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Economic Commission for Africa
Committee on Private Sector Development,
Regional Integration, Trade, Infrastructure,
Industry and Technology
Fourth session
Addis Ababa (hybrid), 18 and 19 November 2025

Agenda item 8

Consideration and adoption of the report on the session

Report of the Committee on Private Sector Development, Regional Integration, Trade, Infrastructure, Industry and Technology on its fourth session

Introduction

1. The fourth session of the Committee on Private Sector Development, Regional Integration, Trade, Infrastructure, Industry and Technology was held in Addis Ababa on 18 and 19 November 2025. The session was convened under the theme “Leveraging frontier technologies and innovation to advance regional integration for sustainable and inclusive growth”.

2. Three expert group meetings preceded the session. They consisted of a review of a draft study on standards and norms for successful special economic zones in Africa; a conversation on the findings and recommendations contained in the report *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa (ARIA XI): Delivering on the African Economic Community – Towards an African Continental Customs Union and African Continental Common Market*; and a workshop to raise awareness of and build capacity in using the integrated planning and reporting toolkit developed by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to align national development plans with the Awaza Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2024–2034 and with the priorities reflected in such regional and global development frameworks as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, and the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries.

Attendance

3. Representatives of the following members of ECA attended the session in person: Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.



4. Representatives of the following intergovernmental institutions and organizations attended the session: African Development Bank, African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development, African Youth Union Commission.
5. The following subregional entities were represented: Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Southern African Development Community, Regional Electricity Regulatory Authority of the Economic Community of West African States.
6. Observers from the following institutions and organizations attended the session: African Economic Research Consortium; Ghana Free Zones Authority; Kwame Nkrumah University, Zambia; Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda; Nigeria Economic Zones Association; Special Economic Zones Authority of Botswana; Triple Line Consulting; University of Johannesburg, South Africa; University of Lomé.
7. The complete list of participants will be circulated as an information document.

I. Opening of the session [agenda item 1]

8. The meeting was opened by the Chair of the outgoing Bureau (the representative of Guinea-Bissau). He thanked ECA, as the secretariat of the Committee, for organizing the session. He expressed gratitude to the Government of Ethiopia for hosting the meeting. The Chair of the outgoing Bureau underscored the importance of the meeting and the choice of theme, "Leveraging frontier technologies and innovation to advance regional integration for sustainable and inclusive growth", which he said was timely, considering the heavy impact of the far-reaching global and regional challenges on African economies and the need to build back better. He concluded by reiterating his country's support for the Chair of the incoming Bureau and the secretariat in implementing its programmes and activities.
9. In his opening remarks, the Executive Secretary of ECA welcomed the participants to the session. He highlighted major developments that had occurred in the past five years on the African continent, including the rapid advance of frontier technologies and the deepening of continental integration under the African Continental Free Trade Area. He concluded by saying that ECA would continue to implement measures to assist African countries in striving for industrialization in a manner that was consistent with the theme of the fourth session.

II. Election of the Bureau [agenda item 2]

10. The participants elected the following countries to constitute its Bureau, on the basis of rotating subregional representation:

Chair a.i.:	Zimbabwe (Southern Africa) ¹
First Vice-Chair:	Mauritania (North Africa)
Second Vice-Chair:	United Republic of Tanzania (East Africa)
Third Vice-Chair:	Democratic Republic of the Congo (Central Africa)
Rapporteur:	Cabo Verde (West Africa)

¹ Zimbabwe served as Chair a.i. on behalf of Southern Africa during the fourth session, pending notification to the Committee of the final nomination for the subregion.

11. After the election, the Chair a.i. of the incoming Bureau, the representative of Zimbabwe, thanked participants for their support and trust. He then acknowledged the excellent work and leadership of the Chair of the outgoing Bureau. The Chair a.i. of the incoming Bureau thanked ECA for its outstanding work, commended its staff members for their expertise and welcomed the prospect of the Commission continuing to provide support to its members. He committed himself to giving his full support to ECA in the implementation of its programmes during his mandate as Chair of the Bureau.

