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Economic Commission for Africa
Committee of Experts of the Conference of African
Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
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Tangier, Morocco (hybrid), 28–30 March 2026

Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

Date, venue and theme of the fifty-ninth session of the
Economic Commission for Africa

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Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. In the present document, suggestions made by the secretariat are set forth for the consideration of the Committee of Experts. The Committee may wish to consider the dates and a theme for the fifty-ninth session of the Economic Commission for Africa, to be held in 2027, and to provide the secretariat with guidance in that regard.

II. Date and venue

2. The secretariat proposes that the fifty-ninth session of the Commission be held at its headquarters in Addis Ababa in March 2027. Alternatively, the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development may decide otherwise, upon an invitation by a member of the Commission to host the said session, under the condition that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 40/243, the Government issuing an invitation has agreed to defray the actual additional costs directly and indirectly involved with holding the meeting away from the headquarters of the Commission.

III. Theme

3. The secretariat submits the following potential themes for the consideration of the Committee of Experts:

- (a) Option one: “Shaping the future of work in Africa: youth employment, growth and fiscal resilience”;
- (b) Option two: “From extraction to transformation: leveraging the critical minerals and biodiversity of Africa for industrialization and green growth”;
- (c) Option three: “Reclaiming financial sovereignty for Africa to drive sustainable, inclusive and resilient development”.

* E/ECA/COE/44/1.



A. Background

4. Africa stands at a crucial juncture in its development journey, defined by immense opportunities and complex, interconnected challenges. Central to the continent's progress is how it can simultaneously leverage its young labour force and its vast reserves of critical natural resources to build sustainable, resilient and inclusive economies. The strategic management of these important assets (people and natural capital) will determine the extent to which Africa will be able to convert its demographic and resource potential into tangible economic transformation. In a global context marked by rapid technological change and the urgent need for climate adaptation, the policy choices made in the near term will be critical. The proposed themes are designed to enable the focused exploration of the actionable policies that are needed to navigate these dynamics and secure a prosperous future for all Africans.

1. Option one: "Shaping the future of work in Africa: youth employment, growth and fiscal resilience"

5. Productive employment lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, which were reaffirmed during the Second World Summit for Social Development. Today, however, the continent's employment structure constrains growth, fiscal stability and domestic revenue mobilization. Rapid population growth, persistent informality and low absorption of young people into productive work could turn the continent's demographic potential into a fiscal burden. Fiscal reforms alone cannot secure sustainability. Africa must urgently boost the participation of young people in formal employment and align job creation with such transformative megatrends as digitalization, climate action and the global demand for critical minerals. If Africa can concentrate its growth in such labour-intensive sectors as digital services, renewable energy and climate-smart agriculture, and if it can leverage such platforms as the African Continental Free Trade Area to formalize informal and gig work, then it can use its demographic potential to drive inclusive growth and fiscal resilience.

6. Achieving this potential requires strategic investment in human capital. To thrive amid technological and ecological shifts, young Africans, who make up more than 60 per cent of the population, need high-quality education, digital fluency and entrepreneurial readiness. It is both a social and economic imperative to raise youth employment levels. Targeted support for such high-potential sectors as financial technology, agricultural technology and green industrialization can turn demographic dynamism into structural transformation, boosting productivity and widening the tax base.

7. Positioning the future of work and youth employment as pillars of socioeconomic strategy can yield significant fiscal returns and drive development. In the short term, this focus promotes formalization and revenue growth; in the medium term, it can build productivity and resilience to shocks; in the long term, it anchors demographic change as a stable source of growth. To achieve these aims, members of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) will need to embed employment objectives into macroeconomic frameworks, with a view to advancing digital infrastructure, incentivizing the hiring of young people and youth entrepreneurship, strengthening public-private collaboration and enhancing labour-market data and policy coherence. Through such measures, Africa can secure productive youth employment as a catalyst for and an outcome of sustainable and inclusive prosperity.

8. If chosen, option one would entail analysing the broad and varied implications of these megatrends and examining the opportunities and the risks associated with them. To fully seize the opportunities, African States will require populations that are better educated, healthier, more technologically savvy and better equipped for a rapidly changing world of work. Option one would also entail exploring the specific policy options and measures that would be required for an inclusive and sustainable future labour market, in which decent employment opportunities are ensured and demographic potential is transformed into lasting and inclusive prosperity.

2. Option two: “From extraction to transformation: leveraging the critical minerals and biodiversity of Africa for industrialization and green growth”

9. Global demand for minerals in Africa is essential to the green energy transition. Combined with the rising economic value of biodiversity, it presents a historic opportunity. These two asset classes are closely interwoven: sustainable mineral extraction reflects concern for healthy ecosystems and water systems, while positive biodiversity outcomes depend directly on the way in which mineral development occurs, where it occurs and the way in which it is governed. Advancing from raw commodity extraction to value-added industrial transformation is a central priority for the region, as articulated in the Africa Mining Vision and the Africa Green Mineral Strategy.

10. A strategic focus on governance, finance and partnerships will be essential for African countries to capture greater value from their natural endowments. This includes fostering nature-positive mining and industrialization pathways in which biodiversity safeguards, ecosystem restoration and landscape-level planning figure into the development of mineral value chains. Through the policies they enact, countries can support local beneficiation, foster the development of regional green industrial value chains, ensure community benefit-sharing and leverage natural capital through high-integrity biodiversity credits, restoration mechanisms and nature-based solutions. Doing so would offset the environmental impact of mining, align the sector with global sustainability standards and mobilize additional development finance.

11. Biodiversity should be positioned not only as a conservation priority but also as a material economic factor that shapes project bankability, investor risk, supply-chain integrity and long-term industrial productivity. This endeavour is built upon a well-established record of support for resource-based sustainable development and green industrialization among members of ECA.

