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Statutory issues: Doha Programme of Action for the Least
Developed Countries: report on progress in implementation
of priority areas in Africa

Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries: report on progress in implementation of priority areas in Africa

I. Introduction

1. The Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2022–2031 reflects the strengthened commitment of these countries and their development partners. The Programme encompasses the private sector and civil society, with the aim of achieving sustainable and resilient development. It is built around the following main objectives: ensuring a speedy and inclusive recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic; enhancing resilience against future shocks; eradicating extreme poverty and improving labour markets; enabling graduation from least developed country status; facilitating access to sustainable and innovative financing; addressing inequality; harnessing science, technology and innovation; mainstreaming technology-driven entrepreneurship; advancing structural transformation; and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through a revitalized global partnership.

2. Least developed countries in Africa account for 9.9 per cent of the global population, but only 1 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP), 1.7 per cent of global foreign direct investment and less than 1 per cent of global merchandising exports.¹ These countries face high levels of poverty and vulnerability, as well as the pressing challenge of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Recent global crises have revealed underlying structural fragilities within the economies of African least developed countries. Of the 44 countries currently designated as least developed countries globally, 32 (73 per cent) are in Africa.² Given this concentration, the success of the

* E/ECA/COE/44/1.

¹ World Bank, World Development Indicators, databank. Available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators> (accessed on 29 December 2025).

² United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), “UN list of least developed countries”. Available at <https://unctad.org/topic/least-developed-countries/list>.



global least developed countries agenda, including the Programme, is inextricably linked with the development trajectory of Africa.

II. Graduation from least developed country status in Africa

3. There are two ways in which a country can graduate from least developed country status. The first is to meet any two of the three criteria in two consecutive triennial reviews. The second is to meet the income-only criterion, whereby the gross national income per capita must be at least triple the threshold in two consecutive triennial reviews. In table 1, an overview is provided of the graduation thresholds that countries had to meet to be considered during the two most recent triennial reviews. The next triennial review will be in 2027.

4. Since the inception of the category in 1971, based on General Assembly resolution 2768 (XXVI), only eight countries have graduated from that status as of December 2025: Bhutan (2023), Botswana (1994), Cabo Verde (2007), Equatorial Guinea (2017), Maldives (2011), Samoa (2014), Sao Tome and Principe (2024) and Vanuatu (2020). No country has returned to least developed country status after graduating.

Table 1

Graduation thresholds at the 2021 and 2024 triennial reviews

Year	Gross national income per capita	Human assets index score	Economic and environmental vulnerability index score
2021	US\$ 1,222 or above; or \$2,444 or above on an income-only ^a basis	66 or above	32 or below
2024	\$1,306 or above; or \$3,918 or above on an income-only basis	66 or above	32 or below

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Graduation from the LDC category”, 2024. Available at <https://policy.desa.un.org/themes/least-developed-countries-category/graduation-from-the-ldc-category>, and “The LDC category after the 2021 triennial review”, 2021. Available at <https://policy.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/ldc-category-2021.pdf>.

5. The graduation process can be complex, with countries at different stages.³ In table 2, details are provided of the least developed countries in Africa which have been considered for graduation, along with their status following the 2024 triennial review.

³ Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), “Navigating the complexities of graduating from least developed country status”, ECA Policy Brief (Addis Ababa, 2024). Available at <https://www.uneca.org/macroeconomics-and-governance/publications>.

Table 2
Categories of African least developed countries after the 2024 triennial reviews

<i>Country</i>	<i>Income</i>	<i>Human assets index</i>	<i>Economic vulnerability index</i>	<i>Graduation stage</i>
Sao Tome and Principe (2024)	Threshold passed	Threshold passed	Threshold not passed	Graduated in 2024
Senegal (2029)	Threshold passed	Threshold passed	Threshold not passed	Graduating country
Djibouti	Threshold passed	Threshold passed	Threshold not passed	Recommended for graduation at the 2024 triennial review by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP). However, the Economic and Social Council decided to defer graduation to a later date.
Comoros	Threshold passed	Threshold passed	Threshold not passed	Met criteria two or more times consecutively, but deferred by CDP to the 2027 triennial review.
Rwanda	Threshold not passed	Threshold passed	Threshold passed	Met the criteria for the first time and will be evaluated by CDP at the 2027 triennial review.
Uganda	Threshold not passed	Threshold passed	Threshold passed	
United Republic of Tanzania	Threshold not passed	Threshold passed	Threshold passed	
Zambia	Threshold not passed	Threshold passed	Threshold not passed	Previously in the graduation process but no longer meet the graduation criteria.
Angola	Threshold passed	Threshold not passed	Threshold not passed	

Source: “The 2024 triennial review of the list of least developed countries”, excerpt from report on the twenty-sixth session, see Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2024, Supplement No. 13 (E/2024/33). Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/CDP-excerpt-2024-2.pdf>.

III. Progress in the priority areas

A. Investing in people: eradicating poverty and building capacity

6. The goals of the first key focus area of the Doha Programme of Action include the eradication of poverty, hunger and malnutrition, in all its forms and the advancement of inclusive and sustainable human development by 2030. The Programme prioritizes equal opportunities for all, with special attention given to the poorest and most vulnerable groups, including women and girls, young people, children, older persons and persons with disabilities, as well as people affected by violence and conflict, ensuring that no one is left behind.⁴

⁴ Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, *Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries 2022–2031* (New York, 2022). Available at https://www.un.org/ldc5/sites/www.un.org/ldc5/files/doha_booklet-web.pdf.

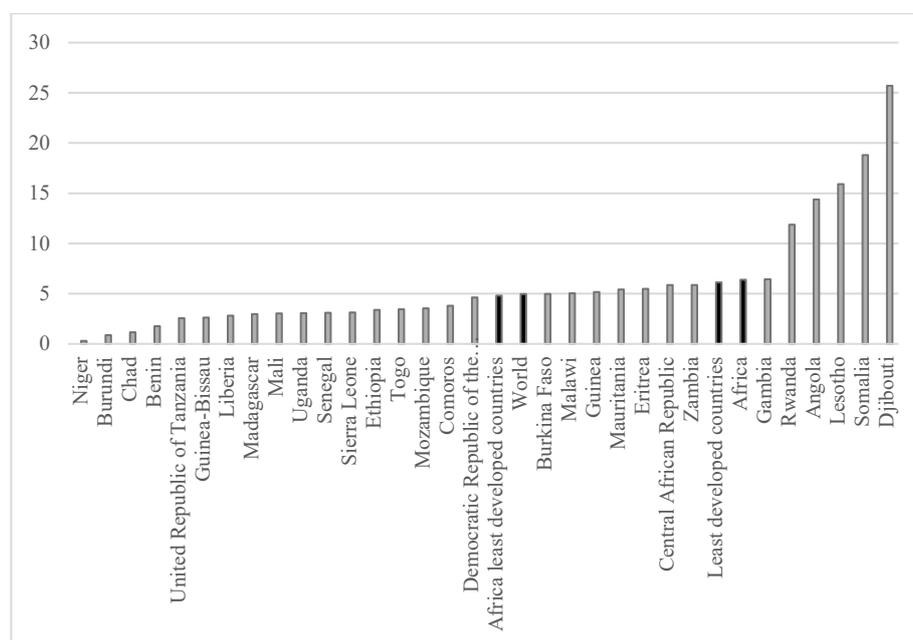
1. Achieving universal access to quality education, skills and lifelong learning

7. Full employment and decent work are essential for achieving sustainable development. A skilled labour force is fundamental to boosting employment and productivity. Labour productivity is essential for raising income levels, which in turn generate substantive consumption and investment within a country⁵ and contribute to overall poverty reduction.

8. The average unemployment rate for people aged 15 years and over in African least developed countries is 4.8 per cent, which is slightly lower than the world average of 4.96 per cent and the African average of 6.39 per cent. As may be seen in figure I, however, there is a wide variation, ranging from 0.312 per cent in Niger to 25.7 per cent in Djibouti.

Figure I

Unemployment rate for persons aged 15 years and over in African least developed countries, least developed countries, Africa and the world, 2025 estimates



Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database, Unemployment rate. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/snapshots/unemployment-rate/> (accessed on 29 November 2025).

Note: No data available for Kiribati, the Sudan, South Sudan and Tuvalu.

2. Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women, girls and young people to address inequality and drive economic growth

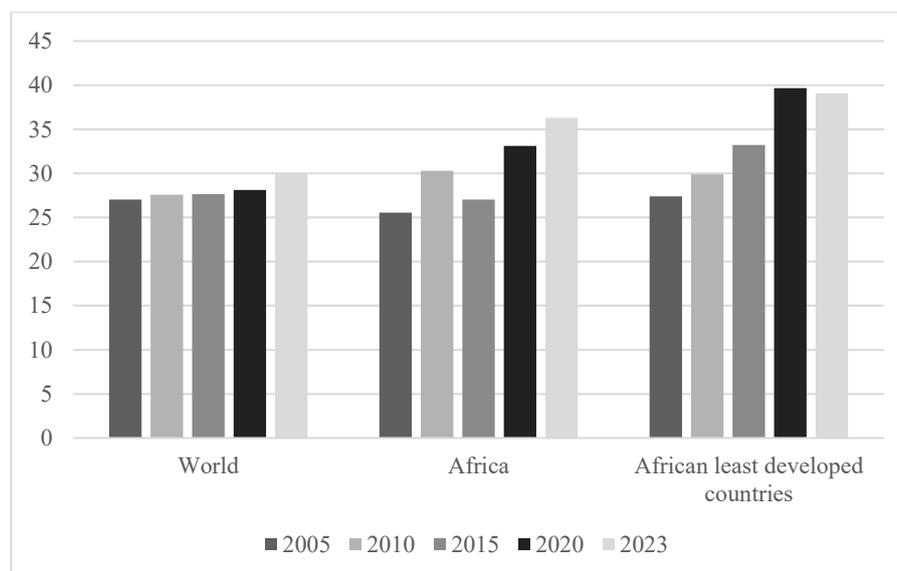
9. Gender equality and the empowerment of women, girls and young people are critical for least developed countries. Gender parity in the workplace is essential for empowering women, promoting inclusive economic growth and ensuring diverse perspectives in decision-making. This is associated with stronger organizational strategy, policy and performance.⁶ According to

⁵ World Bank Group, “Boosting labor productivity in sub-Saharan African countries could bring transformational economic benefits to the region”, press release, 24 March 2022. Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/24/boosting-labor-productivity-in-sub-saharan-african-countries-could-bring-transformational-economic-benefits-to-the-regio>; African Center for Economic Transformation, African Transformation Index 2023: productivity increases. Available at <https://acetforafrica.org/ati/growth-with-depth/productivity-increases/>.

⁶ African Development Bank, African Union Commission, ECA and United Nations Development Programme, *Africa Sustainable Development Report* (Addis Ababa, 2025).

research by the International Labour Organization in 2019, the benefits of gender equality and diversity begin to accrue when women hold 30 per cent of senior management and leadership positions.⁷ As shown in figure II, as of 2023, women in African least developed countries held 39 per cent of managerial positions, exceeding both the global and African averages of 30 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively.

Figure II
Proportion of women in managerial positions, 2005–2023
(Percentage)

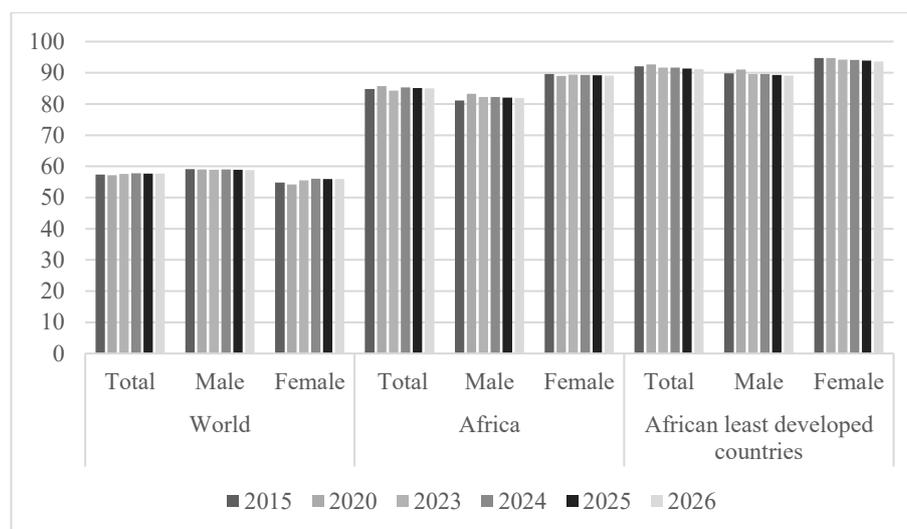


Source: ILO, ILOSTAT regional estimates generator. SDG Indicator 5.5.2: proportion of women in managerial positions (%). Available at <https://rshiny.ilo.org/regionalaggregate/> (accessed on 2 December 2025).

10. Informal employment, however, remains predominant in Africa and African least developed countries, with little change in the composition of this sector since 2015. On average, it is estimated that 91.12 per cent of workers in African least developed countries will be in informal employment by 2026, which is around 6.09 and 33 percentage points above the Africa and global averages, respectively. This figure is relatively unchanged from 92.08 per cent in 2015, with informality being higher among women than men.

⁷ ILO, *Women in Business and Management: the Business Case for Change* (Geneva, International Labour Office, Bureau for Employers' Activities, 2019). Available at https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcms_p5/groups/public/%40dgreports/%40dcomm/%40publ/documents/publication/wcms_n_in Bu700953.pdf.

Figure III
Proportion of employment in total employment by sex, 2015–2026*



Source: ILO, ILOSTAT regional estimates generator. SDG indicator 8.3.1: proportion of informal employment in total employment by sex and sector. Available at <https://rshiny.ilo.org/regionalaggregate/> (accessed on 2 December 2025). *Data for 2026 are projections.

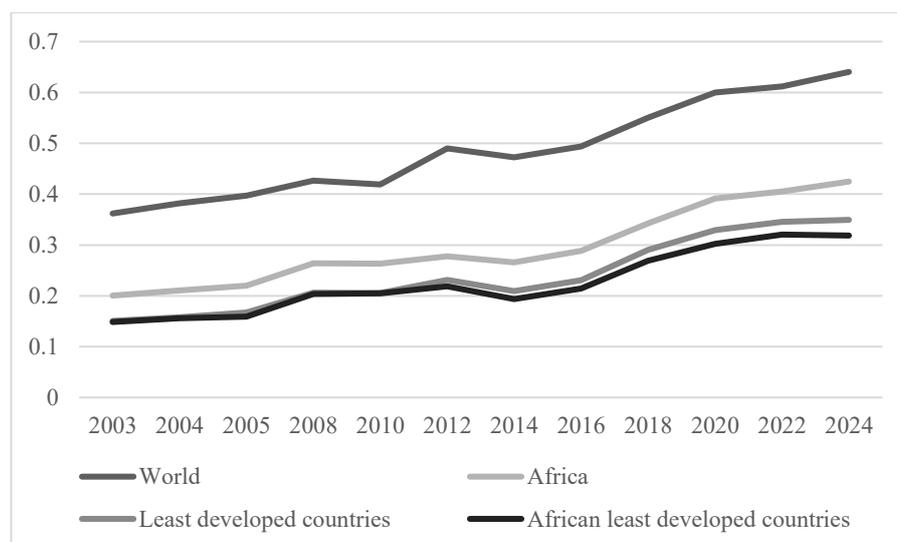
3. Good and effective governance at all levels

11. In the Programme, emphasis is placed on the importance of good governance and the rule of law, inclusiveness, transparency and domestic resource mobilization as crucial elements of the development process of least developed countries. Digital technologies can be utilized to improve the efficiency of public services, accountability, citizen participation and transparency. They can also be utilized to enhance domestic resource mobilization.

12. From the E-Government Development Index, as shown in figure IV, it is evident that the use and application of information technologies in public administration is increasing.⁸ African least developed countries, however, have the lowest scores compared to African and global averages. These scores reflect the need to invest in information technology to improve public service delivery.

⁸ DESA, E-Government Development Index (EGDI), Available at EGOVKB | United Nations > About > Overview > E-Government Development Index.

Figure IV
E-Government Development Index, 2003–2024

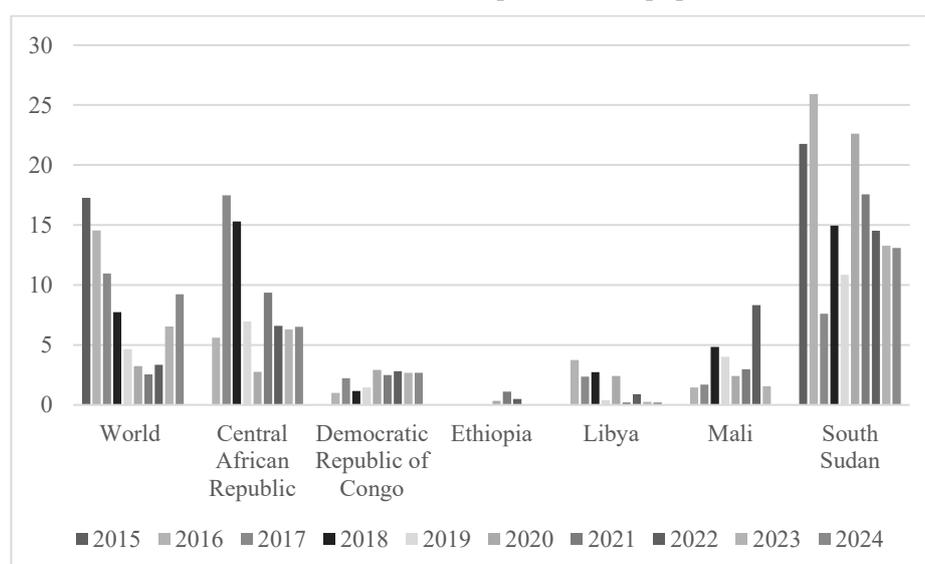


Source: World Bank, Data 360: E-Gov Development Index (UN EGDI) – overall score. Available at https://data360.worldbank.org/en/indicator/UN_EGDI_EGDI (accessed on 29 November 2025).

4. Building and sustaining peace for sustainable development

13. The Programme emphasizes that peace and security are necessary for achieving sustainable development. Moonshot 4 of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union is aimed at promoting the amicable resolution of conflicts in Africa. As shown in figure V, after declining between 2015 and 2021, the number of global, regional and interregional conflicts increased again in 2022, leading to an increase in the number of conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population. African and least developed countries are among those affected by conflict, with Chad and South Sudan recording significant conflict-related deaths.

Figure V
Number of total conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database: SDG Indicator 16.1.2. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database> (accessed on 29 December 2025).

