
Subregional Office for North Africa
Subregional Office for West Africa**Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa**
Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa
Second joint session

Accra, 1–3 November 2023

Concept note**I. Context**

1. As statutory deliberative bodies, the Intergovernmental Committees of Senior Officials and Experts for North and West Africa oversee the activities of the respective subregional offices of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) as part of the programme adopted by the annual session of the General Assembly at its annual session.¹ The Committees hold annual sessions to consider the results achieved by the subregional offices, their upcoming work programmes and their strategic orientations as they relate to the development priorities of countries in North and West Africa. The sessions also provide forums for senior experts and policymakers in national Governments, researchers, the private sector, civil society and academia to assess and discuss trends in economic and social conditions across the subregions.

2. Building on the positive experience of participants at the first joint session, held in 2022, and the feedback and recommendations of participating countries and partners, the Subregional Offices for North and West Africa are convening the second joint session of the Intergovernmental Committees of Senior Officials and Experts for North and West Africa.

3. The joint session will provide an opportunity for policymakers and experts from countries in the two subregions to discuss some of the most pressing sustainable development challenges, share good practices and devise action-oriented solutions to be taken by ECA, its members and other entities involved in development. Those solutions, together with the outcomes of policy dialogues held separately in the two subregions, will be submitted to the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, the principal deliberative organ of ECA, for review and discussion.

4. The thirty-eighth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa and the twenty-sixth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa will be held jointly in Accra from 1 to 3 November 2023, on the theme “Investing in the energy transition, food security and regional value chains for sustainable development in North and West Africa”.

¹ See A/76/6 (Sect.18).



5. The global economy continues to be undermined by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, which have resulted in rising food and energy prices and increases in borrowing costs and debt service payments. At the same time, climate change is having a disproportionate impact on the countries in North and West Africa. The United Nations projects that global economic output will grow by 2.3 per cent in 2023 and 2.5 per cent in 2024. Although those figures have been revised upwards (by 0.4 percentage points compared with the January 2023 forecast), they remain below the average growth rate for the two decades prior to the pandemic (3.1 percent).²

6. In Africa, growth rates are expected to fall slightly from the 3.5 per cent registered in 2022 to 3.4 per cent in 2023, before returning to 3.5 per cent in 2024, but they are likely to remain far below the 7.0 per cent growth rate required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by the 2030 deadline.³

7. It is estimated that economic growth in West Africa slowed to 3.9 per cent in 2022, down from 4.4 per cent in 2021. Growth is projected to slow further to 3.8 per cent in 2023 before increasing to 4.2 per cent in 2024. Economic growth declined in all countries in West Africa in 2022, with the exception of Cabo Verde, Guinea, Mali, the Niger and Togo.⁴ The impact of the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on global demand and on energy, food and fertilizer prices has further worsened important macroeconomic indicators in the subregion, including economic growth and inflation rates and countries' fiscal deficits and current account balances, undermining much of the progress achieved in recent years in the area of human development. Inflation rates in West Africa averaged 17.0 per cent in 2022, higher than in any other African subregion, up from 12.7 per cent in 2021. In North Africa, the inflation rate was 14.5 per cent in 2022, up from 11.0 per cent in 2021, with the increase mainly due to rising food and energy prices in the subregion.⁵

8. Despite the strong economic rebound that has taken place in the oil sector in Libya, economic growth in North Africa remains subdued, in particular given the subregion's relative wealth and economic potential. Growth rates declined from 5.4 per cent in 2021 to 3.1 per cent in 2022 owing to a rapid contraction in economic activity in Libya and the impact on agriculture of a severe drought in Morocco. Growth rates are expected to remain subdued in the subregion in 2023 and 2024, at between 3.3 and 3.4 percent. The subregion's economies remain subject to significant headwinds, notably the unstable political situation in Libya, the Sudan and Tunisia, continued spillovers from the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine and climate shocks. Nonetheless, the subregion currently has a golden opportunity to promote economic diversification, moving away from exports of raw materials to become a global hub for renewable energy and sustainable power generation.

