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TWENTY-FOURTH (24th) MEETING OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE  
OF SENIOR OFFICIALS AND EXPERTS (24th ICE) FOR WEST AFRICA

*Theme:*

**“Leveraging the AfCFTA Implementation to Building Forward Resilient and Sustainable Economies in West Africa, in a COVID-19 Era”**

***9-11 November 2021***

***Concept Note***

**Sub-Regional Office for West Africa**

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## I. Background

Following a recommendation of the [United Nations \(UN\) General Assembly](#), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was established in 1958 by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), to encourage economic cooperation among its member states (the nations of the [African continent](#)). The ECA's mandate is to promote the economic and social development of Africa, alongside its mission to generate ideas and actions for the prosperity of Africa. ECA has five sub-regional Offices (SROs), which enable it to transform its normative work and analysis into operational activities at subregional level. The ECA/SRO-WA Office is based in Niamey, Niger, and covers the fifteen ECOWAS Member States: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. The SROs were restructured in 2019, to fit for purpose and better respond to the specific development challenges of their respective sub-regions. In this vein, Demographic Dynamics for Development (DDD) was identified as the area of specialization of Subregional Office for West Africa (SRO-WA), given the important demographic challenges faced by countries of the region.

In furtherance of the regional economic cooperation, the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts (ICE) of the ECA was created by the UN General Assembly. The ICE across sub-regions, is organized annually by the ECA-Sub regional Offices to discuss national and regional economic and social performances, based on reports prepared by the Sub-Regional Offices.

The SRO-WA's ICE is made up of Senior Officials and experts from the West Africa's 15 Member States. It is a statutory framework for Member States to direct and supervise the elaboration and the implementation of the work plan of the Office. In this regard, the ICE ensures alignment of activities carried out by the Office with sub-regional and national priorities, while making suggestions related to the economic and social development in the sub-region. These recommendations are tabled before the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development for review and decision.

Each year, the ICE brings together high-level decision-makers from Member States to discuss economic and social performances and make recommendations to Member States and other development stakeholders.

The ICE is hosted each year, at its request, by a Member State from the sub-region. This year, the 24<sup>th</sup> ICE meeting will be hosted by The Gambia, from 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, November 2021. The theme for the session is: **“Leveraging the AfCFTA Implementation to Building Forward Resilient and Sustainable Economics in West Africa in a Covid-19 Era”**. This theme is informed by the recommendations from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Session of the ICE held in 2020

As usual, this year's ICE 24 will be preceded by policy dialogue that will take place on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2021, to discuss (1) the outcome of the forum of West Africa Inter-governmental Organisations (IGO) and private sector platform held in May 2021, (2) the key milestones from the Regional Business Forum – **“Empowering the Youth and Women to Spur Africa's Transformation Agenda** organized in September 2021 and the outcome of the National Transfer Account International Conference held in October 2021. This session will be an opportunity to launch the **“Made in West Africa”** Initiative, a key recommendation from the Regional Forum of IGO and Private Sector.

## II. Objectives and theme of the 24<sup>th</sup> ICE Meeting

With the starting of trading under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in January 2021 and the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, socio-economic space in Africa has been altered. The main aim of the 24th ICE is therefore to discuss how recent changes have affected economic and social development of West African countries. In particular, the meeting seeks to identify inherent strengths and resilience of West Africa economies to rebound from the aftermath of Covid-19, the challenges, opportunities as well as and strategic pathways toward building a more resilient and sustainable development, by harnessing the numerous opportunities of the AfCFTA.

To this end, senior officials and experts from across the region will examine statutory reports produced by the secretariat. The session will also offer Member States an opportunity to review the report on the implementation of the SRO-WA's work business plan and work programme since 23<sup>rd</sup> session of ICE, the report on the socioeconomic profile for West Africa and progress report on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in West Africa. These respective reports and subsequent discussions will be considered within the context of economic recovery from COVID-19 with AfCFTA implementation as an anchor for such agenda.