B. Leveraging science, technology and innovation for sustainable development

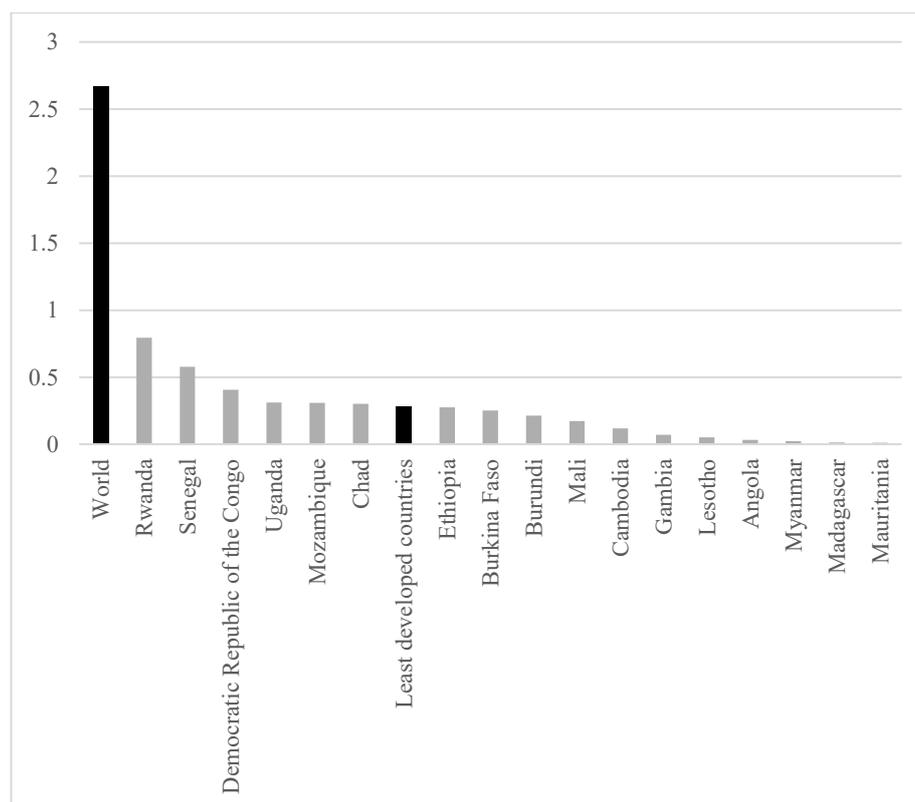
14. The second key focus area of the Programme is the use of science, technology and innovation as strategic tools to combat multidimensional vulnerabilities and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In the Programme, science, technology and innovation are identified as critical for accelerating economic diversification, improving productivity and enabling the full participation of least developed countries in the global digital economy. However, significant disparities persist in access to technology, digital infrastructure and innovation capacities.⁹

1. Investment in research and development

15. Increased investment in research and development is essential for African least developed countries to develop the capabilities required to adopt modern technologies and benefit from the fourth industrial revolution. Nevertheless, as may be seen in figure VI, spending on research and development remains low, at about 0.28 per cent of GDP, compared with the global average of 2.67 per cent. Closing this gap requires national funding, international support for scientific infrastructure and technical assistance to strengthen statistical systems for research and development.

Figure VI

Research and development expenditure as a proportion of GDP, 2015–2023
(Percentage)



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database: SDG Indicator 9.5.1 (accessed on 29 December 2025).

⁹ Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, *Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries 2022–2031*.

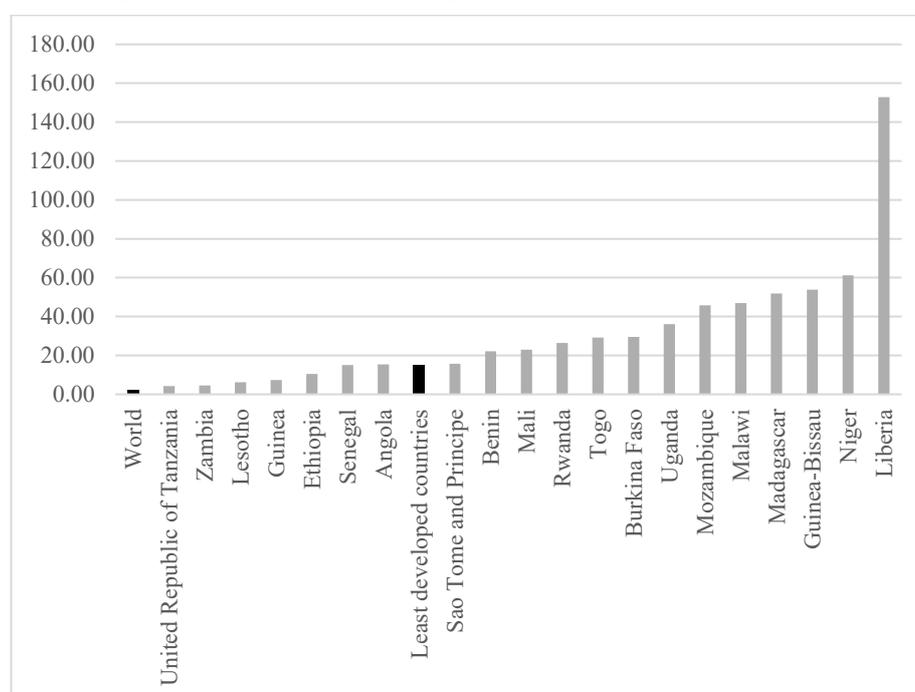
2. Affordability of Internet access

16. The affordability of Internet access remains a significant obstacle to the achievement of universal and meaningful connectivity in African least developed countries. As illustrated in figure VII, fixed broadband services in particular are prohibitively expensive. For the majority of these countries, the cost remains above the affordability target set by the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development of less than 2 per cent of gross national income per capita for entry-level broadband in developing countries by 2025.¹⁰

17. Although generally more accessible, mobile broadband still presents affordability constraints. As shown in figure VIII, the price of a 2GB data-only basket in 2024, as a percentage of gross national income, ranged from 1.75 per cent of gross national income in Ethiopia to 26.70 per cent in the Central African Republic. This affordability gap can undermine the ability to harness technology to reduce vulnerabilities, highlighting the need to accelerate cost reductions and ensure equitable access.

Figure VII

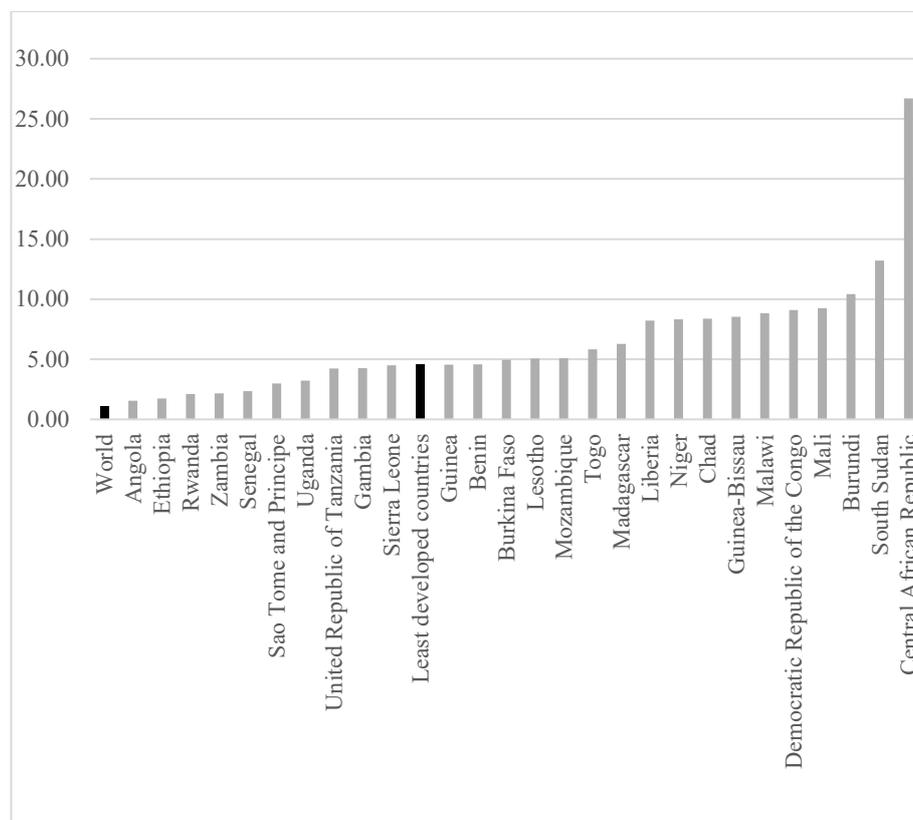
Fixed broadband basket prices of African least developed countries (Percentage of gross national income per capita, 2024)



Source: International Telecommunication Union, “ICT price baskets, historical data series, May 2025 release”. In “Measuring digital development: the affordability of ICT services” (accessed on 28 November 2025).

¹⁰ International Telecommunication Union (2025), “Measuring digital development: the affordability of ICT services” (Geneva, 2024). Available at https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/ind/D-IND-ICT_PRICES_01-2025-PDF-E.pdf.

