half-years of schooling.

[44] For instance, the 2003 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) listed 72 upper secondary education institutions in the Comoros; of these, 10 were public and 62 were private.

[45] The Comoran franc devalued by 25 per cent, whereas the CFA franc (the local currency used in West and Central Africa) devalued by 50 per cent, which had implications for the Comoros as an import-dependent country.

[46] At the time, poverty incidence differed markedly across the islands: Anjouan was the worst affected, with 62 per cent of the population living in poverty, while the rates for Mohéli and Grande Comore were 52 per cent and 41 per cent respectively.

[47] The PRSP was prepared in 2003, revised in 2005 and updated in 2010.

annual average real GDP growth of at least 5 per cent and to halve poverty by 2015.

The Government placed a much greater emphasis than its predecessors on the recovery of the private sector, as a key source of wealth, job and income creation. The policies implemented under the PRSP focused on those sectors considered key to driving economic growth and creating jobs and wealth, such as agro-industry and tourism. The aim of this approach was to raise the economic fortunes of the most vulnerable in society and, therefore, to lower poverty levels in the Comoros.

In support of these new economic policy choices, the government sought to mobilize domestic and external sources, both public and private. To this end, two donor conferences were held: the first in Mauritius in 2005[48] and the second in Doha in 2010.[49] In the mid-2000s, the authorities also opened talks on obtaining debt relief under the HIPC initiative[50] in order to support the country's development.

Although the PRSP led to the consolidation of public finances,[51] the strategy ultimately failed to live up to its ambitions: according to estimates, annual real economic growth between 2004 and 2014 was less than 1.5 per cent, far below the 5 per cent envisaged as necessary to halve poverty by 2015.

Over the same period, the poverty rate fell from 45 per cent to 42 per cent (INSEED, 2014), again falling short of the PRSP target of reducing poverty by 50 per cent. In 2014, following the failure of yet another strategy, the authorities adopted a new development framework: the Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy (SCA2D).

4.1.5 Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy (SCA2D) (2015–2019) and revised SCA2D (2018–2021)

In 2014, amid less-than-ideal conditions characterized by sluggish economic growth, the Government prepared a new development strategy for the period 2015–2019. This document articulated policy choices geared towards strengthening linkages between the economic, social, environmental and other aspects of development as a way to achieve faster-paced economic growth, boost the creation of decent jobs and, thereby, combat poverty and unemployment (Comores, 2014). Specifically, the strategy set the following targets: achieving average annual real growth of 6.1 per cent, reducing unemployment from 14 per cent to less than 10 per cent by 2019, bringing the monetary poverty rate down from 44.8 per cent to 21 per cent by 2019, and significantly improving governance[52] (Comores, 2014).

In pursuit of these outcomes, SCA2D focused on four major areas:

- Acceleration, diversification and sustainability of economic growth

[48] At the Conference of the Friends of the Comoros, held in Mauritius on 8 December 2005, partners pledged more than $265 million to finance the PRSP Action Plan for 2006–2009. Estimates by the Office of the Commissioner General for Planning of the Comoros suggested that, as of 2008, only $54.1 million (30.7 per cent) had been released.

[49] At this second conference, held in Doha, Qatar in March 2010, partners committed $540 million to support the development of the Comoros. In the end, the impact of the conference was limited and very little of the pledged funding was mobilized.

[50] In December 2012, following protracted negotiations, the Boards of Directors of the IMF and the World Bank announced debt relief for the Comoros after determining that the country had fulfilled the requirements to reach the HIPC completion point. In 2012, prior to receiving debt relief under the HIPC initiative, the country's external debt stood at KMF 92.5 billion, representing 42.3 per cent of GDP and 318 per cent of exports. The majority of this debt (76 per cent) was held by multilateral creditors, including the World Bank (41.6 per cent), the AfDB (11 per cent), the BADEA (10.2 per cent) and the IMF (5.9 per cent). With several creditors granting the Comoros relief under HIPC initiative, the country's external debt shrank from KMF 92.7 billion to KMF 47.5 billion between 2012 and 2014, a reduction of 48.75 per cent. Its external debt-to-GDP ratio fell from 42.3 per cent to 19.9 per cent over the same period.

[51] The budget balance was positive during this period.

[52] Lifting the Comoros to 21st out of 52 countries in the Ibrahim Index of African Governance.

- Development of infrastructure to support growth
- Improved access to basic social services and increased household resilience
- Strengthening of governance and institutional and human resilience.

In 2018, the authorities signalled their intention to the SCA2D in order to align it with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2063 Agenda of the African Union, while reflecting on their development priorities. The inclusive revision process helped to build renewed momentum behind the strategy. The revised SCA2D sought to lay the foundations for the structural transformation of the Comoran economy in order to achieve strong, wealth- and job-creating growth. It set specific targets of achieving economic growth of 6.1 per cent, reducing unemployment to less than 10 per cent and significantly improving political governance by 2021 – largely unchanged from the targets set in the original SCA2D.

Unlike the initial version, however, the revised SCA2D[53] focused on three major areas:

- Accelerating the structural transformation of the economy and achieving sustainable management of the environment
- Accelerating the development of human capital and promoting social welfare
- Consolidating governance and promoting the rule of law.

The underlying policy choices were closely aligned with the new government's agenda, as well as with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

Inadequate monitoring and evaluation, however, meant that the targets set in the SCA2D and its revised version were not achieved. Between 2015 and 2021, average annual real economic growth isestimated at 2.1 per cent, substantially below the target rate of 6.1 per cent. Contrary to the stated ambition of SCA2D, the poverty rate rose from 42 per cent in 2014 to 45 per cent in 2020 (INSEED, 2020). In terms of governance, between 2016 and 2020, the Comoros slipped from 32nd place (with a score of 49.5 points) to 38th place (43.2 points) in the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2016, 2020), again failing to meet the targets set in SCA2D, which envisaged lifting the country to 21st place in the ranking.

