



Advancing the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area: proposing transformative strategic actions

Fifty-seventh session of the Economic Commission for Africa Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development

12 - 18 March, 2025, Addis Ababa

## SIDE EVENT

*Organized by the Strategic Planning, Oversight and Results Division, the Gender Poverty and Social Policy Division, the Regional Integration and Trade Division and the Subregional Offices of the Economic Commission for Africa, in conjunction with external partners, including the Pan African Youth Union*

# Making the African Continental Free Trade Area work for African young people: opportunities, challenges and the way forward

## Background

A central theme of The Pact for the Future,<sup>1</sup> adopted by the General Assembly in September 2024, is the need to prioritize policies and initiatives that are relevant to the social and economic development of young people and their participation at the national and international levels. In the African context, the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area is the main blueprint for the economic transformation of the continent. Young people in Africa are a major asset in the context of the Agreement. With the youngest population in the world – it is estimated that there are more than 400 million people aged between 15 and 35 years in the region<sup>2</sup> – African young people constitute the biggest resource on which the efforts to implement the Agreement can draw. They will provide the labour, skills, innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship that will drive the implementation. They support the economic development of the continent through their activity in all sectors and aspects of the economy, including information technology, tourism, small-scale and medium-scale manufacturing and the public sector. Through the present side event, their voices, expectations, challenges and opportunities with regard to the implementation of the

Agreement will be given prominence in the discussions that take place during the fifty-seventh session of the Economic Commission for Africa.

## Objectives

The primary objective of the side event is to provide a platform on which young Africans can discuss the implementation of the Agreement, its relevance, efficacy, opportunities and challenges with regard to their interests and the economic development of the continent. Participants will be invited to propose recommendations on the ways in which the Agreement can be made relevant to and be driven by young people. An emphasis will be placed on young Africans in various sectors of the economy, in particular young entrepreneurs who are affected by the Agreement daily.

The main objectives are:

- (a) To provide a platform on which young Africans can discuss the implementation of the Agreement, in particular its relevance efficacy, opportunities and challenges, and the ways in which it can be centred on young people in order to drive the economic transformation and development of the continent;
- (b) To provide an opportunity for young African

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 79/1.

<sup>2</sup> Mabingue Ngom, "AfCFTA: reaping the benefits of the world's most youth and women-friendly trade agreement", Africa Renewal, United Nations, 23 February 2023.



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entrepreneurs in all sectors of the economy to showcase their innovations and creativity and learn about the potential of the Agreement to support their transformative initiatives;

- (c) To make recommendations, from a youth perspective, on the Agreement and the ways in which its implementation can be accelerated to benefit the burgeoning population of young people on the continent.

### Expected outcomes

The following outcomes are expected:

- (a) Improved knowledge and capacity among African youth concerning the Agreement, its implementation and opportunities, and the ways that they can benefit fully from it;
- (b) Recommendations from African youth entrepreneurs on addressing the challenges that they face in taking advantage of the Agreement, growing their businesses and operating at greater scales.

### Speakers

In addition to young African entrepreneurs from various sectors of the economy and young African policymakers and political leaders, including ministers, representatives of the following entities will participate:

- (a) Pan African Youth Union;
- (b) African Union Commission, Youth Division;
- (c) African Union Development Agency;
- (d) African Development Bank;

- (e) African Export-Import Bank;
- (f) United Nations Development Programme;
- (g) African civil society organizations working on youth economic development issues;
- (h) International financial institutions.

### Target audience

The target audience includes: African young people; senior government officials attending the fifty-seventh session of the Economic Commission for Africa; international and regional organizations, including the African Development Bank, the African Export-Import Bank, other international financial institutions, the African Union Commission and the United Nations Development Programme; civil society organizations; and private sector organizations.

### Further information

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