Figure VIII
Data-only mobile broadband basket (2 GB) prices of African least developed countries
 (Percentage of gross national income per capita, 2024)

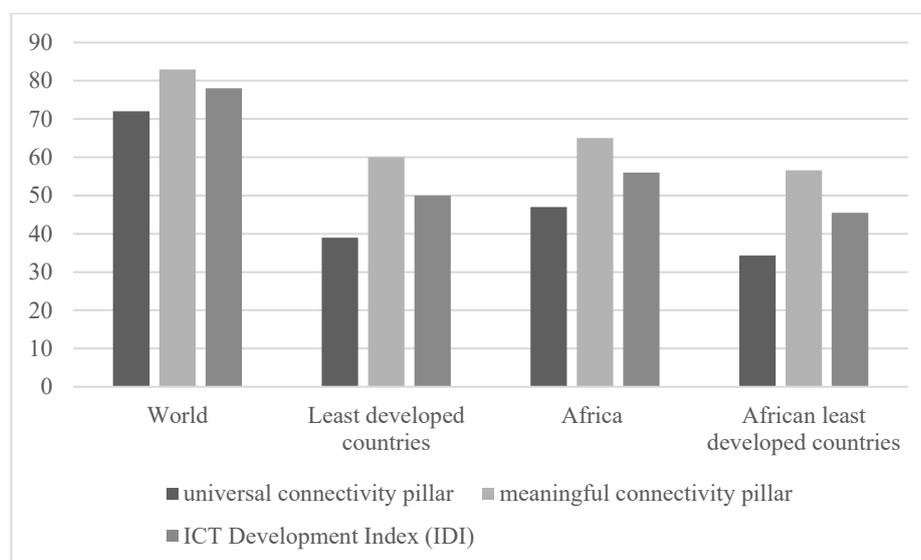


Source: International Telecommunication Union ICT Price Baskets, historical data series, May 2025 release. In “Measuring digital development: the affordability of ICT services” (accessed on 28 November 2025).

3. Information and Communications Technology Development Index

18. The digital divide in technological capabilities can also be reflected by the ICT Development Index, which measures universal and meaningful connectivity. As shown in figure IX, African least developed countries lag with a score of 45.5 in 2025, below the world average (78.0) and the average for all least developed countries (50.0). This score reveals a dual deficit: performance is weak in the universal connectivity pillar (34.3), indicating gaps in basic access and affordability. Meanwhile the score in the meaningful connectivity pillar (56.6) is higher, but still indicates constrained quality of use and digital skills.

Figure IX
Universal and meaningful connectivity pillar scores and ranking in the Information and Communications Technology Development Index, 2025
 (Percentage)



Source: ITU, “ICT Development Index 2025” (Geneva, 2025). Available at https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/ind/D-IND-ICT_MDD-2025-1-PDF-E.pdf.

Note: Data for African least developed countries are calculated by ECA using a simple average of country data.

C. Supporting structural transformation as a driver of prosperity

19. The third key focus area of the Programme is supporting structural transformation as a driver of prosperity. Least developed countries often have low economic diversification, high dependence on agriculture, limited domestic resource mobilization and widespread informality. A smooth and well-managed transformation process supports a gradual shift from low-productivity to high-productivity activities, thereby generating employment, boosting incomes and creating broader opportunities for inclusive development.

1. Productive capacity-building

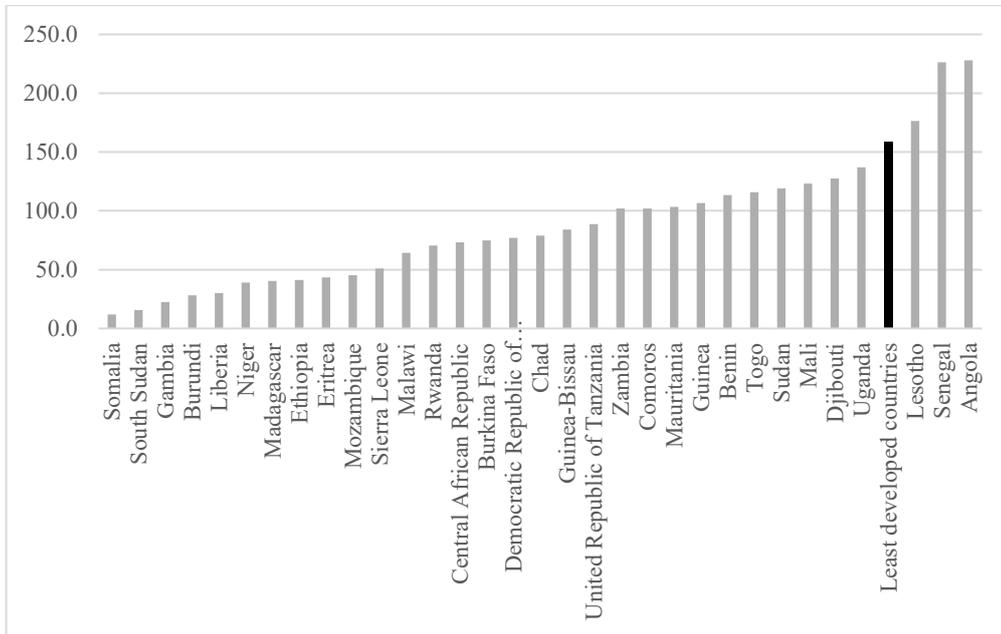
20. Productive capacities encompass human capital, natural resources and physical infrastructure, including energy, transport, information and communication systems, irrigation systems and water and sanitation systems. These elements form the foundation of the productive base in a country. Strengthening these capacities through structural transformation is essential to achieving a sustained and resilient development trajectory in least developed countries.¹¹

21. Manufacturing value added per capita remains persistently low across African least developed countries, with significant variation between countries (see figure X). This is indicative of slow productivity growth in both manufacturing and services, as well as differing degrees of vulnerability and opportunity for structural transformation. A similar pattern is observed in manufacturing value added as a proportion of GDP, which has remained

¹¹ ECA, “Beyond graduation: crafting resilient transitions for African least developed countries” (forthcoming).

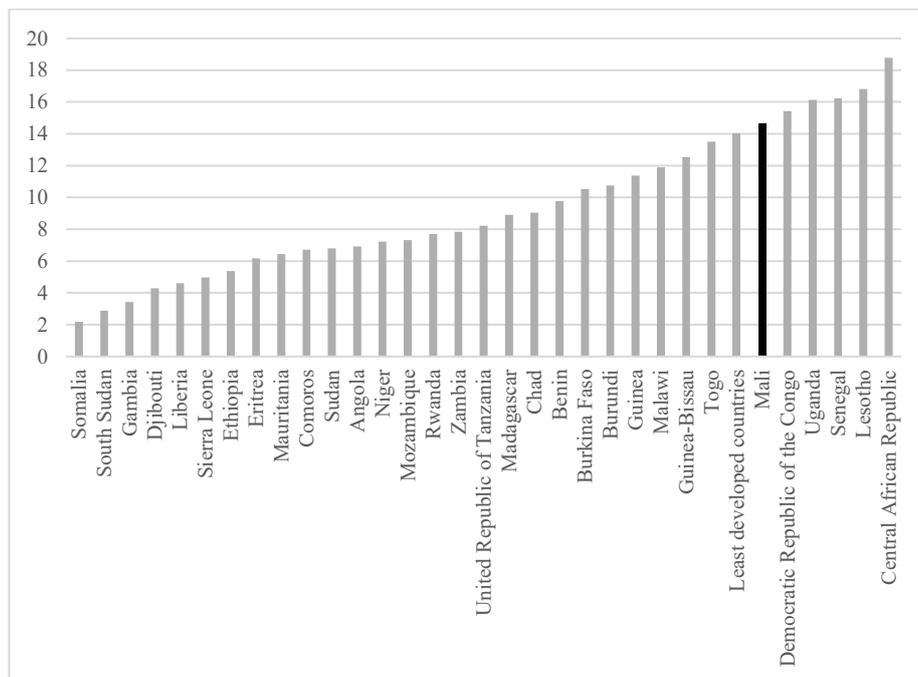
stagnant at low levels for most African least developed countries, generally below the overall least developed country average (see figure XI).

Figure X
Manufacturing value added per capita
 (Value in constant United States dollars; average for 2016–2024)



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database: SDG Indicator 9.2.1 (accessed on 29 December 2025).

Figure XI
Manufacturing value added (constant 2015 United States dollars) as a proportion of GDP
 (Percentage)

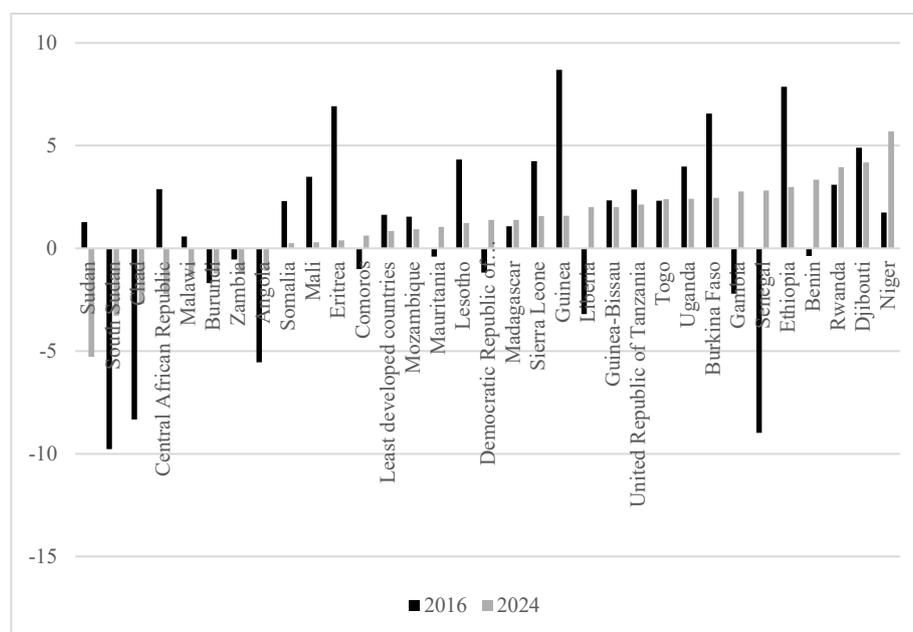


Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database: SDG Indicator 9.2.1 (accessed on 29 December 2025).