4.1.6. Emerging Comoros Plan (ECP)

The revised SCA2D aimed to lay the foundations for steady and harmonious development with the objective of placing the Comoros on a path to becoming an emerging economy. In 2019, in the face of faltering economic performance, the authorities drew up the ECP with this same overarching objective. This new blueprint, developed with the support of UNDP and the World Bank, aims to accelerate reforms towards the deep-seated transformation and diversification of the Comoran economy with a view to achieving emerging economy status by 2030 (Comores, 2019a).

The ECP is presented as a clean break with past practices that saw the Comoros fail to keep pace with the rapid development achieved by its neighbours (Mauritius and Seychelles). The plan is structured around five pillars and five catalysts. The pillars identified as key to driving growth are tourism and handicrafts, the blue economy, financial services, agriculture, and industry (Comores, 2019a). These pillars are expected to set in motion the structural changes necessary for emergence, putting the Comoran economy on the path of regular and sustained growth of up to 7.5 per cent per year. The catalysts identified as key to these structural reforms that, together with the pillars, will kick-start the recovery of the economy are infrastructure, digital technology, human capital, governance, and the business environment (Comores, 2019a).

According to government estimates, the total cost of implementing the ECP

[53] The revised SCA2D comprised 14 priority programmes: 6 under focus area 1, 4 under focus area 2, and 4 under focus area 3. The estimated budget for implementation of the revised SCA2D was KMF 415 billion.

is approximately KMF 2,068 billion (corresponding to €4.2 billion). To finance this ambitious plan, the Comoran authorities organized the Conference of Development Partners of the Comoros (CPAD), held in Paris on 2 and 3 December 2019 (box 3).

Box 3
The Conference of Development Partners of the Comoros (CPAD)

The Conference was led by the Government of the Comoros, with technical and financial support from UNDP, the World Bank, AFD and other partners. Held in Paris on 2-3 December 2019, it was attended by more than 220 participants, including 30 bilateral partners, 25 international and regional institutions, and 145 national and international private-sector stakeholders. At the event, the Comoran authorities presented 6 flagship projects, 6 structural projects and about 40 priority projects spanning the pillars and catalysts of the ECP. At the outset, the Government of the Comoros aimed to mobilize at least $3.15 billion. However, over the two days of the Conference, total funding pledged to support the development of Comoros amounted to $4.37 billion, of which $1.57 billion was from bilateral and multilateral partners, and $2.8 billion from the private sector.

Source: Nations Unies Comores (2020).

In order to operationalize the ECP, the authorities put in place a new Interim Development Plan (2020–2024) with the following goals:[54]

- Promote sustainable management of the environment
- Revive the economy for strong growth to fight poverty
- Improve the health system and promote equitable access to education
- Guarantee peace, security and stability, and consolidate democracy
- Reform and modernize government
- Promote equitable justice for all.

Just a few months after the approval of the ECP, and CPAD, the world was shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic – and, subsequently, the war in Ukraine. These two global crises have adversely impacted the Comoran economy and, consequently, the implementation of the ECP. Available data show that the country's main economic indicators have worsened, lagging far behind the targets set in the plan. Between 2020 and 2021, average real economic growth remained well below 7.5 per cent, while commodity prices rose sharply,[55] potentially sending poverty soaring and significantly deepening inequalities.

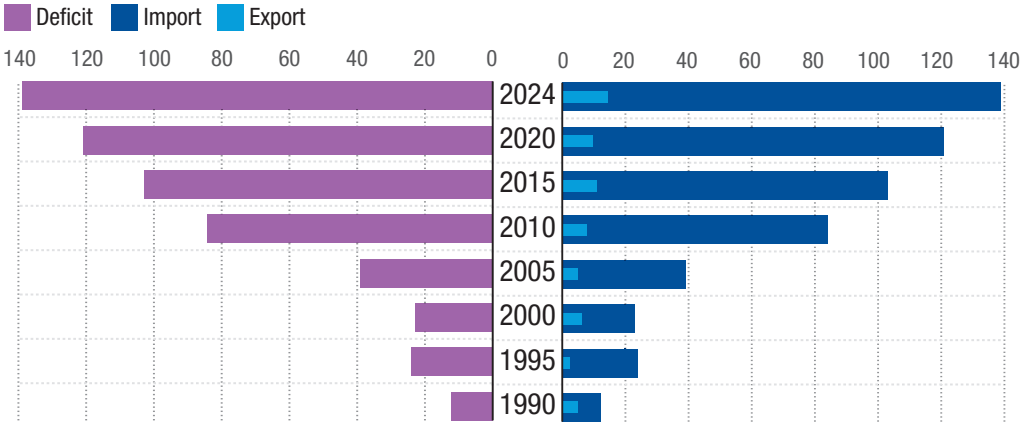
4.2. International trade and regional integration

The Comoros is a small island developing State (SIDS) facing a series of natural and structural vulnerabilities. On account of its fragile economy and weak productivity capacity, the country is more dependent than most on international trade, which has increased significantly in recent years.

[54] Nations Unies Comores (2020).

[55] For instance, the price of basic food staples were 9 per cent higher in June 2022 than June 2021, while electricity prices jumped by 9.8 per cent over the same period.

Figure 17
Trade balance of the Comoros, 1990-2024
(Billions of Comoran francs)



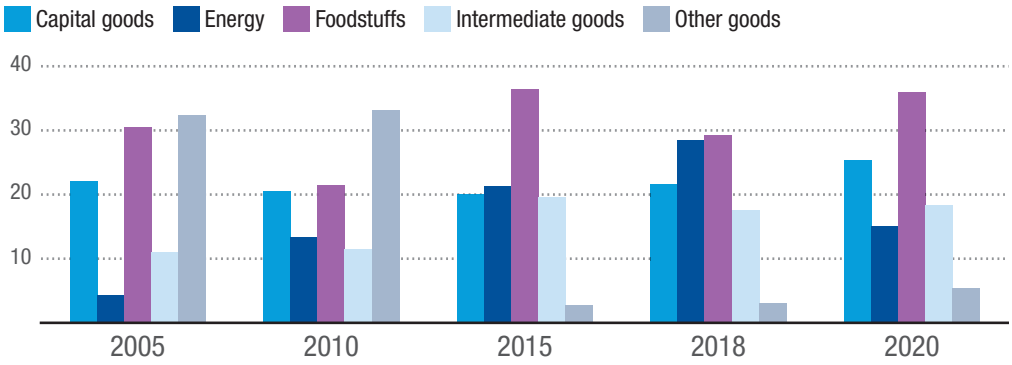
Source: BCC (2020, 2024).