### **III. Rationale of the Main theme for the 24<sup>th</sup> ICE Meeting**

The adoption of the AfCFTA on 21 March 2018, in Kigali (Rwanda) by African governments marked a significant stride towards the realization of both the United Nations (UN) Agenda 2030 and the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063. The AfCFTA, a core projects of the first-ten-year implementation plan for Agenda 2063<sup>1</sup>, was officially launched on 7 July 2019 in Niamey, Niger, at the AU's extraordinary AU. The AfCFTA officially became operational on 1 January 2021, thus laying the foundation for a process of strengthening intra-African trade. The AfCFTA Agreement has among its stated objectives and aims: (a) the creation of a single market for trade in goods and services in accordance with the Pan African Vision of "An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa" enshrined in Agenda 2063; (b) the creation of a liberalised market for goods and services aided by the elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers to trade in goods or services; (c) enhanced efficiency of customs procedures, trade facilitation and transit; (d) the development and promotion of regional and continental value chains; (e) enhanced socio-economic development, diversification and industrialization across Africa.

With an estimated population of over 1.3 billion in 2020 and a projection of 1.5 billion by 2025<sup>2</sup>, Africa is the second largest continent in the world, coming after Asia with 4.6 billion. This huge population provides potential consumer base and market for trade on the African continent. Apart from its population size, the continent is also well endowed with varieties of natural resources. Despite its population and rich resource endowment, Africa is one of the poorest continents in the world with total GDP of US\$2.6 trillion and an average GDP per capita of US\$1,970, as of 2020<sup>3</sup>. West Africa accounts for about 26.5 percent (US\$688billion) of economy (GDP) and over one-third (30.8%, 401 million)<sup>4</sup> of population of Africa.

A Notable response to the current development challenges in the continent is the facilitation of production and trade among the constituent countries, which the AfCFTA provides a platform. First, the AfCFTA is expected to bring together the African population, it will also create about \$3.5 trillion economic bloc and usher in a new era of development on the continent. Second, it is envisaged that it

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<sup>1</sup> <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/ftyip>

<sup>2</sup> <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Probabilistic/Population/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>

will enable African economies to strengthen South-South cooperation, conquer new markets and diversify sources of supply. Third, AfCFTA could foster a sharp increase in intra-African trade by more than 50% and even double within 10 years after the entry into force compared to approximately 15% currently, while producing more jobs for Africa's bulging youth population<sup>5</sup>.

An important pillar on which rests the AfCFTA is the strength of the existing Regional Economic Communities (RECs) on the Continent as contained in Article 5b on general principles<sup>6</sup>. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is among the first REC blocs in Africa to embark on economic integration.

Within the past four decades of its creation, ECOWAS members have made tremendous progress towards regional integration by several treaties signed and operationalised such as: ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS); Common External Tariff (CET); guaranteeing free movement of people with common ID card and right of establishment; and various regional initiatives such as the West Africa Common Industrial Policy and the Private Sector Development Strategy, among many others.

ECOWAS has also made significant progress towards the implementation of AfCFTA. As at September 2021, 12 (80%) out of the 15 ECOWAS countries (compared with 69.1% in Africa) ratified the AfCFTA agreement, which is one of the major projects of the first ten-year implementation plan of the African Union's 2063 Agenda<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, out of 12 African countries which validated their national AfCFTA strategies, 8 (66.7%)<sup>8</sup> are in West Africa.

The significance of the West African region within the context of AfCFTA notwithstanding, the region is still characterised by notable socio-economic features.

With total confirmed infection cases of 513,946 and 6,710 fatality (deaths), West Africa accounted for 10.6 % and 5.8% (respectively in Covid-19 cases in Africa as of 30<sup>th</sup> July 2021<sup>9</sup>). Though the infections rates are relatively lower compared to other regions, the pandemic has significant negative economic and social impacts. According to the recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) April 2021 Africa (SSA) Regional Economic Outlook (REO), real GDP growth for West Africa slumped to 0.7 percent in 2020, from 3.5 percent in 2019; driven by the worst global recession in over a century due to COVID-19 pandemic with the brunt of the negative effects mostly felt by Cabo Verde, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Mali, and Nigeria<sup>10</sup>.

Observably, the mild decline in GDP, which is a clear contrast to projected sharp fall is attributable to more targeted and less restrictive lockdowns, and positive economic growth in Benin (2.3 percent), Côte d'Ivoire (2 percent), and Niger (1.2 percent)<sup>11</sup>.