² *World Economic Situation and prospects: Mid-Year Update* (United Nations publication, May 2023). Available at: desapublications.un.org/publications/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-mid-2023.

³ Ibid.

⁴ International Monetary Fund, *Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa – The Big Funding Squeeze*, (Washington, D.C., April 2023). Available at: www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/SSA/Issues/2023/04/14/regional-economic-outlook-for-sub-saharan-africa-april-2023.

⁵ Ibid.

9. The main purpose of the joint session will be to discuss ways to address the daunting food and energy challenges faced by North and West African countries and to explore opportunities for value chain development in response to those challenges. Given the multiplier effects of food and energy security on all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals, addressing those issues will be critical in efforts to ensure the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. It should, in that connection, be noted that “sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition patterns” and “energy decarbonization and universal access” are among the six entry points identified in the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report to leverage interlinkages and accelerate progress across all 17 of the Goals.⁶

Addressing the daunting food security challenges faced by North and West Africa

10. The number of people in the world facing hunger and food insecurity has increased in recent years. Globally, the proportion of people living with hunger increased from 8.0 to 9.8 per cent between 2019 and 2021. In Africa, however, that proportion was around 20 per cent in 2021, far higher than in other global regions.⁷ Data published in April 2023 showed that nearly 48 million people were likely to face acute food insecurity in the Sahel and West Africa during the lean season (June–August 2023), more than five times the number of people affected in 2014, prior to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁸

11. The cost of a balanced, nutritious diet has continued to rise in North Africa in recent years, and was estimated at \$3.47 per person per day in 2020, an amount that exceeds the average daily income of many people in the subregion. The conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine has, moreover, exacerbated food security challenges in North Africa owing to the fact that the subregion imports a large proportion of its wheat and other agricultural inputs from Ukraine. The conflict has disrupted food shipments, increasing food prices and causing food shortages. Some 34 per cent of the population of the subregion experienced moderate to severe food insecurity in 2021, while 11 per cent of people affected actually ran out of food. Furthermore, the rate of increase in moderate or severe food insecurity jumped from 1.3 per cent in 2020 to 3.8 per cent in 2021. Even though the proportion of undernourished people in North Africa as a whole is lower than the global average, it is higher than the global average in Mauritania and the Sudan. What is more, ongoing internal economic and conflict-related challenges continue to undermine food security in Libya and the Sudan.

⁶ The four other entry points are: strengthening human well-being and capabilities; shifting towards sustainable and just economies; promoting sustainable urban and peri-urban development; and securing the global environmental commons. For further information, see: *Global Sustainable Development Report 2023: Advance, Unedited Version* (United Nations publication, 14 June 2023). Available at: sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Advance%20unedited%20GSDR%2014June2023.pdf.

⁷ For further information, see: *Global Sustainable Development Report 2023: Advance, Unedited Version*.

⁸ United Nations, “West Africa and Sahel: food insecurity, malnutrition, set to reach 10-year high”, UN News, 18 April 2023.

12. The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine has also had an impact on agricultural productivity in Africa, which registered a decline 0.8 per cent, with the fall in agricultural productivity particularly acute in Guinea, Mali and Tunisia.⁹ Those shocks also continue to fuel global and African food prices and overall inflation, although food prices have declined slightly since the all-time high observed in March 2022 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with the FAO Food Price Index score for the first five months of 2023 some 11.1 per cent lower than the average score in 2022.¹⁰

Promoting regional value chains for sustainable industrialization in North and West Africa