However, the goods trade-to-GDP ratio in the Comoroshas followed an erratic pattern in recent years. According to the BCC (2020), the ratio jumped from 35.9 per cent in 2005 to over 47 per cent in 2010, before dipping to 21 per cent in 2018. Although this ratio remains relatively high, it is still below the Africa-wide average, which stood at more than 77 per cent in 2020 (UNECA, 2022). The country's trade in goods is overwhelmingly dominated by imports, leading to an ever-widening trade deficit that leaves the Comoros increasingly vulnerable and dependent on the outside world.

4.2.1. Imports of goods

Comoran imports of goods have increased steadily over recent decades in response to domestic demand, which is increasingly supported by migrant remittances. Imports of goods grew from KMF 23 billion in 2000 to KMF 84 billion in 2010, to KMF 120.8 billion in 2020 and to KMF 138.8 billion in 2024. Comoran imports consist primarily of foodstuffs intermediate goods, capital goods and petroleum products. Notably, foodstuffs account for an ever-increasing share of imports, representing 41 per cent of total imports of goods in 2024. Because of its weak productive capacities, the Comoros relies on imported food[56] to meet household needs, making the country increasingly vulnerable to external shocks. Imported food accounts for more than 40 per cent of household consumption.

Figure 18
Composition of imports of goods, 2005-2020
(Percentage)



Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations based on data from BCC, INSEED and the Comoran Customs database.

[56] These imported foodstuffs mainly comprise grain, meat products, condiments, beverages, live animals, etc.

Data from Comoran Customs show that the main sources of these imports come from Asia (China, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, etc.) and Europe (France and Spain) (table 5).