The pandemic has also led to increased government expenditures because of the related substantive spending on health facilities provision of social support for the vulnerable groups of the population. This further widened fiscal deficits and heightened the debt crisis with fiscal deficits and public debts

<sup>5</sup> <https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/43253>

<sup>6</sup> [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36437-treaty-consolidated\\_text\\_on\\_cfta\\_-\\_en.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36437-treaty-consolidated_text_on_cfta_-_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-14\\_ten\\_year\\_implementation\\_french.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-14_ten_year_implementation_french.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal, Togo, Niger, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Burkina Faso

<sup>9</sup> AU, Africa CDC, July 2021

<sup>10</sup> ECA SRO-WA draft Policy Brief, Assessing Covid-19 Impact on West African Economies in 2020

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.afdb.org/en/knowledge/publications/african-economic-outlook>

standing at 6.9 percent and 38.8 percent of the GDP respectively in 2020<sup>12</sup>. It is estimated that about 7.3 million of full-time jobs<sup>13</sup> have been lost due to lockdown and other restrictions imposed to curtail spread of the virus in different countries across the region.

The pandemic has also impacted negatively on trade both within the ECOWAS region and between ECOWAS member states and other African and world trading partners. The impacts of the pandemic in Africa, and West Africa are exacerbated by the characteristics of the region with limited fiscal space, poorly diversified economies focused on exports of primary products and a large informal sector.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the negative impacts of the covid-19 pandemic, West African economy is on a gradual path to recovery, though the latter is still fragile. This suggests the resilience of the regional economy, and the need to strengthen the economy recovery in building forward a more resilient, sustainable growth and development path. The AfCFTA offers unique opportunities for fast-tracking such economic recovery and development which can be leveraged through regional collaborative efforts.

The West African economies are marked by a strong predominance of small and medium-sized enterprises, and/or those operating in the informal sector<sup>15</sup> and with low productivity<sup>16</sup>, whose constraints have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic also highlighted the structural fragility of the sub-region's economies, due to its lack of processing, as evidenced by the structure of its exports, which are largely composed of raw materials.

The importance of AfCFTA implementation for accelerating Africa's post covid-19 recovery and building forward is well recognized by ECA<sup>17</sup>. Effective implementation of the AfCFTA is expected to facilitate the creation of sub-regional value chains with a view to transforming the natural and mineral resources West Africa is endowed with. Specifically, through creation and facilitation of trade (formal and informal cross-border) AfCFTA is expected to lead to production expansion of tradable goods and services sectors, thereby, yielding resource allocation, increased employment and income generation, as well as improved revenue generation for governments. AfCFTA has the potentials for addressing the regional unemployment estimated at 6.6 percent in 2020, and particularly youth unemployment and underemployment which stood at 12.0 and 1.5 percent respectively in 2019<sup>18</sup>. Consequently, AfCFTA could be an anchor for an inclusive, transformative, resilient, and sustainable economic recovery of West African countries

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/SSA/Issues/2021/04/15/regional-economic-outlook-for-sub-saharan-africa-april-2021>.

<sup>13</sup> ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Seventh edition Updated estimates and analysis, January 2021, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/--dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_767028.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/--dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_767028.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact of Restriction Measures in West Africa - Benin | ReliefWeb, <https://reliefweb.int/report/benin/covid-19-pandemic-impact-restriction-measures-west-africa>

<sup>15</sup> 9 Informal sector contributing 25-65% to GDP in 13 of 15 West African countries (Regional Economic Outlook - Sub-Saharan Africa - Restarting Growth, IMF, April 2017)

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/2019AEO/AEO\\_2019-FR-CHAP2.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/2019AEO/AEO_2019-FR-CHAP2.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.uneca.org/stories/accelerating-afcfta-implementation-key-for-africa%27s-recovery-post-covid-19>

<sup>18</sup> <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/unemployment-and-labour-underutilization/>

In this regard, ECA/SRO-WA has supported the formulation of national AfCFTA strategies and implementation frameworks of eight countries. Similarly, the Office is providing technical support to other countries whose AfCFTA strategies are either still being developed or finalized.

