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**Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa  
Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa  
First joint session**

Marrakech, Morocco, 1–3 November 2022

## Concept note

### I. Context

1. As statutory deliberative bodies, the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa and the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa oversee the activities of the respective Subregional Offices of the Economic Commission for Africa as part of the programme adopted at the annual session of the General Assembly.<sup>1</sup> The Committees hold annual sessions to consider the results achieved by the Subregional Offices, their upcoming work programmes and their strategic orientations as they relate to the development priorities of countries in North and West Africa. The sessions also provide forums for senior experts and policymakers in national Governments, researchers, the private sector, civil society and academia to assess and discuss trends in economic and social conditions across the subregions. During the sessions, participants make recommendations on how to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union while deepening regional integration.

2. The theme of the first joint session is “Food and energy security in North and West Africa amid multiple crises”. The world is facing high prices for food, fertilizer and fuel owing to heightened geopolitical tensions, the global economic slowdown, the growing impact of climate change and the repercussions of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. All countries have been hit by these shocks, albeit through varied channels and to different degrees, with developing countries being hit the hardest. Global output is projected to grow by only 3.2 per cent in 2022 and 2.9 per cent in 2023, down from 6.1 per cent in 2021.<sup>2</sup> The International Monetary Fund has revised its 2022 inflation forecasts upward to 6.6 per cent for advanced economies and 9.5 per cent for emerging markets and developing countries. The impact of the escalation of the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in 2022 has impeded any economic recovery and rendered various fiscal stimulus efforts less effective. According to a recent study by the United Nations Development Programme, it is estimated that 52 million people, mostly in Africa, fell into extreme poverty in the first three months following the outbreak of the conflict, with their income falling to \$1.90 or less a day (adjusted for purchasing power parity). An additional 20 million people fell below the poverty threshold of \$3.20 a day.

3. Despite people’s loss of income, as of May 2022, global food prices had increased by 80 per cent over the previous two years and by 15 per cent between March–and April 2022. The escalation of the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in 2022 and the resulting disruption to global supply chains, reduced business confidence and heightened

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<sup>1</sup> See A/76/6 (Sect.18).

<sup>2</sup> International Monetary Fund, “World Economic Outlook update: gloomy and more uncertain” (Washington, D.C., July 2022).



uncertainty accelerated food price increases, which placed millions of people at risk of food insecurity and deprivation. The Food Price Index of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reached a record high in March 2022. High and volatile food prices have jeopardized the livelihoods of households in rural areas, which depend on agriculture. Material risks of food shortages have also emerged, given that the Russian Federation and Ukraine are major food exporters, having provided almost 30 per cent of global wheat exports in recent years. North African countries, in particular Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, import more than half of their wheat – which constitutes a significant portion of their diet – from the Russian Federation and Ukraine.<sup>3,4</sup> In West Africa, 46 per cent of wheat flour is imported from the Black Sea region, mainly from the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Benin, Senegal and Togo are highly dependent on wheat imports from the Russian Federation, which supplies 68, 52 and 45 per cent of their wheat imports, respectively.

4. Globally, North and West Africa are among the subregions that are most vulnerable to food insecurity, since they rely heavily on food imports. North Africa in particular has one of the largest food deficits anywhere in the world for cereals.<sup>5</sup> In a recent joint assessment of West Africa by the Economic Community of West African States, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme, it was estimated that, in 2022, agricultural production in the subregion would be 20 per cent lower than average annual production from 2017 to 2020 and cereal imports would be 5 per cent higher than in 2021, exceeding 22 million tons. Furthermore, severe food insecurity rates during the lean season were projected to increase by 70 per cent, from 27.1 per cent in 2021 to 38.2 per cent in 2022. These projections did not take into consideration the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, so food insecurity levels could be particularly alarming during the 2022 lean season.<sup>6</sup>

5. The persistent food and nutrition insecurity in North and West Africa continue to be exacerbated by the lingering effects of the COVID-19 crisis, severe droughts, protracted geopolitical tensions and political unrest in several countries in the two subregions. An increase in the frequency of extreme weather conditions combined with the steady warming of the climate are affecting local agriculture in both subregions. Half the population of North Africa already lives with water stress. Furthermore, agriculture productivity in the subregion is not keeping pace with population growth rates, which are among the highest in the world. In West Africa, nearly two thirds of countries will face water scarcity by 2025. Research results have shown that water contamination is a major problem for both rural and urban populations.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “World food situation, FAO Food Price Index”. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/> (accessed on 28 June 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Between 2009 and 2017, the cereal import dependency of Tunisia was greater than 60 per cent, with the bulk coming from Ukraine. Egypt, the world’s largest wheat importer, buys up to 85 per cent of its wheat from the Russian Federation and Ukraine and spends around 2 per cent of its budget on bread subsidies.