Table 5
Composition of Comoran imports of goods by country, 2018

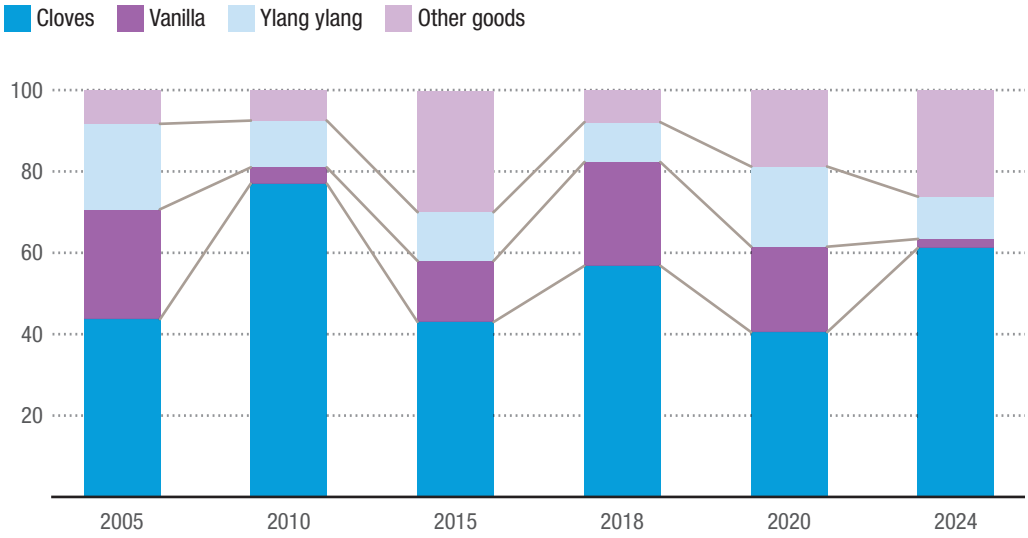
United Arab Emirates	**25.44%** Goods and passenger vehicles - Oil - Mineral water - Bars of iron - Tiles - Oil - Milk - Furniture - Biscuits – Rice, semi-milled - Refrigerators - Plugs and sockets - Juice - Paint
China	**10.41%** Tiles - Passenger vehicles - Sanitary towels and tampons, napkins and napkin liners - Furniture - Parts for user telephone sets, telephones for cellular networks and others - Tomatoes, prepared or preserved - Flat-rolled products of iron or steel - Electricity meters - Outer soles and heels of shoes - Telephones for cellular networks - Granite and articles of such stone - Piston-engine generators – Medicines - Etc.
Pakistan	**14.17%** Rice, broken - Cement - Rice, semi-milled - Bars of iron or steel - Flour - Chicken eggs, fertilized - Etc.
France	**13.20%** Passenger vehicles - Wheat flour - Cut meat and edible offal of fowls - Milk and cream - Bars of iron or steel - Medicines - Books and brochures - Goods vehicles - Food preparations - Printed matter - Worn clothing and worn textile articles - Refrigerators and freezers - Wooden furniture - Machine parts - Doors and frames - Books for writing - Cement - Tiles - Spanners - Drilling tools - Clothing - Signposts - Biscuits - Tower cranes - Etc.
India	**3.26%** Boneless meat of bovine animals, frozen - Rice, semi-milled, wholly milled, polished - Containers of cast iron or steel - Tubes, pipes and hollow profiles - Edible offal of bovine animals - Meat of bovine animals, salted or in brine, dried or smoked - Cotton cloth - Shawls, scarves - Flat-rolled products of iron or steel - Medicines - Cut meat and edible offal of turkeys - Tiles - Etc.
Malaysia	**3.07%** Cement - Vegetable fats and oils - Sanitary towels and tampons - Milk and cream - Books for writing - Beans - Potatoes - Margarine - Rubber contraceptives, male - Doors and frames - Mineral water - Soap flakes - Etc.
South Africa	**2.87%** Cane sugar - Mineral water - Cream - Beet sugar - Bitumen and asphalt - Fats and oils - Cut meat and edible offal of fowls - Coniferous wood - Fruit juices - Bituminous mastics - Bars of iron or steel - Matches – Apples, fresh - Yoghurt - Fertilizers - Wheat flour - Wines - Animal meat - Fish fillets - Chocolate and other cocoa-based preparations - Etc.
Madagascar	**2.76%** Goods vehicles - Graders - Tractors - Bulldozers - Liquefied butane - Machinery for crushing - Salt - Rollers - Onions and shallots - Wood - Crane trucks - Passenger vehicles - Medicines - Insecticides - Vegetables – Onions, dried - Tarot root - Ducks, geese, turkeys - Etc.
Türkiye	**2.74%** Bars of iron or steel - Wheat flour - Bituminous mastics - Tubes, pipes and hollow profiles, of cast iron - Sanitary towels and tampons, napkins and napkin liners - Rice, semi-milled or wholly rolled - Pasta, cooked or otherwise prepared - Tractors - Pasta - Pasta, stuffed with meat or other substances - Cane sugar - Soaps - Biscuits, sweetened - Milk and cream, in powder or granules - Flat-rolled products of iron or non-alloy steel - Tiles, ceramic, glazed or enamelled - Bedroom furniture - Etc.
Japan	**2.67%** Rice, broken - Passenger vehicles - Spark-ignition outboard motors for marine propulsion - Road tractors for semi-trailers and crawler tractors - Medicines consisting of mixed or unmixed products - Motorcycles, including mopeds - Etc.
Viet Nam	**2.26%** Cement - Furnishing articles, of textile materials - Fruit juices and vegetable juices - Mineral water and carbonated water - Tubes, pipes and hoses, of plastics - Orange juice, unfermented - Medium density fibreboard of wood - Lingonberries, prepared or preserved - Preparations of a kind used in animal feeding - Potatoes, prepared or preserved, frozen - Etc.
Mauritius	**2.24%** Edible offal of sheep, goats, horses, asses or mules, fresh or chilled - Cut meat and edible offal of fowls - Milk and cream, in powder or granules - Yoghurt - Beans - Potatoes, frozen - Dates, fresh or dried - Rice, semi-milled or wholly milled - Wheat or meslin flour - Grains of corn - Tuna, prepared or preserved – Sugars - Etc.
Spain	**1.90%** Edible offal of bovine animals, goats, sheep, fresh or chilled, frozen - Livers of bovine animals, fowls and ducks, frozen - Yoghurt - Potatoes, frozen - Sausages - Biscuits, sweetened - Fruit or vegetable juices - Mineral water and carbonated water - Malt beers, sparkling wine of fresh grapes - Etc.
United Republic of Tanzania	**1.23%** Live mules and hinnies - Live bovine animals, sheep, goats, ducks, geese, turkeys and guinea fowl - Fish meat, frozen - Molluscs, smoked, dried, salted or in brine - Milk and cream, unconcentrated and in powder form - Natural honey - Foliage, branches and other parts of plants - Seed potatoes - Potatoes - Onions and shallots - Garlic - Leeks and other alliaceous vegetables - Cabbages, kale, kohlrabi and other edible products - Carrots and turnips - Leguminous vegetables - Potatoes, frozen - Sweet corn, frozen - Vegetables, frozen
Indonesia	**1.01%** Milk and cream, concentrated and unconcentrated - Coffee, not roasted, decaffeinated - Wheat flour - Animal fats and oils - Vegetable fats and oils - Crude cotton-seed oil - Raw cane sugar in solid form - Sugar confectionery not containing cocoa - Chocolate and other food preparations containing cocoa - Biscuits, sweetened

Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations based on data from the INSEED database.

4.2.2. Exports of goods

Comoran exports of goods are characterized by weak growth and limited diversification. Three cash crops – vanilla, ylang ylang and cloves – account for 74 per cent of exports of goods, which amounted to KMF 13.4 billion in 2024, showing modest growth over the previous two decades (KMF 6.3 billion in 2000 and KMF 7.6 billion in 2010). This reliance on a small number of low-value-added products is a source of increasing fragility. To make matters worse, dramatic fluctuations in the volumes and prices of these cash crops means that exports earnings are both volatile and at the mercy of uncertain weather and climate conditions.

Figure 19
Composition of exports of goods, 2005-2024
(Percentage)



Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations based on data from BCC, INSEED and the Comoran Customs database.

All else being equal, weak export performance has translated into a widening structural trade deficit, which increased from KMF 16.7 billion in 2000 to KMF 76.6 billion in 2010, before soaring to KMF 111.3 billion in 2020 and 124.5 in 2024.

The country's main export markets are located in Europe (Czechia, France and Germany), Asia (India and the United Arab Emirates) and North America (Canada and United States).

Table 6
Composition of exports of goods by country, 2018

Exports	2018
France	**36.18%** Essential oils - Vanilla, crushed and not crushed - Cloves - Pepper
India	**33.15%** Cloves - Vanilla
Germany	**9.31%** Vanilla, crushed and not crushed - Cloves
United Arab Emirates	**3.09%** Cloves - Waterproof footwear with outer soles and uppers of rubber or of plastics
Canada	**2.19%** Vanilla, crushed and not crushed

Exports	2018
Madagascar	**1.87%** Vacuum flasks and other vacuum vessels - Containers for gas, in cast iron, steel or aluminium - Passenger vehicles
United States of America	**1.45%** Cloves
Czechia	**1.21%** Spark-ignition reciprocating or rotary internal combustion piston engines