In the same vein, The West Africa IGOs and Private Sector sub-Regional Virtual forum on the Implementation of the AfCFTA held in May 2021 recognized the imperative to identify/ consolidate joint measures and actions that involved ECOWAS, UEMOA, FEWACCI, CCR-UEMOA and other OIGs and regional private sector and CSO platforms to accelerate the implementation of the AfCFTA in West Africa. Among the key recommendations to be implemented, the meeting called for the establishment of the "Made in West Africa", initiative, as a regional platform to promote the creation of value additions to local products, using the AfCFTA as an anchor. The Made in West Africa initiative will be launched at the ICE 24th session along with measures and concrete towards its successful operationalization.

Moreover, the ECA/SRO WA Regional Business Forum held in September 2011 which has involved around 300 women, youth and business leaders resulted in the launch of the West Africa Business Linkages Platform.

By bringing together women and young entrepreneurs from across the region, and coalition partners to support them leapfrog into the business ecosystems in West Africa, the West Africa Business Linkages fit into and support the operation of the Made in West Africa initiative.

Overall, targeted and results oriented policies and programmes are essential to responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and wriggle out of its relics, particularly given the current wave of the delta variant. Therefore, building forward a resilient, inclusive and sustainable recovery of the West African economy requires timely, concerted, cohesive, and well-focused national and regional economic recovery strategies.

It is against this backdrop that the 24<sup>th</sup> ICE meeting will be organized, to bring together policy planners from ECOWAS members states to discuss the imperative to **“Leveraging the AfCFTA Implementation to Building Forward Resilient and Sustainable Economics in West Africa in a Covid-19 Era”**.

#### **IV. Participation**

Participants at the 24<sup>th</sup> ICE include Senior development planning and economic experts and trade experts in the West Africa, The IGOs, other stakeholders and development partners. Consequently, delegates will be drawn from the 15 West African States, as well as senior officials and experts from ECOWAS, WAEMU, Mano River Union (MRU), and other sub-regional Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs). The African Union Commission, the African Development Bank (AfDB), and other International Financial Institutions will also be represented.

Besides the ECA, other agencies under the UN System will contribute to the success of the meeting

#### **V. ICE Documents**

Given the theme of the 24<sup>th</sup> ICE, deliberations shall be guided by the content of different working documents to be presented by ECA/SRO-WA. Documents to be presented include the following:

- Report on the implementation of the SRO-WA work plan for the period September 2020-September 2022;

- Report on the socioeconomic profile and prospects for West Africa 2020/2021;
- Progress report on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in West Africa; and
- Issue paper accompanying discussions on the ICE thematic

## **VI. Expected results from the 24<sup>th</sup> ICE meeting**

The ICE 24<sup>th</sup> meeting is expected to enrich and adopt the draft reports that will be presented by the ECA/SRO-WA. It is also expected to define actions-oriented policy recommendations for onwards submission to decision makers, to inform the formulation of national development programs and to speed up the regional integration process. In this perspective, particular emphasis will be placed on how to leverage on the AfCFTA for rebuilding, recovery and building forward resilient economies to fast-track sustainable development in the ECOWAS region considering the covid-19 pandemic. A detailed meeting report will summarize presentations, discussions, additions to be made to documents presented, main conclusions, and recommendations.

## **VII. Meeting organization, date, and format**

The 24th ICE meeting will be *hybrid* in nature, taking place *physically and virtually*, 9-11 November 2021, with plenary sessions and a round table during which reports prepared by the Office and statements from eminent experts will be presented and discussed. All reports and documents from the ICE 24 session will be published on the ECA/SRO-WA website: <http://www.uneca.org/sro-wa/>.

## **VIII. Working language**

The working language of the meeting will be French and English.

## **IX. Administrative arrangements and logistics**

The ECA SRO-WA will inform participants about the logistic conditions for participation in this meeting, notably the parameters for connecting to the virtual platform. Additional information on other administrative arrangements will be provided in the advisory note, which will be sent to participants who confirm their participation.

## **X. Contacts**

### **At the ECA SRO-WA**

To confirm participation, request additional information, and make any other inquiry regarding the meeting, contact:

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**For any administrative, logistics inquiry and other information**

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