13. Many African economies remain heavily dependent on the export of commodities. Half the countries in West Africa have a commodity export dependency rate of 90.9 per cent, with exports comprising primarily agricultural products, minerals, ores and metals.¹¹ The manufacturing sector in West Africa generates less than 10 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Developing and strengthening regional value chains is critical to improving the pace of structural transformation and economic and export diversification. Indeed, according to a recent report on regional value chains by the Subregional Office for West Africa, increasing trade within value chains by 1 per cent increases per capita income by more than 1 per cent, almost double the rate associated with developing trade outside value chains.¹² Africa as a whole, and West African countries in particular, participate weakly in global value chains, however, and their participation is heavily concentrated in forward participation (producing and exporting inputs that are further re-exported) involving the supply of minimally processed exports of primary goods, including petroleum, agricultural and mining products. Between 2015 and 2019, West African countries had, on average, an annual forward global value chain participation rate of 39.2 per cent of exported value added and an annual backward global value chain participation rate of 14.5 per cent.¹³ However, backward participation to value added trade accounts for 87.8 per cent of the total participation of Nigeria, which, in turn, accounts for nearly two thirds of the participation of the West African subregion in global value chains. This can be attributed to the fact that the economy of Nigeria is heavily dependent on the export of petroleum products, which generates some 90 per cent of the country's total export earnings.

14. In 2021, North Africa was the most advanced African subregion in terms of industrial development, with an African Development Bank industrialization index score of 0.6594. The North African subregion was followed by Southern Africa (0.5649), Central Africa (0.5020), West Africa (0.4887) and East Africa (0.4760). Three of the six North African countries – Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia – were ranked among the top 10 countries in the index, reflecting

⁹ African Union and others, *Africa Sustainable Development Report, 2022* (November 2022). Available at: www.undp.org/africa/publications/africa-sustainable-development-report-asdr-2022.

¹⁰ FAO, *FAO Food Price Index*. Updated figures available at: www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/.

¹¹ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *State of Commodity Dependence 2021* (Geneva, 2021). Available at: unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditccom2021d2_en.pdf.

¹² United Nations, ECA, “The development of value chains: an opportunity to take advantage of the AfCFTA”, 22 June 2023.

¹³ African Union Commission and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Africa's Development Dynamics 2022: Regional Value Chains for a Sustainable Recovery* (Addis Ababa and Paris, 2022). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/2e3b97fd-en>.

their efforts and policies to promote the development of key industries and infrastructure. South Africa is the only sub-Saharan country with a higher industrialization index score than the countries in North Africa.¹⁴

15. Although the countries in North Africa participate in numerous global value chains, the scope and scale of their participation remains limited. North African countries have relatively high forward participation rates owing to the fact that they are major exporters of raw materials, including oil, gas and phosphates. On the other hand, they have relatively low levels of backward participation because their manufacturing sectors are still relatively underdeveloped. For the subregion as a whole, forward participation between 2000 and 2019 comprised some 80 per cent of their engagement in global value chains, while backward participation accounted for approximately 20 per cent. The most significant global value chains for the subregion are in the textiles, agrifood, automotive and aerospace sectors. A number of factors account for the limited participation of North African countries in global value chains, including the modest size of their domestic markets, a shortage of skilled labour and, for some countries, political instability. To strengthen their participation in global value chains, North African countries must increase their investments in education and training in order to enhance workers' skill levels, while also fostering political stability and promoting regional integration.¹⁵

16. Agricultural value chains could play an important role in transforming the economies of North and West Africa by helping to address food insecurity, creating trading opportunities to meet food needs and creating high-quality jobs for young people, who comprise a very large proportion of the population of the two subregions. The agricultural sector remains the main provider of employment in West Africa, with some 65 per cent of the active work force employed therein. Furthermore, women account for 80 per cent of jobs in agricultural processing, 70 per cent of marketing jobs and nearly 90 per cent of street sales of ready-to-eat products. The food industry employs 82 million people in West Africa,¹⁶ and ECA underscored that four out of the five priority products selected to accelerate structural transformation in the subregion through industrialization, diversification and export sophistication are agricultural products, namely fruits and vegetables, cashew nuts and almonds, flour roots and tubers, and cocoa and cocoa products, with fish and shellfish as the other (non-agricultural) priority product.

17. The agriculture sector is an important contributor to the North African economy. Indeed, the sector contributed 12 per cent of the subregion's GDP in 2019 and over 20 per cent of employment. It contributes, on average, about 40 per cent of employment in Mauritania and 30 per cent of employment in Egypt and Morocco.¹⁷ Agriculture in North Africa primarily involves small-scale farms and family-owned businesses, which typically enjoy only limited access to markets, technology and credit.¹⁸ Climate change poses a significant risk to the sector,

¹⁴ African Development Bank, African Union Commission and United Nations Industrial Development Organization, *Africa Industrialization Index 2022* (2022). Available at: www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-industrialization-index-2022.