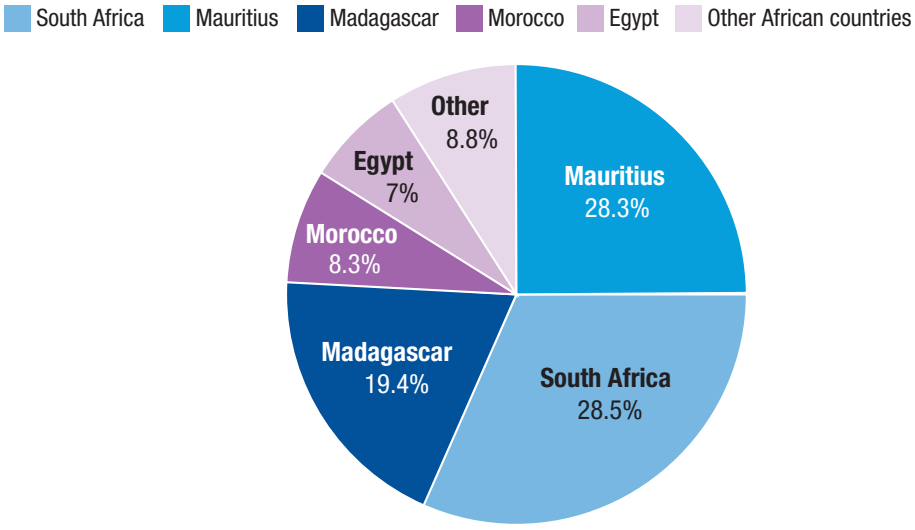
Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations based on data from the INSEED database.

4.2.3. Regional trade integration

The Comoros is a member of major regional economic communities, such as COMESA and SADC, but its trade with Africa is still low. Imports of goods from the rest of the continent accounted for just 8.7 per cent of total imports in 2020, while in the same year, exports of goods to other African countries represented only 10.2 per cent of total exports (UNECA, 2022). As a net importer, the Comoros has a structural trade deficit with the rest of Africa, estimated at between KMF 6.5 billion and KMF 16 billion over the past decade (UNECA, 2022).

Data from Comoran Customs show these imports come from a relatively well-diversified set of trade partners, although Madagascar, Mauritius and South Africa together account for more than 76 per cent of total intra-African imports of the Comoros, which consist primarily of foodstuffs such as sugar, beverages and bovine animals.

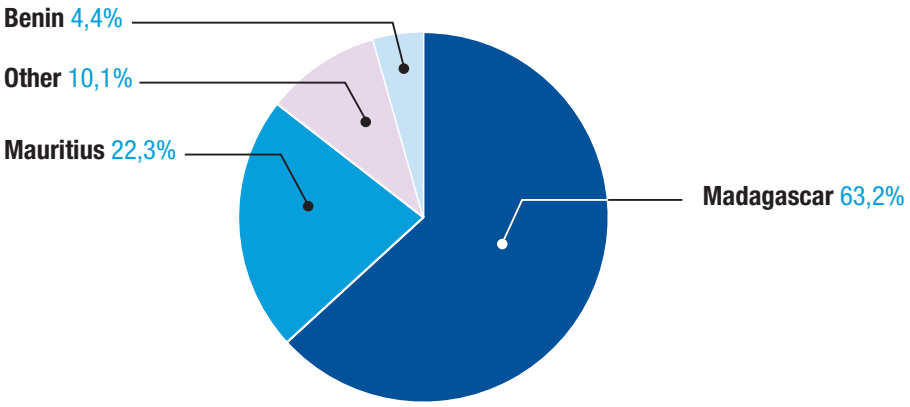
Figure 20
Intra-African imports, 2016–2019 average



Source: UNCTAD secretariat Moroccoulations based on data from the Comoran Customs.

Intra-African exports of goods, meanwhile, consist overwhelmingly of the three above-mentioned cash crops (82.3 per cent of the total) and are heavily skewed towards neighbouring countries: Madagascar and Mauritius alone account for at least 85.5 per cent of exports to other African trade partners.

Figure 21
Intra-African exports of goods, 2016–2019 average



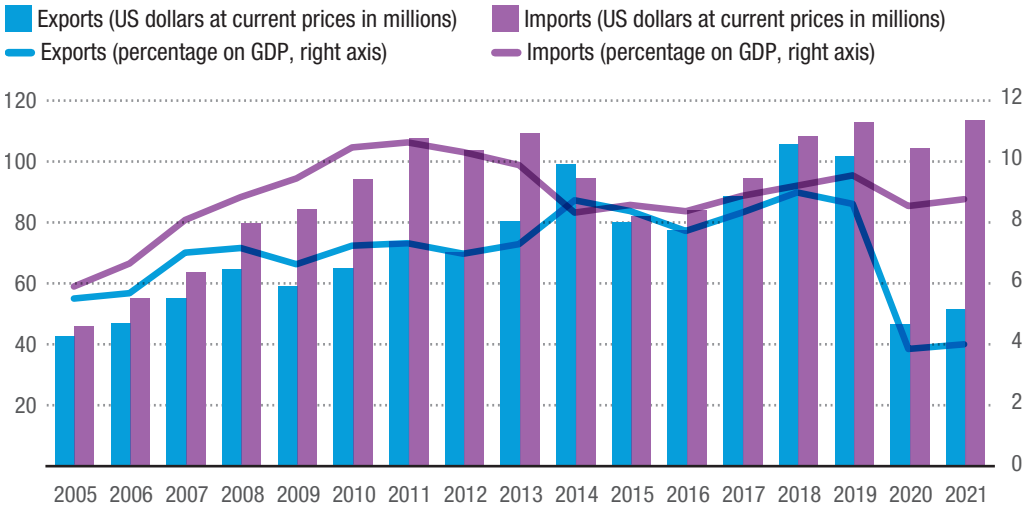
Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations based on data from the Comoran Customs database..

The above analysis shows that trade between the Comoros and the rest of Africa remains at a low level, pointing to untapped import and export opportunities with continental trade partners at a time when African markets present strong potential. At the 25th African Union Summit in 2015, leaders agreed to commence negotiations towards the creation of the AfCFTA.