22. The main pathway of structural transformation is the reallocation of resources from agriculture to manufacturing through industrialization. Among African least developed countries, however, the pace of structural change in output has slowed, in particular after the end of the commodity super-cycle.¹² To accelerate transformation, African least developed countries must focus on local resource beneficiation and regional value chain development. This requires sound national governance and political will for regional collaboration.

23. Labour productivity – measured as the annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person – has shown a negative trend in 18 of the 32 African least developed countries (see figure XII). For all least developed countries combined, labour productivity growth declined by 48.8 per cent. This is an especially troubling trend, given that it reflects weakening productivity levels in already vulnerable economies. Given the high share of employment in agriculture in these countries, increasing labour productivity in this sector is vital to supporting overall productivity gains and to accelerating structural transformation.

Figure XII
Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person
(Percentage)



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database: SDG Indicator 8.2.1. (accessed on 29 December 2025).

2. Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy

24. The impact of climate change has resulted in attention being focused on the importance of improving productive capacity and promoting green structural transformation in African least developed countries. In this context, a just energy transition has far-reaching implications for both the development prospects and transformation pathways.¹³ Green structural transformation involves replacing environmentally unsustainable activities with sustainable

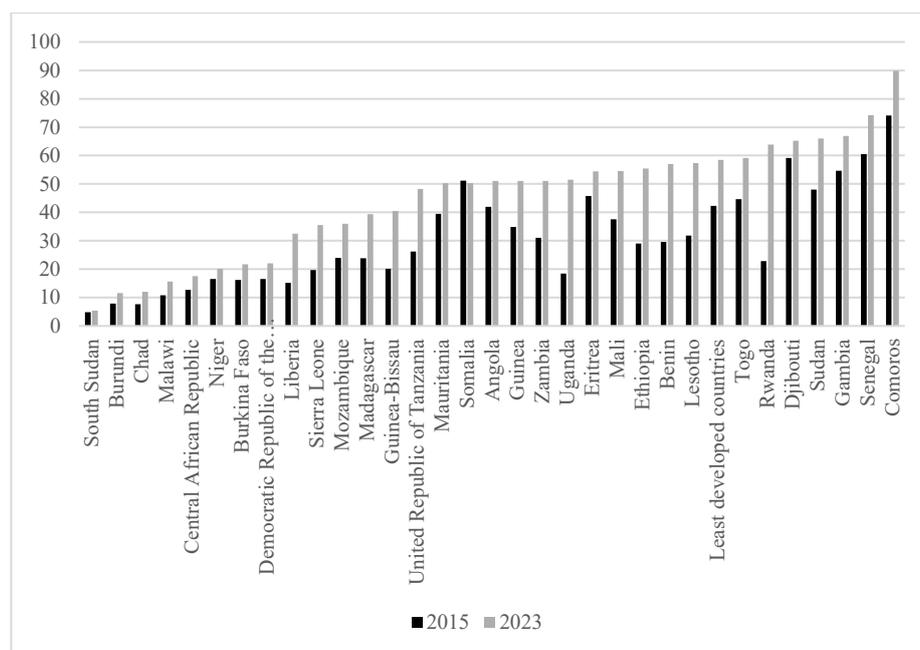
¹² United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *The Least Developed Countries Report 2020: Productive Capacities for the New Decade* (Geneva, 2020).

¹³ UNCTAD, *The Least Developed Countries Report 2022: the Low-Carbon Transition and its Daunting Implications for Structural Transformation* (Geneva, 2022).

alternatives,¹⁴ such as shifting from fossil-fuel-based energy production to renewable energy sources.

25. In 2023, access to electricity in African least developed countries stood at 44.6 per cent, up from 30.5 per cent in 2015. This means that more than half of the population in these countries still lacks access to electricity. Moreover, these countries continue to lag behind the overall average for least developed countries reported in 2023 (see figure XIII).

Figure XIII
Access to electricity in 2015–2023
(Percentage of population)

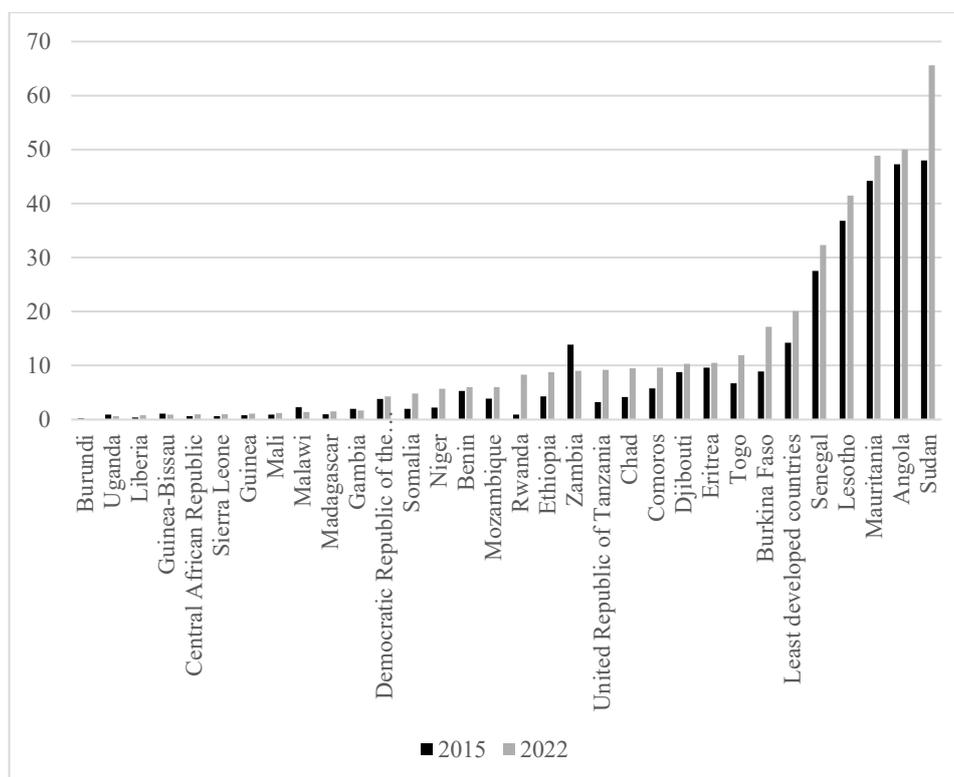


Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators. Available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators> (accessed on 29 November 2025).

26. However, significant disparities remain in access to clean fuels and technologies. The proportion of the population with access ranges from as low as 0.1 per cent in Burundi to as high as 65.6 per cent in the Sudan (see figure XIV), highlighting the uneven progress in ensuring access to clean fuels and technologies access across the region.

¹⁴ Tilman Altenburg and Dani Rodrik, “Green industrial policy: accelerating structural change towards wealthy green economies”, in *Green Industrial Policy: Concept, Policies, Country Experiences* (Geneva, UNEP; Bonn, German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), 2017).

Figure XIV
Access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking
 (percentage of population)



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators. Available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators> (accessed on 29 November 2025).

3. Support for private sector development

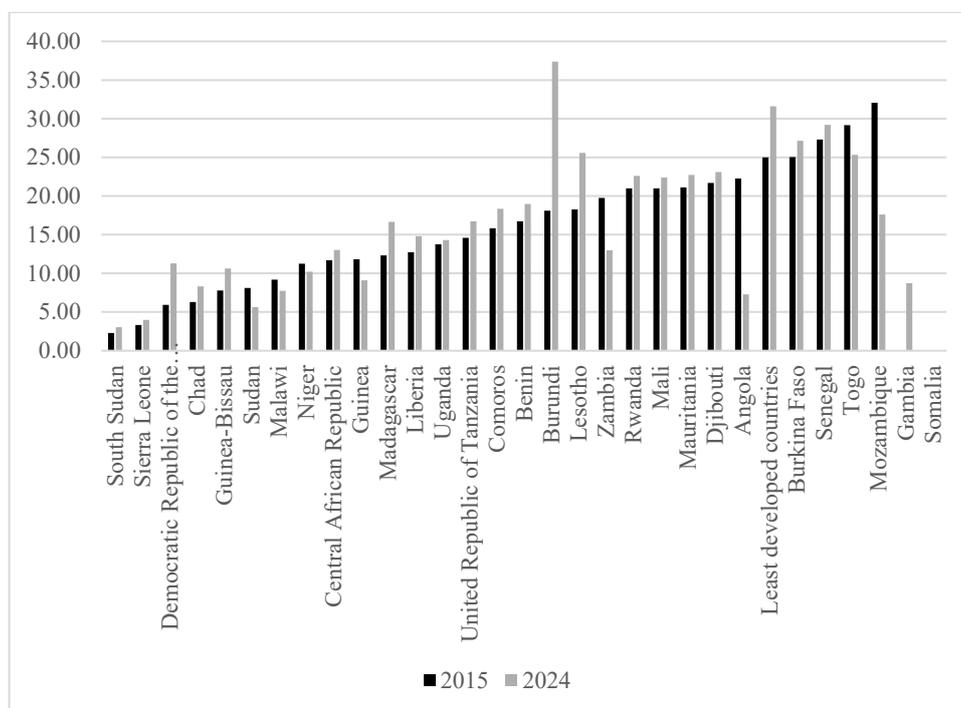
27. The central priorities of the Programme include creating an enabling environment for private sector development and supporting its alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite its importance, domestic credit to the private sector in African least developed countries has remained modest between 2015 and 2024 (see figure XV), reflecting persistent structural constraints in the financial sectors of the region.