III. Consideration and adoption of the agenda and programme of work [agenda item 3]

12. The Chair a.i. introduced the provisional agenda of the fourth session, as set out in document E/ECA/CPRTIIT/4/1. The agenda was adopted as follows, with no amendments:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of the Bureau.
3. Consideration and adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
4. Presentation of reports by the secretariat:
 - (a) Deepening regional integration in Africa: enabling regional value chains through the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area for innovation, diversification and economic transformation;
 - (b) Frontier technologies: catalysts for innovation, regional integration and sustainable development;
 - (c) Harnessing energy and transport for economic and social transformation in Africa.
5. Presentation on the theme of the session: “Leveraging frontier technologies and innovation to advance regional integration for sustainable and inclusive growth”.
6. General discussion on the theme.
7. Review of the 2024 and 2025 programme plans relating to private sector development, regional integration, trade, infrastructure, industry and technology, and the priorities of the 2026 programme plan.
8. Consideration and adoption of the report on the session.
9. Closing of the session.

13. The programme of work, as set out in document E/ECA/CPRTIIT/4/3/Rev.1, was adopted with no amendments.

IV. Presentation of reports by the secretariat [agenda item 4]

A. Deepening regional integration in Africa: enabling regional value chains through the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area for innovation, diversification and economic transformation

1. Presentation

14. A representative of the secretariat introduced a report on the sub-item (E/ECA/CPRTIIT/4/6), emphasizing that the competitiveness of Africa in the global digital economy depended on harmonized regulations, interoperable systems and strong cross-border infrastructure. He said that, unfortunately, weak regional integration and connectivity gaps continued to limit progress. The creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area could address those challenges by advancing regulatory coherence, lowering compliance costs and attracting digital investment. In addition, frontier technologies – such as digital customs systems and interoperable regulatory platforms – could accelerate the transition of Africa towards a continental customs union and a common market. Building on that foundation, regional frameworks had the potential to spur regional value chains in the food processing, tourism, health, pharmaceutical and automotive industries. Such technology- and knowledge-driven value chains offered a path to inclusive industrialization, economic resilience and deeper regional integration.

2. Discussion

15. In the ensuing discussion, participants highlighted the need to strengthen the approach to digital technology in Africa by prioritizing youth-led innovation, improving access to finance for the development of technology and leveraging universities as hubs for research and development. Participants emphasized the importance of enhancing and protecting intellectual property rights in order to safeguard innovation and promote technological progress. In addition, they noted the need to scale up digital trade solutions, with a view to boosting intra-African trade, enriching trade information and supporting the integration of small and medium-sized enterprises into regional value chains. Furthermore, participants highlighted the fact that many firms across the continent remained at the early stages of industrialization, underscoring the need for strategies to accelerate the adoption of frontier technologies and ensure that digital transformation contributed to the region's industrial and integration goals.

3. Recommendations

16. In the light of the discussion, the Committee made the following recommendations:

(a) Members of ECA are encouraged:

(i) To strengthen digital skills and innovation ecosystems by fostering closer collaboration among academic institutions, industry and government;

(ii) To improve access to finance for young innovators and small and medium-sized enterprises, including access to targeted funding mechanisms designed to support digital entrepreneurship and the development of technology;

(iii) To develop and enforce robust intellectual property rights systems, in order to safeguard technologies developed in Africa and encourage investment in innovation;

- (iv) To adopt digital trade solutions, such as the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System and other payment platforms, in order to reduce costs and enhance trade facilitation;
- (b) ECA is encouraged:
 - (i) To provide technical assistance and capacity-building in relation to digital transformation, industrial upgrading and the adoption of frontier technologies among its members;
 - (ii) To strengthen support for innovation ecosystems, including by establishing programmes that build digital skills, promote youth entrepreneurship and enhance collaboration between universities and industries;
 - (iii) To assist its members in developing or strengthening intellectual property frameworks and leveraging emerging technologies that are in line with regional integration priorities;
 - (iv) To promote the adoption and expansion of digital trade platforms by providing guidance, policy analysis and capacity support in relation to digital trade readiness.

