

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



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

I. Overview

The fifty-eighth session of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) will be held at a pivotal moment, with Africa currently navigating ever faster technological change, a rapidly evolving global digital governance landscape and the impending deadline of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With global debates on artificial intelligence, data governance and digital sovereignty intensifying, the fifty-eighth session of the Commission offers a timely opportunity for African States and institutions to articulate a coherent strategic response and strengthen the continent's presence in the global value chains of frontier technologies.

The session will consist of the preparatory meeting of the Committee of Experts of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, followed by the ministerial segment of the Conference. In addition to considering the statutory matters of the Commission, the Conference will serve as the premier continental forum for dialogue and exchange of views among African ministers responsible for finance, planning and economic development, and governors of central banks on issues central to the economic transformation agenda of Africa.

II. Theme

The theme of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission will be "Growth through innovation: harnessing data and frontier technologies for the economic transformation of Africa". The choice of theme serves to emphasize the dual

imperative of using frontier technologies to increase African competitiveness through increased productivity and diversification, while strengthening the continent's digital sovereignty, data governance systems and institutional resilience.

At its fifty-eighth session, the Commission will explore the role of frontier technologies in enhancing sectoral productivity and growth, along with opportunities, challenges and policy options for transforming African economies through innovation-led growth strategies. During the deliberations, participants are expected to present empirical evidence of the impact of innovation on economic growth and development, outline trends in the adoption of frontier technologies in Africa and demonstrate the centrality of innovation and data to evidence-based decision-making.

Beyond sectoral productivity gains, the theme also encompasses the continent's strategic positioning in global digital governance. With the emergence of regulatory frameworks for artificial intelligence, dependence on cloud infrastructure and asymmetries in global data flows, African countries are presented with unprecedented opportunities, while also facing structural vulnerabilities. Strengthened digital sovereignty, strategic autonomy and governance capacity are essential in order to ensure African competitiveness in the value chains of emerging technologies. The harnessing of frontier technologies for economic transformation also requires investment in supporting infrastructure, including reliable energy, fibre optics and human capital development.

In addition to the transformative potential of frontier technologies, participants are expected to examine challenges pertaining to data governance, address the risks of technological dependency (including reliance on external cloud providers, limited domestic capacity to develop or adapt artificial intelligence models and fragmented regulatory approaches) and identify ways in which African States and institutions can assert digital sovereignty and enhance their role in global governance frameworks.

By the end of the Commission's fifty-eighth session, participants are also expected to propose ways in which its members can harness data and frontier technologies to advance the growth and economic transformation of Africa.

III. Expected outcomes

The expected outcomes of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission include:

- Ministerial policy recommendations on data governance, on economic transformation driven by the responsible use of artificial intelligence and innovation, and on the coherent development of data centres, among other digital infrastructure, and of the associated energy infrastructure
- Guidance on the strengthening of African digital sovereignty and regional data architecture
- Endorsement of the Commission's sustainable health financing initiative and of an African development impact forum, as crucial platforms for continental innovation and evidence-based policymaking

- Agreement on follow-up mechanisms ahead of the fifty-ninth session of the Commission, to be held in 2027, with a view to ensuring institutional continuity and accountability

IV. Date and venue

The fifty-eighth session of the Commission will be held in Tangier, Morocco, from Saturday, 28 March to Friday, 3 April 2026.

V. Format

A. Committee of Experts (28–30 March)

The Committee of Experts will hold a three-day preparatory technical meeting to review economic and social development trends in Africa, consider progress in regional integration and examine issues at the intersection of data, frontier technologies and innovation for economic transformation. The Committee will also consider statutory matters relating to the work of ECA and formulate policy recommendations, as appropriate, for consideration by the African ministers of finance, planning and economic development during the ministerial segment.

B. Side events (31 March and 1 April)

A number of high-level side events will be held on the margins of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission. The events will be devoted to critical development challenges and opportunities, with particular focus on digital inclusion, skills development, innovative financing and regional cooperation on technology and data governance. Events will be curated to reinforce the session theme, including high-level discussions on ethical frameworks for artificial intelligence, cross-border data policies, digital public infrastructure and innovation-driven financing models.

C. Ministerial segment (2 and 3 April)

The ministerial segment will feature a high-level policy dialogue on the theme of the session. The annual Adebayo Adedeji lecture will set the intellectual tone for the ministerial debates, with the speaker highlighting frontier thinking on technology, innovation and structural transformation. Round-table discussions will be held on sub-themes emerging from the issues paper, including the upgrading of industry, human capital development, infrastructure and finance. In addition, the 2026 edition of the Commission's flagship publication, Economic Report on Africa, will be launched during the ministerial segment, also under the theme "Growth through innovation: harnessing data and frontier technologies for the economic transformation of Africa". Furthermore, the Commission's sustainable health financing initiative will be formally launched, with a view to showcasing how digital systems, advanced analytics and data governance reforms can expand fiscal space, strengthen accountability and drive sustainable investment in health. Lastly, an African development impact forum will be launched during the ministerial segment; it will serve as a continental platform for data-driven policy dialogue, the synthesis of evidence and innovation-led peer-to-peer learning.

The ministerial segment is designed to be interactive, combining insights from leading African and international experts with contributions from ministers and policymakers. The deliberations will culminate in policy recommendations and data-driven decisions to guide the African agenda for economic transformation through innovation and frontier technologies.

D. Knowledge fair

The fifty-eighth session of the Commission will also include a knowledge fair that showcases the work of ECA and its partners to advance the continent's innovation and technology agenda. At the knowledge fair, case studies, successful initiatives and opportunities for collaboration will be highlighted, with a focus on data-driven solutions, technology-enabled value chains and inclusive growth models. The knowledge fair will include interactive demonstrations, live innovation labs, technology showcases and policy clinics, designed to translate data and frontier technologies into specific development measures.

Such a structure will ensure a coherent flow from technical analysis to political engagement and knowledge exchange, maximizing the impact and visibility of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission.

VI. Participation

As this is a statutory meeting of the Commission, all members of ECA are called upon to participate. Delegations will include ministers responsible for finance, planning and economic development, for science, technology and innovation, and for health, along with central bank governors. In addition, the participants may include representatives of African regional organizations, entities of the United Nations system, pan-African financial institutions, development partners, academic institutions and civil society. Invitations will also be extended to partners and stakeholders in the private sector, to national digital regulators, to regional data governance bodies and to global partners involved in shaping the Global Digital Compact and related international frameworks.

VII. Bureau

The Bureau of the fifty-seventh session is as follows:

Chair: Morocco (North Africa)

First Vice-Chair: Cameroon (Central Africa)

Second Vice-Chair: Benin (West Africa)

Third Vice-Chair: Kenya (East Africa)

Rapporteur: Zimbabwe (Southern Africa)

On the basis of the principles of rotation and equitable subregional representation,

which the secretariat of ECA has consistently applied, the proposed composition of the Bureau to be elected at the fifty-eighth session is as follows:

Chair: Central Africa

First Vice-Chair: West Africa

Second Vice-Chair: East Africa

Third Vice-Chair: Southern Africa

Rapporteur: North Africa