28. Limited access to finance, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, remains a barrier to private investment, business expansion and job creation. Contributing factors include high informality, elevated interest rates, shallow capital markets, stringent collateral requirements and low levels of financial inclusion. These factors are constraints on the penetration of formal credit.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the recent financial technology boom in Africa, especially in the area of mobile money, has resulted in improvements to financial inclusion, by offering more affordable capital to small and medium-sized enterprises through digital lending, bypassing traditional banking thanks to high mobile penetration. However, given the significant ongoing

¹⁵ Daniel Runde, Conor Savoy and Janina Staguhn, “Supporting small and medium enterprises in sub-Saharan Africa through blended finance”, CSIS Briefs (Washington, D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2021); Zuzana Brixiová, Thierry Kangoye and Thierry Yogo, “Access to finance among small and medium-sized enterprises and job creation in Africa”, *Structural Change and Economic Dynamics*, vol. 55, December 2020, pp. 177–189.

infrastructure and regulatory challenges, further innovation is necessary for bridging gaps in coverage.¹⁶

Figure XV
Domestic credit to the private sector in 2015 and 2024
(Percentage of GDP)



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, databank (accessed on 29 November 2025).¹⁷

D. Enhancing international trade of the least developed countries and regional integration

29. This focus area addresses the stagnation of the global export share of least developed countries at around 1%, a level which failed to meet the SDG target for 2020 and was further eroded by the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlights structural barriers and rising protectionism, reaffirming the central role of a rules-based WTO and calling for the full implementation of decisions in favour of LDCs to foster their integration into the global trading system.¹⁸

1. Duty-free and quota-free market access

30. Evidence indicates that, between 2015 and 2023, African least developed countries continued to face significantly higher average tariffs under the most-favoured-nation regime than under preferential regimes (see figure 3.15).

¹⁶ Désiré Avom, Chrysost Bangaké and Hermann Ndoya, “Do financial innovations improve financial inclusion? Evidence from mobile money adoption in Africa”, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, vol. 190, May 2023.

¹⁷ Data refer to the latest available year for each African least developed country between 2019 and 2024, accessed on 29 November 2025. Specifically, of the 30 countries and groups listed: 17 have 2024 data; six have 2023 data (Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Malawi and South Sudan); four (Central African Republic, Liberia, Sudan and Zambia) have 2022 data; two (Chad and Guinea) have 2021 data and Mauritania has 2019 data.

¹⁸ Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, *Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries 2022–2031* (New York, 2022). Available at https://www.un.org/ldc5/sites/www.un.org/ldc5/files/doha_booklet-web.pdf.

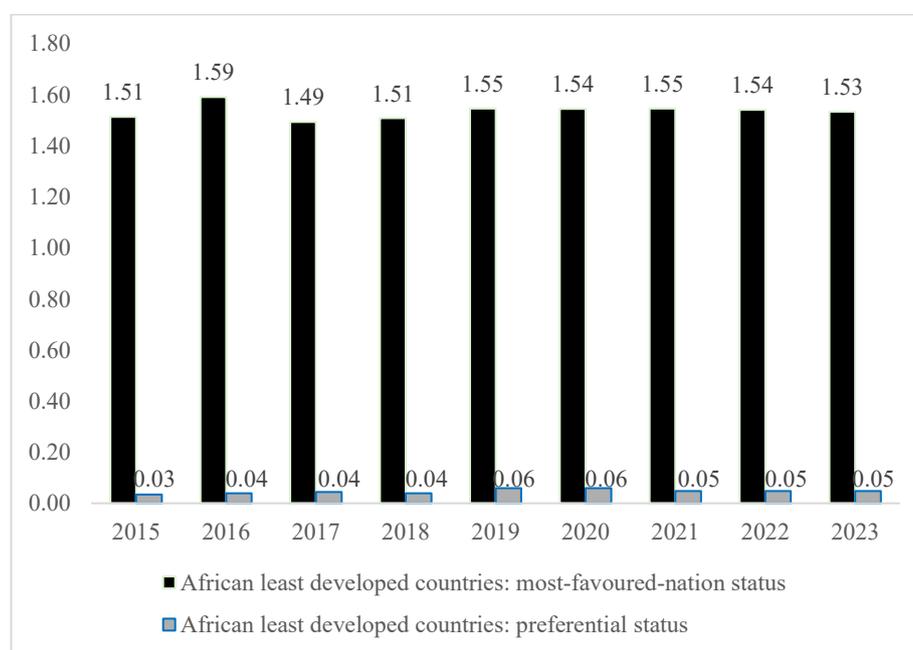
According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD),¹⁹ the most-favoured-nation duties imposed by developed partners remain systematically higher than the preferential rates, despite the fact that a relatively high proportion of duty-free tariff lines have been granted specifically to African least developed countries. This tariff differential affects most product categories, including agricultural products, raw materials and certain manufactured goods.

31. However, the recent increase in tariffs introduced by the Government of the United States of America remains substantially problematic. Under the African Growth and Opportunity Act, preferential, near-zero rates were introduced. These have now been replaced by significantly higher country-specific tariffs, averaging 20–28 per cent.²⁰ Many exports from African least developed countries, in particular textiles, apparel and certain agricultural products, are now subject to relatively high most-favoured-nation tariffs, which adversely affects their competitiveness in the United States market.

32. At the same time, the expanding duty-free, quota-free scheme offered by China is a growing source of opportunities, with coverage now extended to nearly all tariff lines. However, in order to realize the full benefits of this preferential access, supply-side constraints must be addressed and utilization rates improved. These stylized facts confirm that trade preferences play a fundamental role in improving access to developed markets for African least developed countries. Accordingly, efforts to simplify and harmonize the rules of origin must be intensified to increase the effective utilization rate of these preferences.

Figure XVI

Most-favoured-nation and preferential tariffs applied by developed countries in African least developed countries
(Percentage)



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database: SDG Indicator 17.12.1 (accessed on 29 December 2025).

¹⁹ UNCTAD, *SDG Pulse 2023* (Geneva, 2023). Available at https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/stat2023d3_en.pdf.

²⁰ Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Tracking the U.S. reciprocal tariff rates for all African countries” (Washington, D.C., 2025). Available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/tracking-us-reciprocal-tariff-rates-all-african-countries>.

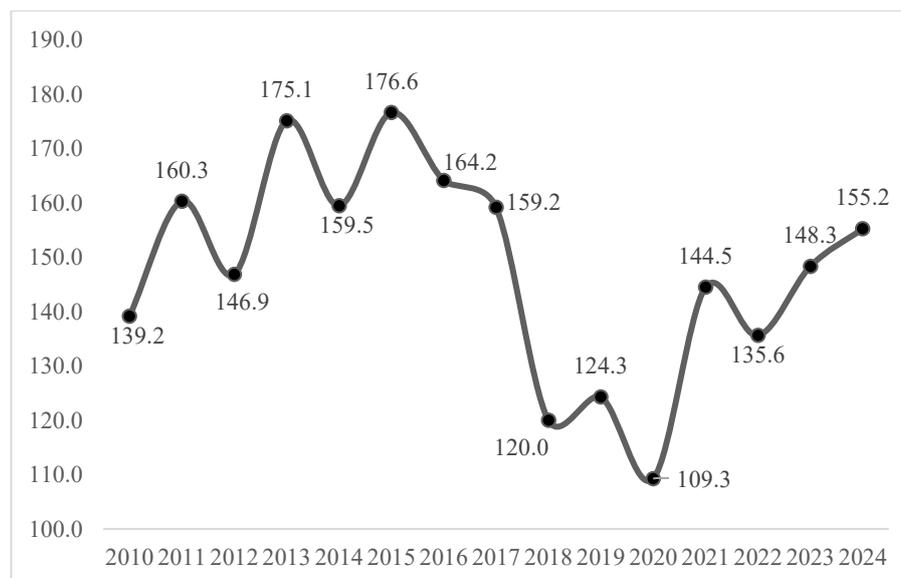
2. Least developed countries services waiver

33. As demonstrated by UNCTAD, between 2015 and 2024, trade in services from African least developed countries showed highly unstable growth (figure 3.16), reflecting volatile global demand and limited diversification.²¹ This volatility underscores their vulnerability to external shocks and the necessity of building more resilient service sectors through diversification, digitalization and strengthening productive capacities.

Figure XVII

Annual services export value from African least developed countries, 2010–2024

(Millions of United States dollars, current prices)



Source: UNCTAD Stat, Exports and imports by service-category and by trade-partner, annual. Available at <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/datacentre/dataviewer/US.TradeServCatByPartner> (accessed on 29 November 2025).