B. Frontier technologies: catalysts for innovation, regional integration and sustainable development

1. Presentation

17. A representative of the secretariat introduced a report on the sub-item (E/ECA/CPRTIIT/4/7), noting that frontier technologies – such as artificial intelligence, genetic sequencing and robotics – were reshaping economies and societies worldwide. He said that, for Africa, such a rapid technological shift brought both challenges and vast opportunities. Those technologies could strengthen the innovation ecosystem, boost public and private sector efficiency and accelerate progress towards sustainable development. With the continent's expanding single market, Africa had a unique possibility to harness those tools to deepen regional integration and build home-grown technological solutions. Among the frontier technology trends most relevant to Africa were the falling costs of technology; the increasing usability of such digital tools as artificial intelligence; the industrial maturity of robotics, electric vehicles and other technologies; the development of cleaner energy systems, driven by environmental pressures; and the growing use of blockchain technology to enhance transparency and reduce corruption. Measures that were needed in order to unlock markets included strong public leadership and national strategies; joint ventures in technology-intensive infrastructure; alliances with global leaders in technology development; centres of excellence in emerging fields; the integration of frontier technologies into educational systems; testing and experimentation environments; and greater stakeholder participation, accountability and transparency. Frontier technologies could play a pivotal role in regional integration by improving cross-border trade, reducing inefficiencies and strengthening market linkages. The implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and the creation of a continental market could stimulate the development and diffusion of frontier technologies by enabling the introduction of shared facilities for research and development, supporting common standards and incentivizing investment in innovation ecosystems.

2. Discussion

18. In the ensuing discussion, the Committee deliberated on the growth of the market for electric vehicles, the need for African-based production and overall African capabilities in power generation. Participants emphasized the

importance of recycling electric vehicle batteries and developing African manufacturing capabilities to produce solar panels and generate solar power. They discussed the inequality in the adoption of technology, with marginalized segments of society and less developed countries lagging behind; the benefits of manufacturing technology on the continent, including reduced external dependencies; the broader benefits of technological development; the role of small and medium-sized enterprises in technology development; and how frontier technologies could help to reduce the cost of mobility, travel and digital infrastructure.

3. Recommendations

19. In the light of the discussion, the Committee made the following recommendations:

- (a) Members of ECA are encouraged:
 - (i) To promote the principles of the circular economy in the production and use of electric vehicle batteries;
 - (ii) To collaborate in promoting the creation of a regional value chain for electric vehicle batteries, leveraging the endowment of critical minerals on the continent;
- (b) ECA is encouraged:
 - (i) To support its members in developing strategies to produce and recycle electric vehicle batteries;
 - (ii) To conduct studies on logistics, transport and telecommunications, with a view to assisting in the design of policies to address high costs and limited access in those areas;
 - (iii) To promote integrated electric vehicle policies in the countries and subregions of Africa.

C. Harnessing energy and transport for economic and social transformation in Africa

1. Presentation

20. A representative of the secretariat introduced a report on the sub-item (E/ECA/CPRTIIT/4/8), noting that Africa was at a pivotal moment in its infrastructural transformation. He said that ECA had supported the development of the continent's transport corridors, regional integration projects and energy systems. African countries had prioritized sustainability, improved cross-border connectivity and mobilized domestic resources to reshape the continent's infrastructure landscape.