4.2.4. Trade in services

In 2019, the Comoros was among the eight African countries that exported more services than goods (UNCTAD, 2022). However, the country maintained a services trade deficit throughout the period 2005–2024, except for 2014. Comoran imports of services trended upwards between 2005 and 2013, and again between 2016 and 2021 (figure 22). Over this same period, imports of services increased from $46 million (2005) to $209 million (2024). Between 2008 and 2021, imports of services as a share of GDP remained above 8 per cent. This ratio, which peaked at 16.1 per cent in 2022, stood at 13.2 per cent in 2024.

Figure 22
Trade in services, 2005-2021

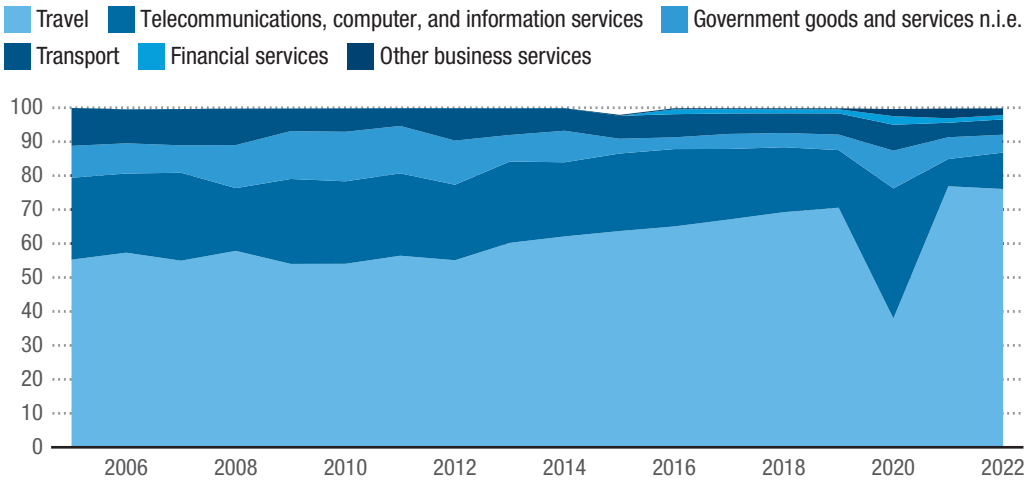


Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations, based on data from the UNCTADstat database (accessed October 2025).

Exports of services increased in value from $43 million in 2005 to $129 million in 2024, when it represented 8.2 per cent of GDP. However, in 2020, Comoran service exports plummeted to $47 million, the lowest level since 2006. The dip seen in 2020 was due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the country's tourism sector.

The country's principal imports of services are transport services, travel services, business services, insurance and pension services, and telecommunications, computer and information services. Although the share of transport services in imports has been trending downwards since 2012, transport and travel continue to account for the overwhelming majority (79 per cent in 2022) of Comoran imports of services. Exports of services, meanwhile, consist mainly of travel services, telecommunications, computer and information services, transport services, and government services, which together accounted for 96 per cent of these exports in 2022. Tourism makes a significant contribution to the GDP of the Comoros: the share of travel services in exports grew steadily between 2012 and 2019, when they accounted for 71 per cent of Comoran exports of services. Telecommunications, computer and information services also represent a significant share of exports, with the Comoros deriving substantial income from computer-related services. Figure 23 shows the composition of Comoran exports of services between 2005 and 2022.

Figure 23
Composition of exports of services, 2005-2022
(Percentage)



Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations, based on data from the UNCTADstat database (accessed October 2025).

4.2.5. Major trade challenges

As an island State with weak productive capacities, the Comoros is heavily dependent on international trade. However, it faces a series of challenges in terms of both domestic and foreign trade. Domestic trade is limited, and an analysis of the related challenges provides a clearer picture of the country's position in global value chains.

As explained earlier, weak domestic production is an impediment to trade that makes the Comoros increasingly dependent on imports, especially of food. Domestic trade consists largely of agricultural products. According to the 2015 Diagnostic Trade Integration Study, only 25 per cent of domestic agricultural output is sold, whereas 70 per cent is own-consumed. Addressing this challenge of underproduction would help to boost domestic trade. Moreover, weak production and the tendency for producers to sell their produce in small volumes are impediments

to the achievement of economies of scale and to the creation of large, organized businesses capable of generating sufficient supply to reduce the country's reliance on imported agricultural products.

Other challenges impeding the growth of domestic trade include:

- Very high transport costs due to poor connectivity between the three islands
- The lack of supporting infrastructure such as warehousing and cold storage
- Difficulties in transporting agricultural products from rural areas (production areas) to urban areas (markets), leading to inflated prices and heightened competition from products imported from neighbouring countries (Madagascar and the United Republic of Tanzania)
- The absence of food processing companies, which limits added value
- The small size of the market, with fewer than 800,000 potential consumers

Foreign trade, meanwhile, is overwhelmingly dominated by imports, keeping the trade balance in chronic deficit and heightening the country's vulnerability. One of the key priorities for the Comoros is therefore to reduce this deficit through policies aimed at diversifying its exports, which are largely restricted to agricultural products, especially cash crops that alone account for the bulk of exports.

Another significant impediment to boosting exports is the fact that agricultural products are produced and sold in small volumes, preventing producers from achieving economies of scale and hindering the creation of large, organized business capable of generating sufficient supply. Moreover, the country lacks a compliant packaging system, meaning that Comoran exports are marketed without adhering to international packaging standards. The existence of packaging standards is an essential factor in the transport and storage phases of the export value chain.

The Comoros is poorly integrated into global value chains (production, logistics, marketing and sales, etc.). There are several reasons for this situation, such as the absence of a comprehensive production, processing and import policy for Comoran products. Other structural impediments to trade and integration into global and regional value chains include the country's geographical isolation from major global supply chains, its weakly diversified economy, its limited human capital, and its inadequate sea and air transport infrastructure.