¹⁵ African Union Commission and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Africa's Development Dynamics 2022: Regional Value Chains for a Sustainable Recovery*.

¹⁶ Thomas Allen, Philipp Heinrigs and Inhoi Heo, "Agriculture, food and jobs in West Africa", West African Papers, No. 14, (Paris, 2018). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/dc152bc0-en>.

¹⁷ African Development Bank, *North Africa Economic Outlook 2018* (2018). Available at: www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/2018AEO/African-Economic-Outlook-2018-North-Africa.pdf.

¹⁸ FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2020* (Rome, 2020). Available at: www.fao.org/state-of-food-agriculture/2020/en/.

which also faces significant challenges related to water scarcity. The subregion has also struggled to improve agricultural productivity and efficiency. To increase the productivity of the agricultural sector and its contribution to GDP, investments are needed in agricultural research and development, while action must also be taken to improve access to credit and markets for farmers, promote the adoption of innovative technologies and enhance coordination across agricultural value chains. If appropriate steps are taken, agriculture value chains could make a significant contribution to the subregion's economic development.

Accelerating the energy transition for sustainable development in North and West Africa

18. Worldwide, more than 1 billion people gained access to electricity between 2010 and 2021. Nevertheless, some 675 million people, 567 million of whom live in Africa, still have no access to electricity.¹⁹ Further efforts are needed in that regard, as it is estimated that only 92 per cent of the global population will have access to electricity by 2030, leaving 660 million people unserved, of which 85 per cent will be in Africa, excluding North Africa. Furthermore, some 970 million Africans lack access to clean cooking fuels and technologies, and concerted efforts are needed to get the world back on track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 7 on ensuring universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services by 2030.

19. Energy poverty continues to impede industrialization, trade and broader socioeconomic development in Africa, even though the continent has enormous potential for renewable power generation using hydropower, solar, wind and geothermal energy. Approximately 9 per cent of all energy generated in Africa in 2020 came from renewable sources, in particular hydropower. The provision of affordable energy to all Africans must remain a top priority for policymakers. In that regard, it should be noted that there is great potential in Africa for the production of hydrogen using the continent's abundant renewable energy resources. Indeed, with further cost declines, Africa has the potential to produce 5,000 megatons of hydrogen per year, equivalent to current total global energy supplies, at less than \$2 per kilogram. To achieve the continent's energy goals, current annual energy investments in African countries must be more than doubled to \$190 billion per year between 2026 and 2030, with two thirds of those investments allocated to clean power generation technologies.²⁰

20. West Africa has one of the world's lowest rates of access to electricity, and only 42 per cent of the total population and 8 per cent of rural residents in the subregion enjoy access to electricity. The Economic Community of West African States adopted a renewable energy policy in 2013 with the aim of increasing the use of renewable energy sources, including solar, wind, small-scale hydro and bioenergy, to generate grid electricity supplies and increase access to energy services in rural areas. It contained a call for 10 per cent of the subregion's overall electricity mix to be generated from renewable energy sources by 2020, with the share falling slightly to 19 per cent by 2030. If large-scale hydropower generation was included, however, renewable energy sources would increase from 35 per cent of the total energy mix of the subregion in 2020 to 48 per cent by 2030.

¹⁹ International Energy Agency and others, *Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report, 2023* (June 2023). Available at: www.iea.org/reports/tracking-sdg7-the-energy-progress-report-2023.

²⁰ International Energy Agency (2022), *Africa Energy Outlook 2022, Key findings* (May 2023). Available at: www.iea.org/reports/africa-energy-outlook-2022/key-findings.