2. Discussion

21. There were no discussions under the sub-item.

3. Recommendations

22. No recommendations were made under the sub-item.

**V. Presentation on the theme of the session:
“Leveraging frontier technologies and innovation to
advance regional integration for sustainable and
inclusive growth” [agenda item 5]**

23. A representative of the secretariat introduced a report on the agenda item (E/ECA/CPRTIIT/4/5), highlighting that frontier technologies, such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, renewable energy and digital finance, were powerful drivers of transformation and regional integration in Africa. He said that those innovations were already reshaping vital sectors – from e-mobility and agricultural technology to mining and financial technology (known as fintech) – while offering new tools to advance the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Technology and integration were mutually reinforcing, with the African Continental Free Trade Area providing the means for innovation to thrive. Greater investment in skills, research, infrastructure and markets were required to boost the continent’s readiness. Participants were urged to reflect on how to ensure that frontier technologies could deliver inclusive and sustainable growth across the continent.

VI. General discussion on the theme [agenda item 6]

A. Panel discussion

24. The representative of the secretariat of COMESA underscored his regional economic community’s growing experience with using frontier technologies to advance regional integration. He said that digital solutions had enhanced trade facilitation, including through single-window systems and online monitoring platforms. A digital payment system for the entire regional economic community, implemented through the COMESA clearing house, was addressing currency incompatibilities and promoting financial inclusion for cross-border traders. Ongoing work to harmonize standards, certifications and regulatory frameworks for goods and technology products was reducing fragmentation and improving compliance. With European Union support, COMESA was also supporting the strengthening of regional value chains through programmes in the agrifood sector.

25. The representative of the secretariat of the Southern African Development Community indicated that the abundant natural resources of Africa provided a powerful springboard for advancing frontier technologies and innovation. He said that they enabled the continent to play a strategic role in global high-tech value chains by supporting African-based processing of minerals for batteries and semiconductors, powering digital industries with low-carbon energy and leveraging biodiversity for breakthroughs in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and bioengineering. Extensive agricultural land also created opportunities for precision farming, satellite-based monitoring and climate-smart agriculture. To harness such opportunities, he emphasized the need to invest in infrastructure and in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and to leverage regional collaboration.

B. General discussion

26. In the ensuing discussion, participants stressed the importance of planning and governance, regional collaboration and the leveraging of private sector participation in harnessing frontier technologies. They further emphasized the need for Governments to de-risk investment and improve the business environment and for pan-African banks to play a role in reducing the

cost of capital. Participants said that frontier technologies could boost the productivity of small and medium-sized enterprises, support youth employment and promote value addition, reducing dependence on raw material exports. Innovation should be targeted with a view to deepening intra-African trade, while ensuring job protection amid automation. Participants also underscored the need for continental regulatory harmonization, in particular the accelerated ratification of the Protocol to the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area on Digital Trade. They also highlighted opportunities in e-mobility, critical minerals, reverse engineering and safe e-waste management for end-of-life electric vehicle batteries.

C. Recommendations

27. In the light of the discussion, the Committee made the following recommendations:

- (a) Members of ECA are encouraged:
 - (i) To de-risk conditions for investment in frontier technologies and foster a conducive environment for private sector participation;
 - (ii) To assess the role of Governments in actively promoting and facilitating investment in frontier technologies;
 - (iii) To reduce the costs of doing business that affect the development of frontier technologies;
 - (iv) To accelerate the ratification and implementation of the Protocol to the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area on Digital Trade;
- (b) ECA is encouraged:
 - (i) To support African countries in learning from each other, demonstrate best practices and advise on how to leverage frontier technologies for sustainable development;
 - (ii) To support its members in the accelerated implementation of the Protocol to the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area on Digital Trade;
 - (iii) To facilitate such platforms as an alliance for African universities and research labs;
 - (iv) To support capacity development relating to market-ready solutions;
 - (v) To consider assisting with the scaling-up of such initiatives as the COMESA circular economy project, funded by the European Union;
 - (vi) To explore options for establishing a fast-track channel for the safe and efficient transportation of secondary materials, such as used electric vehicle batteries, for the purposes of enabling the management of end-of-life electric vehicle batteries, of facilitating reverse engineering and of strengthening related value chains across the continent.

