



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa



2025 Session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts (ICSOE)

UN Economic Commission for Africa - Eastern Africa

Repositioning Eastern Africa to Respond to External Shocks and Advance Regional Economic Integration

**Leveraging Regional Trade in a Changing Global
Order**

**3 October 2025
10:00 am-12.00 pm (CAT)**



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting

Leveraging Regional Trade in a Changing Global Order

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

Regional Office for Eastern Africa (SRO-EA)

3 October 2025; 10H00-12H00 CAT

Rwanda, Kigali: Virtual Participation

Concept Note and Programme of Work

I. Concept note

1. Background

Global trade tensions have intensified significantly in 2025, following a series of important trade policy shifts by the United States. The first significant development occurred when the U.S. President signed an executive order imposing 25% tariffs on most imports from Canada and Mexico, a substantial increase from previously near-zero rates. This was followed by additional measures targeting other countries, with global implications, including for African economies.

In response, Canada introduced immediate retaliatory tariffs, while China and other key trading partners adopted similar countermeasures, further escalating global trade frictions. A new round of U.S. tariff revisions published in August adjusted many of the earlier measures, reflecting a partial recalibration of the initial trade actions. These new tariff measures effectively dismantled Africa's preferential market access to the U.S., eliminating key duty-free provisions under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP).

In addition to tariff increases, other international policy shifts pose new risks to East African trade. These include the European Union's sustainability regulations on deforestation and carbon-border adjustments, persistent logistical disruptions in the Red Sea, and newly implemented industrial policies in advanced economies¹, which offer significant subsidies to domestic manufacturing sectors, thereby distorting global competition. These, added to the well-known intra-African trade constraints, could hamper efforts made up to now by African countries to boost their export performance.

Nevertheless, the negative effects of these new developments of the global trade landscape might be limited if the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is accelerated by members states.² Eastern Africa's export basket remains highly concentrated in a narrow range of primary commodities and low-complexity manufactured goods, leaving the region vulnerable to external shocks, preference erosion, and non-tariff barriers related to standards and regulations. However, the AfCFTA offers a platform to advance industrialization, economic diversification, and structural transformation.³ Without a strategic shift toward regional integration and trade, Eastern African countries risk slower economic growth, missed

¹ [The Return of Industrial Policy in Data | IMF](#)

² [Killing AGOA Softly: The Impact of the Trump Tariffs for Sub-Saharan Africa | IDOS](#)

³ ['We are on our own' - Africa looks within to weather growing global tariff turmoil | CNBC Africa](#)

opportunities for industrialization, and weaker resilience to global policy shocks. Recent studies by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2025) show that the largest gains from AfCFTA will accrue in processed and value-added goods.⁴

2. Purpose of the Expert Group Meeting (EGM)

This Expert Group Meeting (EGM) will assess how Eastern Africa can accelerate intra-African trade under the AfCFTA framework, and leverage it as a catalyst for industrialization, job creation, and structural economic transformation in the context of global trade dynamics. More specifically, it will discuss the following:

- **Trade Trends and Performance:** Examine recent developments in global trade and analyze Eastern Africa's trade performance, particularly with the United States, under AGOA or other trade regime.
- **National Measures and Strategic Responses:** Review country-specific measures adopted across Eastern Africa to mitigate the negative effects of recent global trade disruptions.
- **AfCFTA Implementation and Regional Integration:** Assess the progress of AfCFTA implementation in the region and the complementary role of the regional economic communities in advancing deeper regional integration, promoting export diversification, and building resilience to external shocks.

3. Participants

This AEGM is expected to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, including Government representatives from the Ministries of Trade and related ministries; regional economic communities, think-tanks, private sector and civil society.

4. UNECA focal point

For further information and clarification, please contact Ms. Simone Assah Kuete, Economic Affairs Officer, e-mail: simone.assahkuete@un.org

⁴ [Economic Report on Africa 2025 | UNECA](#)

II. Programme of Work

The AEGM will last for 2 hours. The times below are in GMT+2. Please adapt to your time zone.

Opening Session: Wednesday, 1 st October 2025	
10.00-10.10	Opening remarks: By: UNECA, SRO-EA Director, Mr. Andrew Mold
Background Paper presentation	
10.10-10.30	Recent trade performance of Eastern Africa By: UNECA Economic Affairs Officer, Mr. Rodgers Mukwaya
Round table discussions	
10.30-11.15	Moderator: UNECA Communication Officer, Mr. Didier Habimana <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ministry of Trade Madagascar• Ministry of Trade Djibouti• Ministry of Trade Tanzania• Ministry of Trade Rwanda• Regional representatives• Think-tank representatives
11.15-11.45	Open discussions
Closing	
11.45-12.00	Closing remarks By: UNECA, SRO-EA, Director, Mr. Andrew Mold