21. With regard to energy security, several middle-income countries in North Africa, namely Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, have already achieved near-universal access to electricity and clean fuels and technology (indicator 7.1.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals) owing to effective public policies that have promoted major grid extensions, rural electrification programmes and the expansion of gas networks and liquefied petroleum gas distribution. On the other hand, according to World Bank data, only 48 per cent, 62 per cent and 70 per cent of the populations of Mauritania, the Sudan and Libya, respectively, enjoy access to electricity.²¹ Since 2000, more than 20 million people have gained access to electricity in North Africa, with access in rural areas increasing at a faster rate than in other regions of the world. Challenges remain, however, including the need to ensure affordable access, limit the pressure on public finances and ensure the reliability of electricity supplies. The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in millions of people sliding back into poverty. Ensuring that the poorest members of society are able to pay for, and do not lose access to, essential energy services must remain a key objective in the months and years to come. It will also be important to increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the total energy mix of North Africa (target 7.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals) and to continue to support the subregion's transition to clean power generation. In that regard, North Africa continues to lead the continent in terms of the development of its renewable energy capacity, and a number of low-carbon hydrogen projects have been launched in Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. These include projects to produce ammonia for fertilizer by exploiting renewable energy sources, which could play an essential role in strengthening food security on the continent.

22. Algeria is already the largest supplier of natural gas to Italy and a major supplier to Spain. Moreover, a number of new ambitious pipeline projects are planned to supply natural gas from North and West African countries to consumers in Europe. Those projects, which include the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline, which will run from Nigeria to Algeria, and the Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline, could also help meet the energy needs of 13 African countries, supporting their industrial and economic development by delivering reliable and sustainable supplies of energy and generating employment opportunities. Furthermore, global declines in the cost of hydrogen production could allow North and West African countries to deliver hydrogen products using renewable energy sources to Europe at internationally competitive prices by 2030.

II. Objectives

23. The year 2023 marks a critical juncture, namely the midway point for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To ensure that the countries of North and West Africa achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including the Goals on food security and on affordable, reliable and sustainable energy use, by the 2030 deadline, it will be crucial to take action to develop and strengthen regional value chains. The joint session will provide a forum for evidence-based analysis of those two critical issues as they relate to the two subregions and for the development of transformative solutions to address pervasive food insecurity, the slow pace of the energy transition and the limited scope and extent of regional value chains.

²¹ World Bank, "Access to electricity (% of population)", World Bank Open Data database. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.ELC.ACCS.ZS> (accessed on 10 August 2023).

24. Participants will also discuss the activity reports and results achieved by the two subregional offices, review their future work programmes and refine their strategic directions, as they relate to the development priorities of North and West African countries and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

III. Expected results

25. Participants will refine and adopt the respective reports that will be submitted by the subregional offices and will draw up recommendations for decision makers to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the two subregions.

26. The Subregional Office for North Africa and the Subregional Office for West Africa will each prepare a separate report on the joint session, in which they will summarize the presentations, discussions, and conclusions and recommendations. The reports will be submitted to the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, the principal deliberative organ of the Economic Commission for Africa.

IV. Organization and operational details

27. The thirty-eighth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa and the twenty-sixth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa will be held in plenary format during which reports and papers drafted by the two subregional offices will be introduced and discussed. Draft versions of the final reports on the joint session will be sent to ECA members in North and West Africa within one month of the closure of the session.

V. Participation

28. Participation at the joint session is open in particular to high-level representatives of national ministries, administrations and institutions responsible for planning, economic and social development, finance, employment, trade and industry, statistics, energy, agriculture and the environment. Representatives of the general secretariat of the Arab Maghreb Union, the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States, the West African Economic and Monetary Union, other subregional intergovernmental organizations based in North and West Africa, civil society, the private sector, universities, research institutions, United Nations entities and other development partners may participate as observers.

VI. Date and venue

29. The joint session will be held from 1 to 3 November 2023 in Accra.

VII. Working languages

30. Arabic, English and French will be the working languages of the session.

VIII. Administrative arrangements and logistics

31. Relevant information pertaining to the logistical and administrative arrangements of the joint session and information about Accra and Ghana will be sent to confirmed participants in due course.

IX. Contacts

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