VII. Review of the 2024 and 2025 programme plans relating to private sector development, regional integration, trade, infrastructure, industry and technology, and the priorities of the 2026 programme plan [agenda item 7]

A. Presentation

28. A representative of the secretariat provided a summary of the proposed programme plan for 2026 and reviewed programme performance in 2024 and 2025 in the following three subprogramme areas that were under the purview of the Committee: technology, innovation, connectivity and infrastructure; regional integration and trade; and private sector development and finance.

B. Discussion

29. Participants highlighted the central role of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area in the achievement of increased intra-African trade, productive capacity and regional integration. They emphasized the importance of updated national implementation strategies to reflect the protocols to the Agreement addressed during the second phase of the negotiations on the Agreement, the elimination of non-tariff barriers, better customs practices and greater private sector participation. They also stressed that successful implementation required adequate financing, operational guidance and sustained stakeholder engagement.

30. Participants stressed the urgent need to advance energy security across the continent, emphasizing that the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 7 remained a priority. They called for States to receive help with the exploitation of their vast energy resources in ways that fostered economic development, highlighting the importance of improved regulatory environments for the attraction of private investment in energy infrastructure, the promotion of public-private partnerships and the establishment of clear frameworks to accelerate clean energy development. They also underscored the importance of infrastructure for the manufacture and use of electric vehicles, which should include appropriate standards, policies, regulations and financing instruments.

31. Participants emphasized the importance of strengthening regional energy interconnections. They noted that cross-border trade in electricity, regional power pools and integrated regional markets was essential for reducing energy costs, enhancing energy security and advancing industrialization. They also called for support in the acceleration of regional interconnection projects, stressing the need to advance transformational flagship energy infrastructure projects, such as the Grand Inga Dam – the capacity of which would exceed 40,000 MW and could meet the electricity needs of the entire continent² – and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

32. Participants highlighted the need to enhance connectivity and logistics to support trade, industrialization and mobility, stressing that African road, rail, maritime, air and inland waterway transport systems remained fragmented and inefficient. They also pointed to persistent delays, high logistics costs and inadequate transport corridor infrastructure as critical obstacles to intra-African trade, emphasizing the need for targeted analytical work to identify gaps and prioritize high-impact transport and electrification projects. In addition, they

² Africa Energy Portal, “World Bank targets \$80B for Africa’s mega Inga dam”, 20 November 2024.

called for support in improving transport corridor efficiency and reducing the bottlenecks that raised the cost of doing business.

33. Participants spotlighted the growing role of innovation and frontier technologies in the acceleration of integration and development. They also stressed the need to strengthen African centres of excellence; improve access to the standards issued by standardizing bodies, including the International Organization for Standardization; develop specialized human capital; and update regulatory frameworks in such areas as artificial intelligence, data governance and digital technologies. In addition, they highlighted risks related to intellectual property theft, smuggling and limited market access for local innovators, calling for regulatory reforms that fostered both innovation and security.

34. Participants underscored the importance for trade of quality infrastructure, emphasizing that standards, certification, accreditation, packaging and laboratory infrastructure were essential for enabling firms, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, to benefit from the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. They also noted persistent challenges in meeting quality requirements, overcoming non-tariff barriers and understanding certification processes, in particular for perishable goods.

35. Participants stressed the relevance of security-sensitive development planning, underscoring that insecurity continued to constrain industrialization, trade and regional integration, in particular along major commercial and transport routes. They requested support with incorporating security considerations into project planning, sequencing and implementation, in order to safeguard investments and ensure that development gains were sustained.

36. Participants highlighted the need to diversify production and develop regional value chains, noting that limited variety in exports and the concentration of similar product structures across many countries undermined the potential of intra-African trade. They also called for strengthened analytical support and technical assistance to help countries to diversify their exports, expand value addition and develop competitive regional value chains aligned with market opportunities within the African Continental Free Trade Area.