12. If chosen, option two would entail exploring specific policies for: the design of fiscal regimes and the investment of resource revenues for economic diversification; the design and implementation of regional strategies for critical minerals and green industrialization; the operationalization of high-integrity carbon and biodiversity credit markets; and natural resource governance that leads to equitable and sustainable development outcomes.

3. Option three: “Reclaiming financial sovereignty for Africa to drive sustainable, inclusive and resilient development”

13. Africa has substantial untapped potential to finance its own transformation by mobilizing domestic resources, strengthening economic governance and leveraging innovation. Reclaiming financial sovereignty is not only necessary, but it represents a strategic opportunity for the alignment of development financing with regional priorities, institutions and aspirations.

14. Realizing this potential is becoming more difficult, given the tightening global financial environment. Africa faces an annual gap of \$670–\$762 billion in financing the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030¹. Domestic resource mobilization remains constrained, with an average tax-to-gross domestic product ratio of approximately 16 per cent, while illicit financial flows drain an estimated \$88.6 billion annually.² Public debt now surpasses \$1.8 trillion,³ with rising debt service

¹ African Union and others, “Executive summary” in *2025 Africa Sustainable Development Report: Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind, and the African Union’s Agenda 2063*, (Addis Ababa, 2025).

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, African Union Commission and African Tax Administration Forum, *Revenue Statistics in Africa 2024: Facilitation and Trust as Drivers of Voluntary Tax Compliance in Selected African Tax Administrations* (Paris, 2024).

³ United Nations, “Tackling illicit financial flows in Africa arising from taxation and illegal commercial practices” (2022); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, “A world of debt: it is time for reform” (2025).

eroding fiscal space as external financing becomes more volatile, costly and conditional. In the light of such pressures, it is all the more urgent to expand sustainable domestic financing and to reduce the structural vulnerabilities in the region's engagement with global capital markets.

15. Despite the challenges, the opportunities for members of ECA to reclaim their financial sovereignty are significant. They can unlock fiscal space by strengthening their domestic resource mobilization through modernized tax systems, more rational incentives and the curbing of illicit flows. By mobilizing private finance, members of ECA can complement public resources and drive large-scale projects. By improving their credit ratings and growing their capital markets, they can channel domestic savings, pensions and diaspora funds into productive investment, as evidenced by the \$4 trillion raised through capital markets in low- and middle-income countries between 1990 and 2022.⁴

16. If chosen, option three would entail focusing on tangible policy options and institutional reforms to strengthen the capacity of the region to finance its development priorities. This would include: advancing digitalized domestic revenue mobilization; curtailing illicit financial flows; improving tax expenditure governance, debt sustainability and transparency; expanding local and regional capital markets; scaling up climate-aligned and other innovative financing instruments; and strengthening the collective positions of Africa on reforms to international tax and sovereign debt governance. Such action would enhance fiscal resilience, reinforce national ownership of development strategies and support inclusive, long-term economic transformation across the region.

B. Previous themes

17. For reference, a list of the themes of previous sessions of the Commission that have been held since 2000 is provided in the annex to the present document.

⁴ International Finance Corporation, "Rise in capital-market financing powers investment and employment in developing countries", 13 March 2025.

Annex

Themes of previous sessions of the Commission

<i>Session</i>	<i>Joint annual meetings of the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union Commission</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Theme</i>
Fifty-seventh	N/A	2025	Advancing the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area: proposing transformative strategic actions
Fifty-sixth	N/A	2024	Financing the transition to inclusive green economies in Africa: imperatives, opportunities and policy options
Fifty-fifth	N/A	2023	Fostering recovery and transformation in Africa to reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities
Fifty-fourth	N/A	2022	Financing Africa's recovery: breaking new ground
Fifty-third	N/A	2021	Africa's sustainable industrialization and diversification in the digital era in the context of COVID-19
Fifty-second	N/A	2019	Fiscal policy, trade and the private sector in a digital era: a strategy for Africa
Fifty-first	N/A	2018	African Continental Free Trade Area and fiscal space for jobs and economic diversification
Fiftieth	Tenth	2017	Growth, inequality and unemployment
Forty-ninth	Ninth	2016	Towards an integrated and coherent approach for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
Forty-eighth	Eighth	2015	Implementing Agenda 2063: planning, mobilizing and financing for development
Forty-seventh	Seventh	2014	Industrialization for inclusive and transformative development in Africa
Forty-sixth	Sixth	2013	Industrialization for an emerging Africa
Forty-fifth	Fifth	2012	Unleashing Africa's potential as a pole of global growth
Forty-fourth	Fourth	2011	Governing development in Africa
Forty-third	Third	2010	Promoting high-level sustainable growth to reduce unemployment in Africa
Forty-second	Second	2009	Enhancing the effectiveness of fiscal policy for domestic resources mobilization
Forty-first	First	2008	Meeting Africa's new challenges in the twenty-first century
Fortieth	N/A	2007	Accelerating Africa's growth and development to meet the Millennium Development Goals: emerging challenges and the way forward
Thirty-ninth	N/A	2006	Meeting the challenge of employment in Africa
Thirty-eighth	N/A	2005	Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Africa
Thirty-seventh	N/A	2004	Mainstreaming trade policy in national development strategies
Thirty-sixth	N/A	2003	Towards greater policy coherence and mutual accountability for development effectiveness
Thirty-fifth	N/A	2002	Accelerating Africa's progress and performance: the challenge of the New Partnership for Africa's Development
Thirty-fourth	N/A	2001	Implementing the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Programme: compact for Africa's recovery
Thirty-third	N/A	2000	The challenges of financing development in Africa