



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

CONCEPT NOTE

Expert Group Meeting

Regional Youth Policy Implementation & Entrepreneurship

Date: 23-24 March, 2026

Location: Conference Room 5, UNCC, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Organized by: UNECA – Socio-economic Development Division

1. Background

Africa currently possesses the world's largest youth population, representing a critical demographic asset for rapid economic gains and the realization of the sustainable development goals and Agenda 2063¹. However, utilization of this demographic asset is consistently stifled by a lack of access to decent work, weak policy implementation systems, and limited youth agency. The Doha Political Declaration underscored the urgent necessity for African states to invest in youth empowerment and coherent social policies that respond to rapidly evolving economic and demographic realities². While many AU Member States have updated their national youth policies, these frameworks often remain fragmented, underfunded, and insufficiently aligned with labour market needs, digital transformation trajectories, and subnational delivery realities.

Ethiopia reflects many of these continental dynamics. Despite a robust National Youth Policy and various government initiatives, implementation bottlenecks persist, particularly at the subnational level. Youth in urban centres such as Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa face high unemployment, constrained entrepreneurship ecosystems, and limited access to finance and institutional support necessary to transition from informal to productive economic activity. While Ethiopia serves as the pilot anchor, these constraints are widely shared across the IGAD sub-region and reflect broader continental patterns underscoring the importance of a coordinated regional dialogue on youth policy delivery and employment pathways.

In response to these structural implementation gaps, UNECA in collaboration with Oxford Economics, is undertaking an analytical study to examine youth policy delivery bottlenecks, labour market transitions, and scalable employment pathways across African contexts. The study integrates macro-level policy analysis with subnational evidence gathered from the Dire Dawa mission and FGDs, ensuring that youth voices and local institutional realities directly inform the analytical framework of the study.

This regional EGM will serve as a technical validation platform for the study and the preliminary field findings from Ethiopia and will convene experts and practitioners from across the IGAD sub-region including Djibouti, Kenya, and Uganda alongside regional institutions, development partners, researchers, and youth entrepreneurs. By bringing together institutional decision-makers and young practitioners operating within the labour market ecosystem, the meeting seeks to foster intergenerational dialogue and bridge the gap between policy design and lived economic realities.

Through expert review and contextualization, the meeting will refine both the analytical study and the findings emerging from field studies. Insights generated will feed into a continental synthesis of national youth policies and inform the development of a structured IGAD Regional Peer-Learning Platform. Collectively, this process aims to establish an evidence-based, field-tested, and scalable implementation model that UNECA can support across regions in the post-WSSD2 phase.

2. Purpose of the EGM

The EGM serves as a regional anchor for the project, aiming to:

¹ African Union Commission, Youth Development. Available at: <https://au.int/en/youth-development>

² Doha Political Declaration of the “World Social Summit” under the title “the Second World Summit for Social Development”.

1. Convene a multi-stakeholder dialogue bringing together governments, youth networks, entrepreneurs, private sector actors, civil society, academia, and development partners to strengthen delivery-oriented youth employment reforms.
2. Review and validate key evidence, including ECA analytical study on best practices in youth employment and entrepreneurship in Africa alongside findings from Dire Dawa focus group discussions, ensuring youth perspectives and subnational realities inform the final analysis.

3. Objectives

Overall Objective

To provide a regional, youth-inclusive technical platform to validate emerging evidence and strengthen delivery-oriented approaches to youth employment and entrepreneurship in Africa.

Specific Objectives

1. Validating analytical work by reviewing the study on best practices in youth employment and entrepreneurship in Africa, alongside findings from the Dire Dawa focus group discussions.
2. Review Youth policy frameworks in the IGAD region, highlighting key priorities, implementation progress, and policy gaps.
3. Presenting country case studies on youth employment and entrepreneurship from Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya.
4. Facilitate dialogue among key institutions supporting and implementing youth employment and entrepreneurship initiatives to identify practical action.

4. Expected Outputs

The consultation is key to achieving Result 1 of the overall project, establishing the foundation for subsequent policy mainstreaming and capacity building.

- Consultation and deliberation report of the EGM.
- Expert inputs to review and revise analytical documents.
- Provide actionable recommendations on youth employment and entrepreneurship in Africa to serve as an input for ARFSD 12 and Youth Event during COM.

5. Format of the Meeting

The EGM will be held over two days in plenary format, and break-out sessions combining expert presentations, moderated panels, and open discussions.

6. Contact Information

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