In order to strengthen the integration of the Comoros into global value chains and, above all, to capitalize on the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA, the authorities are advised to pursue the following policy priorities:

- Improve connectivity by strengthening national infrastructure (ports, airports, roads, telecommunications, etc.)
- Build productive and processing capacities
- Diversity the economy
- Strengthen human capital and reduce the cost of factors of production (energy, telecommunications, etc.).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5. Building resilience to vulnerabilities

5.1. Building productive capacities to reduce dependence on the outside world

The heavy dependence of the Comoros on the outside world has long been a major concern for its development stakeholders. Reducing this vulnerability is therefore essential at a time when the country is undergoing assessment for LDC graduation. As As this vulnerability profile has shown, the Comoran economy is structurally vulnerable. Poor diversification and weak productive capacities leave the economy increasingly reliant on imports, continuously widening the trade deficit.

With this in mind, the authorities are advised to take appropriate measures to strengthen national productive capacities, which would in turn increase the country's resilience to external shocks. Reducing dependence on the outside world implies a process of structural transformation that should have as its end goal the construction of a diverse and sufficiently strong base of domestic production. In order to achieve such an objective, which would also enable the country to meet the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Government of the Comoros should pursue a range of measures aimed at:

- Promoting the domestic private sector
- Boosting investment in infrastructure
- Strengthening the technical and financial capacities of the State and of institutions tasked with supporting public and private productive structures

To promote and support the domestic private sector, the Government should develop policy measures aimed at:

- Strengthening training for private-sector organizations, with a particular focus on managerial skills
- Making it easier for these organizations to access bank loans by creating a guarantee fund, which would increase bank confidence and, in turn, substantially increase lending to the private sector
- Enacting deep and rapid reforms in order to improve the business environment and attract the structural investments needed to reduce the country's vulnerability to external shocks
- Directing migrant remittance inflows towards activities that support local production, by increasing bank penetration and conducting a campaign to raise awareness among the diaspora of opportunities to invest in the Comoros and the benefits of doing so

The authorities are also advised to diversify the economy, with an emphasis on promoting the creative economy and building capacities in science, technology and innovation. To this end, the Comoros is advised to adopt national strategies of economic diversification and innovation. In order to meaningfully reduce the dependence of the economy on the outside world, these strategies should target the growth sectors such as agriculture and industry.

Weaknesses in essential infrastructure also weigh on productivity. In response, the Government and development partners should work together to mobilize the financial resources needed to strengthen Comoran infrastructure. Such an approach would contribute to making the economy more competitive and to accelerating the process of transformation, as well

as helping to bring down the cost of energy and other production inputs. To this end, the Government should invest more in renewable energies in order to reduce the use of more expensive and polluting fossil fuels.

With improved port, airport and road infrastructure, it would also be easier to transport factors of production and for products to reach markets. Such a move would also foster the development of strong domestic markets and support integration to regional and subregional markets, potentially easing international trade, especially exports.

In order to strengthen productive capacities with a view to reducing the Comoran economy's dependence on the outside world, policymakers and business leaders will need to work in tandem to shape a stable, peaceful macroeconomic and political framework allowing the country to embark on a process of economic transformation and diversification. To this end, the Government should take steps to improve governance, with strong measures on corruption and mismanagement, on resource mobilization capacities, and on sound public debt management. Doing so would enable the Comoros to raise the funds necessary for public investment while reducing its dependence on external partners.

The Government needs to strengthen the National Agency for Investment Promotion and other institutions with a similar mandate as part of efforts to increase State support for private economic operators. Accordingly, the authorities should look to strengthen the technical capacities of officials working in Government bodies, while also taking steps to significantly improve their working conditions and salaries. This would allow these institutions to recruit a diverse, versatile and highly qualified workforce.

5.2. Strengthening external and domestic resource mobilization capacity to finance development

The ECP outlines how the Government intends to provide renewed momentum to the transformation of the economy, with a view to achieving emerging economy status by 2030. The country's development partners will need to coordinate their efforts in order to mobilize the significant financial resources needed to achieve the Plan's ambitious targets. This endeavour is complicated by heightened competition for resources following recent global crises, requiring the application of both skill and knowledge.

With this objective in mind, partners will need to show great resourcefulness in initiating the reforms needed to mobilize domestic and external resources to support the country's development. As a first step, the authorities should identify available domestic and external resources that could be mobilized, and develop a national resource mobilization strategy.

Potential sources of domestic resources include tax and non-tax revenues, domestic bank loans, and public-private partnerships. In order to strengthen domestic resource mobilization, the authorities could:

- Build the technical and human capacities of institutions responsible for collecting public resources, including the General Tax and Government Property Administration
- Improve the business environment in order to increase bank confidence, lower interest rates and reduce the ratio of bad debts, which in turn would increase private investment sand expand the tax base
- Enact laws aimed at promoting public-private partnerships and encouraging public-private initiatives

Potential sources of external resources include official development assistance, FDI, foreign public debt, and migrant remittances. In order to increase the level of the official development assistance, the

Government should further diversify its development partner base,[57] as well as enact bold reforms to strengthen political governance and tackle corruption.

Given that investment is the main driver of economic growth, the Comoran authorities are advised to enact bold reformsthat create a healthier business environment.[58] Establishing a presidential investment council could accelerate these reforms by strengthening confidence among domestic and international investors, as well as within the country's diaspora.

In view of the increasingly important role of migrant remittances, policymakers should conduct a wide-ranging campaign aimed at mobilizing the country's diaspora and directing remittance inflows towards development priorities. This campaign, encompassing awareness-raising, profiling and needs identification, should be initiated by the Office of the Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, with a view to further engage Comorans abroad in the country's development.

5.3. Addressing environmental vulnerabilities

As previously mentioned, climate hazards such as drought, floods, cyclones and rising sea levels pose significant challenges to the socioeconomic development of the Comoros. The impacts of climate change are already evident across the archipelago, reflected in declining rainfall, rising temperatures and more frequent flooding. These trends have wide-ranging consequences, including coastal erosion, desertification, and loss of arable and grazing land. These challenges are compounded by the marginalization of some sections of society, particularly, women, children and other vulnerable groups.