E. Addressing climate change, environmental degradation, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and building resilience

34. This focus area underscores that least developed countries are disproportionately affected by climate change, environmental shocks, and the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have amplified their pre-existing vulnerabilities. It commits to building adaptive capacity and resilience through an integrated, all-hazard approach, in line with international agreements, to address severe impacts such as food insecurity and infrastructure damage²². The average per capita official development assistance for medical research and basic health in African least developed countries in 2023 was \$7.26, which is higher than the average for Asian least developed countries of \$4.90 (see figure XVIII). However, the distribution is uneven. Sao Tome and

²¹ UNCTAD, “Trade in services: a niche for export diversification in Africa”, in *Economic Development in Africa Report 2022: Rethinking the Foundations of Export Diversification in Africa* (Geneva, 2022). Available at https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/a_ldcafrica2022_Ch2_en.pdf.

²² Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, *Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries 2022–2031* (New York, 2022). Available at https://www.un.org/ldc5/sites/www.un.org/ldc5/files/doha_booklet-web.pdf.

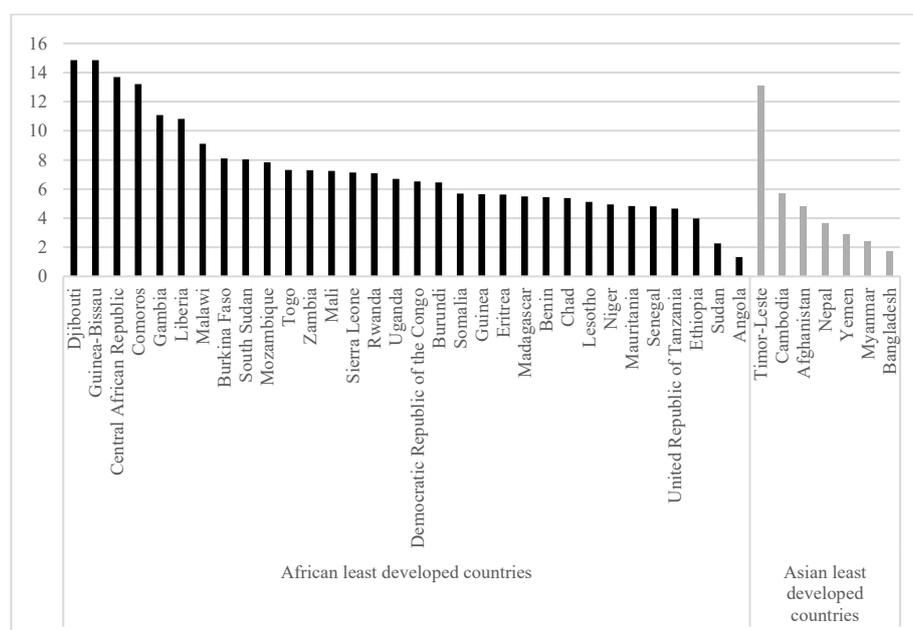
Principe (\$16.71) and Guinea-Bissau (\$14.85) received amounts higher than the regional average, while Ethiopia, with a larger population, received an amount lower than the average (\$3.98). This variation may be indicative of aid allocation being influenced not only by regional priorities, including demography, but also by national contexts, project portfolios and the perceived urgency of needs.

1. Building a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and resilience to future shocks

35. In light of recent severe cutbacks in bilateral health assistance, there is an urgent need to enhance the capacity of African Governments to finance healthcare. This can be achieved through domestic tax reforms and by exploring innovative sources of funding. Furthermore, improving both technical and allocative efficiency within health systems will be essential for maximizing resource utilization and ensuring sustainable health financing.

Figure XVIII

Official development assistance for medical research and basic health sectors per capita, by recipient country, 2023
(United States dollars)

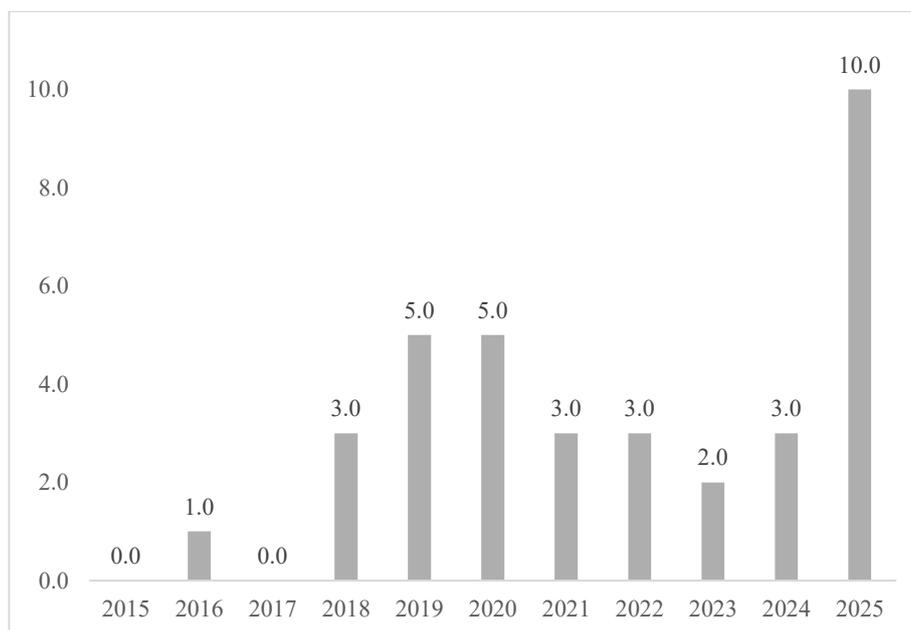


Source: World Health Organization, “Official development assistance (ODA) for medical research and basic health sectors per capita, by recipient country”, Global Observatory on Health Research and Development, indicators (Geneva, 2025). Available at <https://www.who.int/observatories/global-observatory-on-health-research-and-development/indicators/official-development-assistance-for-medical-research-and-basic-health-sectors-per-capita-by-recipient-country> (accessed on 29 November 2025).

2. Access to finance and technology to address climate change

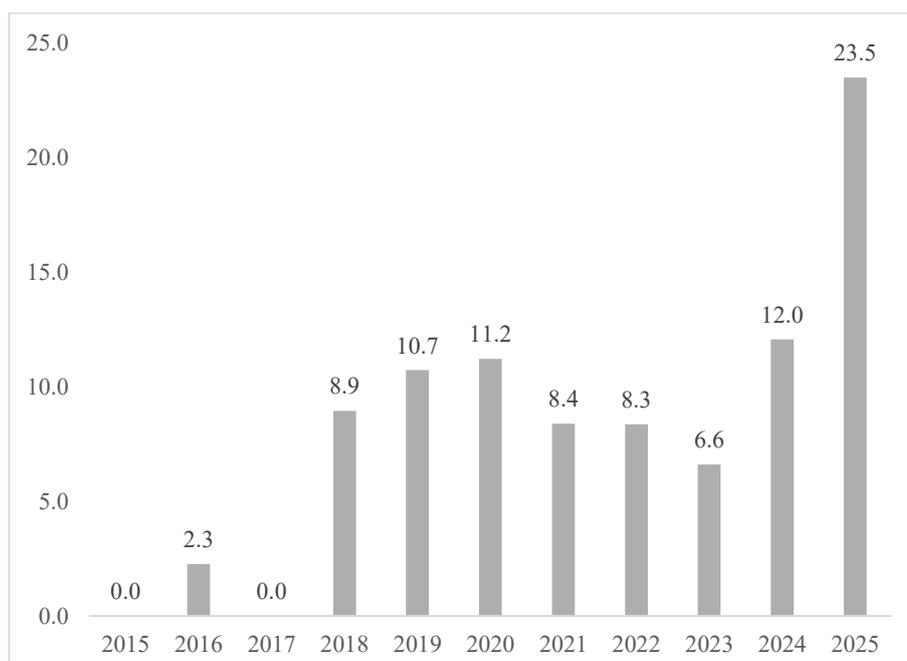
36. Green Climate Fund data indicate that the number of adaptation and cross-cutting projects related to national adaptation plans approved for African least developed countries reached a record high in 2025 (see figure XIX), reflecting growing climate commitment to the most vulnerable of these countries (Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2025). At the same time, the volume of funding allocated to these projects increased, peaking in 2025 (see figure XX), consistent with a sustained inflow of resources dedicated to adaptation.

Figure XIX
Number of adaptation and cross-cutting projects of African least developed countries that have submitted national adaptation plans approved by the Green Climate Fund since 2015, as of 1 September 2025



Source: Green Climate Fund, Open Data Library database. Available at <https://data.greenclimate.fund/public/data/projects> (accessed on 29 November 2025).

Figure XX
Adaptation and cross-cutting projects of African least developed countries that have submitted national adaptation plans and been financed by the Green Climate Fund since 2015, as of 1 September 2025
 (Millions of United States dollars)



Source: Green Climate Fund, Open Data Library database (accessed on 29 November 2025).