C. Recommendations

37. In the light of the presentations and the discussion, ECA is encouraged:

(a) To strengthen support for the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and for the mobilization of resources in order to translate strategies for implementing the Agreement into tangible results, by:

(i) Assisting African States in updating national strategies, in particular by incorporating therein provisions of the protocols to the Agreement addressed during second phase of the negotiations on the Agreement;

(ii) Reducing non-tariff barriers;

(iii) Improving customs administration practices, including governance-related challenges;

(iv) Expanding engagement with private companies;

(v) Building productive capacity;

(b) To scale up support for countries in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 7 through the promotion of the energy transition, the exploitation of the vast renewable and conventional energy

resources of Africa and the improvement of regulatory environments to attract private sector investment, including by assisting with the development of energy policy, strengthening regulatory frameworks, advancing clean energy solutions and supporting the expansion of renewable energy infrastructure;

(c) To assist in accelerating the creation of regional energy interconnections and strengthening regional electricity markets, and to support its members with designing, prioritizing and implementing cross-border energy projects, including such transformational flagship initiatives as the Grand Inga Dam project, and advancing regional power pool mechanisms that enhance energy security and reduce costs;

(d) To reinforce support for e-mobility development by assisting its members in the formulation of policies, regulations, norms, standards and financing mechanisms to accelerate the uptake of electric vehicles, in view of the importance of developing supporting infrastructure, such as charging networks, and aligning electric vehicle deployment with the requirements of the energy transition;

(e) To enhance support for connectivity and logistics by:

(i) Conducting detailed analyses of transport networks;

(ii) Providing guidance on investment in priority road, rail, maritime, air and inland waterway transport corridors;

(iii) Supporting efforts to improve the efficiency of such corridors, including by assisting its members in addressing the delays, bottlenecks and high logistics costs that undermine competitiveness and intra-African trade;

(f) To strengthen support for innovation and frontier technologies through the reinforcement of centres of excellence, expanded access to standards, the development of specialized skills and support for the establishment of regulatory frameworks for such emerging technologies and imperatives as artificial intelligence and data governance, and to help to address such risks as intellectual property theft and limited market access for innovators;

(g) To continue to support resource mobilization among its members, through assistance in the design of financing frameworks, the strengthening of domestic resource mobilization and the establishment of partnerships with development finance institutions and private companies, with a view to closing gaps in the application of national strategies for the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and in the fulfilment of broader development priorities;

(h) To enhance assistance in the improvement of quality infrastructure, including standards, certification, accreditation, packaging and laboratory services, to enable firms, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, to fulfil their trade requirements under the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and overcome non-tariff barriers, with a special focus on perishable goods and sectors with high export potential;

(i) To strengthen support for the incorporation of security-sensitive approaches into development planning and project sequencing, in particular for major transport, energy and trade corridors affected by instability;

(j) To deepen support for production diversification and value chain development, through assistance for countries in identifying competitive sectors, strengthening priority value chains, increasing value addition and reducing export concentration that limits intra-African trade opportunities;

(k) To support trade integration through the provision of market access to African private companies and the use of digital tools to establish connections between such companies and the rest of the world;

(l) To extend its support for the strengthening of development initiatives in Africa, such as fundamental projects relating to infrastructure, technology and energy services, for better trade across the continent.

VIII. Consideration and adoption of the report on the session [agenda item 8]

38. The Committee considered the draft report on its fourth session, adopted it, as amended, and entrusted the secretariat with its finalization.

IX. Closing of the session [agenda item 9]

39. Closing remarks were made by the Chair a.i. of the Bureau, who thanked all participants. He said that he wished to highlight the Committee's central messages on advancing regional integration through frontier technologies, strengthening foundational infrastructure and accelerating the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. The outcomes of the fourth session of the Committee would inform the preparations for the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to be held during the fifty-eighth session of the Commission.

40. Subsequently, the Acting Director of the Regional Integration and Trade Division of ECA, Melaku Desta, thanked all participants for their contributions and commended the secretariat on the organization of the fourth session.

41. The Chair a.i. of the Bureau declared the session closed at 5.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 19 November 2025.