These socially excluded people are the most exposed to climate disturbances, placing them at heightened vulnerability. It is therefore of paramount importance that adequate and appropriate steps are taken to address these climate hazards.

The analysis presented in this vulnerability profile (section 3.3) shows that the Comoros faces varied and multifaceted forms of environmental vulnerability, implying the need for a multi-pronged approach. First, the Comoros needs to redouble investments in climate-resilient infrastructure and clean energy in order to adapt to global warming. In view of the country's limited financial resources and its inability to attract structural investments, the authorities should establish mechanisms aimed at allowing access to environment-focused funds such as the Environmental Fund for Protected Areas of the Comoros, the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility. Resources from these sources could be used to finance greener economic recovery plans and, above all, measures to raise public awareness and improve the living conditions of people most exposed to climate hazards.

Another priority for the Comoran authorities should be to build the technical and human capacities of climate-focused State institutions and civil society organizations, with a particular emphasis on environmental training and awareness. The Government is advised to support the University of the Comoros in delivering training programmes and conducting in-depth research on environment-related themes. In a similar vein, the authorities should assist these institutions in accessing green and digital technologies. With stronger technical and human capacities and improved access to new environment-focused technologies, the Comoros will be better prepared to face future climate shocks.

[57] Available data show that official development assistance to the country comes from a narrow pool of bilateral partners (France, Japan, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, etc.) and multilateral partners (the AfDB, IMF, World Bank, etc.).

[58] At the CPAD, the government pledged to place the Comoran economy among the top 10 reformers in the World Bank's global Doing Business rankings.

The Government should incorporate environmental protection laws into national development plans and strategies in order to ensure their full and effective appropriation by development stakeholders. On the legislative front, the Government should also take appropriate measures to safeguard terrestrial and marine ecosystems, through legal rules aimed at protecting forests, mountains and biodiversity, and at regulating the fisheries sector in order to combat overfishing and destructive and illegal fishing practices. In the interest of social justice, the authorities should explore the option of setting up mechanisms to provide economic support to those exposed to the adverse effects of environmental shocks, especially the most vulnerable. In parallel to the efforts recommended above, the Comoran authorities should develop a comprehensive national climate risk map identifying those areas most exposed to flooding, cyclones, rising sea levels and other hazards.

In addition to these measures, the Government is encouraged to strengthen public awareness of environmental issues, their impacts and consequences and, most importantly, of sound and sustainable practices for the management of terrestrial and marine biodiversity. The establishment of a rapid early warning system would help to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters.



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6. Strategic considerations for graduation with momentum

The Comoros is heavily dependent on the outside world for final household consumption, investment, medical care and financial resource mobilization. The archipelago is also highly vulnerable to climate and environmental hazards. The Comoran economy is reeling from the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Kenneth, COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine. Graduation would imply the Comoros losing the preferential treatment afforded to LDCs, which could further weaken its economy and make the country even more vulnerable.

However, the Comoros is a popular tourist destination with significant maritime potential which, if fully exploited, could spur sustainable, dynamic social and economic development. Moreover, its small population – less than one million – combined with its history of social peace and its economic partnerships could facilitate the successful implementation of economic policies. In order to fully exploit its potential and overcome its vulnerabilities, the country should put in place a number of strategies geared towards smooth, dynamic graduation. Five strategies that the Comoros can consider implementing are proposed below.

6.1. Structural transformation of production through the primary sector

The Comoros should put in place an economic programme aimed at boosting domestic production across all sectors of the economy. The country remains a net importer of foodstuffs. The first strategy for smooth graduation would be to achieve food self-sufficiency by promoting modern, climate-resilient agriculture. The Government should invest in modern farming equipment, train farmers and encourage the population to consume locally produced food. The Comoros has ample space for livestock rearing yet relies on imports to meet more than 80 per cent of demand for red meat. It is essential to fill this gap in local production by developing livestock farming. Since poultry farming can be combined with other forms of employment in both rural and urban areas, it is important for the Government to train people in poultry farming methods. The fact that the Comoros, an archipelago with a vast sea area, is an importer of fish and fish products is something of a paradox. The country needs to invest in modern fishing equipment in order to better exploit its fisheries potential. The Comoros is also advised to strengthen its agribusiness programme and its collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for effective implementation.

6.2. Human capital development

Economic and social policies can only be effective when underpinned by a healthy, well-trained and adequately educated population, that is, strong human capital. Beyond mainstream education, the Government should promote technical and vocational training aligned with the country's development challenges. Close collaboration with UNESCO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) could support human capital development through high-quality education.

Concerning health, the Government is advised to build at least one referral hospital on each of the islands over which it

exercises sovereignty. Diaspora remittances could be mobilized to finance the cost of building these hospitals and other health-care facilities, given that migrants spend large amounts of money on sending their sick relatives abroad for treatment.

6.3. Better allocation of migrant remittances

The Comoros ranks among the top countries globally in terms of the contribution of remittances to GDP. Although Comorans living abroad retain a strong attachment to their home country, heavy reliance on migrant remittances is a source of vulnerability. Many host countries are introducing tougher immigration rules, while the high cost of living and complex labour-market conditions in these countries mean that remittances will likely shrink in coming years. Moreover, future generations of migrants could have a weaker attachment to their country of origin. In response to this trend, remittances should be used to finance sustainable development projects, not simply to support household consumption. For instance, these funds could be put towards agribusiness development projects, the construction of referral hospitals, and other forms of investment.

6.4. Climate adaptation

Addressing climate change is one of the six key focus areas of the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2022–2031. The Comoros should therefore build climate change into its strategies for graduation with momentum.

6.5. Strengthening the national statistical system

High-quality data and statistics will be needed to monitor the country's various programmes. For this reason, the national statistical system should be strengthened. INSEED, as the central organ of this system, should be allocated the technical and financial resources necessary to conduct periodic surveys in order to identify needs and gaps among the population. The Government could establish partnerships with United Nations bodies responsible for strengthening statistical systems.

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