F. Leveraging international solidarity and strengthened global partnerships

37. Emphasis is placed in the sixth key focus area of the Programme on the mobilization of international solidarity and the reinvigoration of global partnerships in order to address chronic financing gaps and to support the sustainable and irreversible graduation of least developed countries from their status. The significant dependence of African least developed countries on external resources in a context of rising debt and financial vulnerabilities is acknowledged. In this section, an examination is made as to whether the level of international support, including official development assistance, concessional financing, debt solutions and private investment, is adequate to achieve the 7 per cent annual growth target and build resilient graduation pathways.²³

1. Domestic resource mobilization

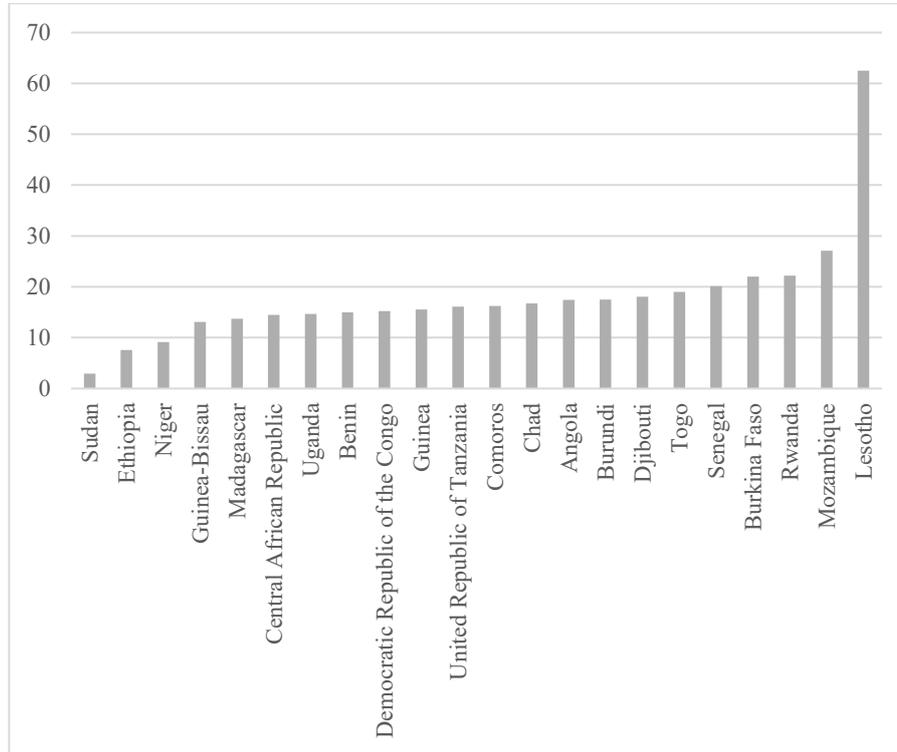
38. African least developed countries are currently operating within a constrained fiscal environment, which drastically limits the capacity of Governments to fund essential public services and development-enabling investments. This constraint is caused by two interconnected challenges: insufficient domestic revenue and an overwhelming debt burden.

39. Data on Government revenue as a proportion of GDP in 2023 reveal stark disparities and low overall fiscal capacity across African least developed countries (see figure XXI). In the specific area of tax revenue, the unweighted average tax-to-GDP ratio in Africa was 16.1 per cent in 2023, compared to 19.6 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, and 33.9 per cent in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. However, these continental averages mask substantial variation at the country level. For example, Rwanda recorded a tax-to-GDP ratio of 15.7 per cent, while Tunisia reached 34 per cent and Somalia only 2.9 per cent.²⁴ This variation highlights differences in institutional strength, economic structure and tax administration efficiency.

²³ Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, *Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries 2022–2031*.

²⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, African Union Commission and African Tax Administration Forum, *Revenue Statistics in Africa 2025: Commonalities and Specificities across African Revenue Classifications 1990–2023* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2025).

Figure XXI
Government revenue, 2024
 (Percentage of GDP)

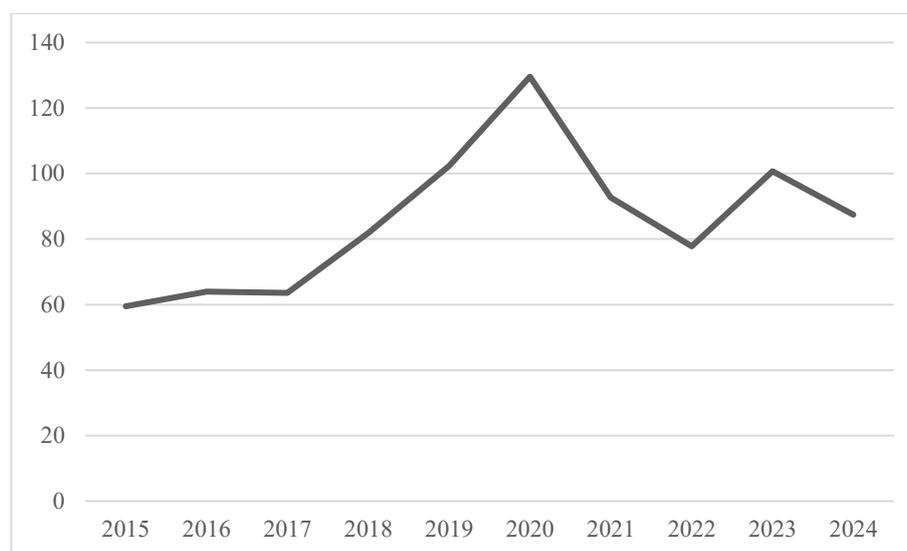


Source: International Monetary Fund, IMF Datamapper, Public Finances in Modern History Database. Available at <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/rev@FPP/USA/FRA/JPN/GBR/SWE/ESP/ITA/ZAF/IND> (accessed on 29 November 2025).

40. The fiscal space in African least developed countries is further constrained by increased net capital outflows and subdued export revenues. The continued restrictive global financial conditions and frequent climate change-related disasters are resulting in substantial losses and damage, exacerbating the fiscal and inflationary pressures on the economy. The debt-to-GDP ratio²⁵ reached 87.4 per cent in 2024 and is expected to remain above 50 per cent in the medium term (figure XXII).

²⁵ To avoid potential outliers, medium value was used to calculate the debt-to-GDP ratio for the 32 African least developed countries.

Figure XXII
Government debt-to-GDP ratio in African least developed countries, 2015–2024
 (Percentage)



Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook (WEO) dataset. Available at [https://data.imf.org/en/Data-Explorer?datasetUrn=IMF.RES:WEO\(9.0.0\)](https://data.imf.org/en/Data-Explorer?datasetUrn=IMF.RES:WEO(9.0.0)) (accessed on 9 December 2025).

2. Smooth transition measures

41. The formulation and implementation of national smooth transition strategies is critical to ensure sustainable and irreversible graduation. Seven recently graduated or currently graduating least developed countries have developed and implemented national smooth transition strategies.²⁶ The strategies usually cover such key areas as macroeconomic stability, export competitiveness, developing productive capacity and climate resilience. As seen in these countries, successful and coherent smooth transition strategies are predicated on high-level political commitment, inclusive stakeholder consultation and proactive engagement.

IV. Main challenges and the way forward

A. Data availability

42. Data gaps continue to hinder the monitoring of the Programme in African least developed countries. However, development partners are helping to reduce reporting burdens. For example, the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States has finalized the Indicator Handbook, ensuring its alignment with widely used metrics. Notably, 70 of the 111 targets (63 per cent) either match or are closely aligned with targets set in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, allowing countries to rely on existing indicators. Other partners, such as ILO, provide aggregate indicators to support comparability. Adopting this harmonized approach across all statistical custodian agencies will be essential for evidence-based decision-making.

²⁶ United Nations, “LDC graduation: experiences with smooth transition strategies” (New York, CDP secretariat, 2024).

B. Implementation, follow-up and monitoring

43. The Programme emphasizes the importance of effective monitoring and follow-up, alignment with such frameworks as the 2030 Agenda and the use of established institutions, including resident coordinators, country teams, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, for national-level support. The Programme calls for strengthening the existing global implementation and monitoring mechanisms established following the Istanbul Programme of Action, while committing to enhance support for least developed countries in strengthening their national statistical and data capacities.²⁷

44. Integrating the Programme into national planning and financing frameworks is therefore essential. This requires raising awareness of, and incorporation the priorities of the Programme at the national, sectoral and subnational levels, with monitoring at each level. ECA has been using the Integrated Planning and Reporting Toolkit to raise awareness among public officials and support the alignment of national development plans and financing strategies with the Programme of Action.

C. Way forward

45. A few factors will be central to attaining the commitments of the Programme and ensuring sustainable, resilient development and graduation. First, in the current context of multiple and mutually reinforcing shocks, a robust macroeconomic performance is essential. These efforts must be supported by expanding productive capacities, that is, diversifying the economy to reduce dependence on a few sectors and making targeted investments to raise labour productivity.

46. Expanding the fiscal space to finance development will be essential. In light of dwindling aid and the evolving foreign engagement policies of partners, domestic resource mobilization and various forms of innovative financing will be crucial. Prudent public financing governance will also be vital. The development of African least developed countries requires the participation of the private sector as a partner.

47. South-South cooperation will be vital for achieving growth and development. The African Continental Free Trade Area is especially important in supporting African least developed countries, as its investment, competition, intellectual property, digital trade and women and youth in trade protocols provide a comprehensive framework for strengthening productive capacity, driving innovation and advancing inclusion.²⁸

48. Lastly, it is important to situate the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action within the broader context of global, continental and thematic agendas. By aligning the Programme of Action priorities with the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and other frameworks, such as Awaza Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries and the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States, African least developed countries can establish mutually reinforcing development pathways. This integrated approach is associated with stronger policy coherence, reduced duplication, more efficient use of resources and accelerated progress towards shared goals for structural transformation, resilience and inclusive growth.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ ECA (Forthcoming). Beyond Graduation: Crafting Resilient Transitions for African least developed countries.