<sup>5</sup> The Global Food Safety Index ranks countries based on issues related to food affordability, availability, quality and safety, as well as natural resources and resilience. According to the 2021 Index, Algeria was the leading country for food security in North Africa. It was ranked 54th out of 113 countries. Algeria was followed by Tunisia (55th), Morocco (57th) and Egypt (67th), with all four countries being placed in the “good performance” category. The Sudan (110th) was classified in the “needs improvement” category. No data were available for Libya and Mauritania.

<sup>6</sup> Economic Community of West African States, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme, “Assessment of the risks and impact of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis on food security in the ECOWAS region” (June 2022).

<sup>7</sup> S. Kenfack, M. Beguere and L. Boukerrou, “Water, climate, and health risks in West Africa: perspectives from

6. Recent trends have revived discussion and efforts by Governments in Africa to become “food sovereign” rather than food dependent, as well as to exert greater power over their food sources and to adopt strategies that mitigate the impact of global market forces. Governments have also recognized that new, longer-term, technology-driven solutions will be needed to achieve food security for their growing populations, given the risks posed by climate change to agricultural productivity.

7. North Africa spent \$13 billion on food imports in 2020, while West Africa spent \$4.5 billion on cereal imports in 2019.<sup>8</sup> Some of that food could be produced in the two subregions, providing viable livelihoods for young people. The Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area provides opportunities for the two subregions to trade with other and achieve food security while stimulating growth. So far, however, the impact of the Agreement on food security has been limited because significant infrastructure gaps make it difficult for countries to transport and access food.

8. The world is facing an energy crisis, with crude oil prices having increased by around 60 per cent and gas prices having more than doubled during the first six months of 2022.<sup>9</sup> Fossil fuel markets have also been heavily disrupted by the conflict in Ukraine, as the Russian Federation is the leading exporter of natural gas and the second largest exporter of oil. As a result of these factors, consumer price inflation has reached double digits in several countries, including Burkina Faso, Egypt, the Gambia, Ghana and Nigeria, with a five-year high in several countries, including Ghana and Nigeria. The rising prices are projected to squeeze living standards in both subregions.

9. The food crisis highlights the link between energy and food supply security in places where the agriculture and food industries use energy for various purposes, including transport and production. For example, direct and indirect energy costs sometimes account for 40 to 50 per cent of the total variable costs of growing crops. Higher energy costs therefore translate into higher production costs and, ultimately, higher food prices, especially for countries that are net oil importers.

10. Regarding energy security, North African countries have already achieved near-universal access to electricity and clean cooking (target 7.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals) thanks to effective public policies that have promoted major grid extensions, rural electrification programmes and the expansion of gas networks and liquefied petroleum gas distribution. Although renewable energy consumption remains largely untapped across the subregion relative to its potential, several countries have made substantial progress in developing their vast renewable resources. Over the past 10 years, renewable electricity has grown by more than 40 per cent in North Africa, driven by the rapid expansion of wind and solar projects. In the transport sector, however, renewables play a minor role across the subregion; there are few electric vehicles that can use renewable power, and biofuel use is low. Nevertheless, the subregion has some of the greatest potential for renewable energy in the world, so significant further development and growth is possible, and it is essential to increase

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a regional water quality program” (Abstract, No. S-064, presented at the 28th annual meeting of the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology, Rome, Italy, 1–4 September 2016). Available at: <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/abs/10.1289/isee.2016.4802#:~:text=Over%2060%25%20of%20countries%20in,both%20rural%20and%20urban%20populations>.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, “Potential impacts of the Ukraine-Russia crisis on West Africa” (Powerpoint presentation, Subregional Office for West Africa, April 2022) .

<sup>9</sup> Oil prices fell back below \$100 a barrel at the beginning of July 2022 and have stayed near that threshold, largely because of expectations that the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries would increase supply.

deployment beyond power generation and into industrial heating and transport, using technologies such as green hydrogen. According to World Bank data for 2019, average national renewable energy consumption in West Africa was 63.57 per cent of total national final energy consumption in 2019.<sup>10</sup>

11. The thirty-seventh session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa and the twenty-fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa will be held jointly in Marrakech, Morocco from 1 to 3 November 2022. They will occur against a backdrop of challenging global conditions, with member States seeking innovative and longer-term solutions to mitigate the impact of the many crises and embark on the path to a resilient and sustainable recovery.

12. An ad hoc expert group meeting on the topic “Crisis resilience and sustainability in North and West Africa” will be held during the joint session. The ad hoc expert group meeting will bring together researchers, policymakers and experts from member States, including representatives of international institutions. Its main objective is to provide policy recommendations and identify priority actions related to the following topics: resilient and sustainable food and energy systems in North and West Africa; small and medium-sized enterprise finance and firm performance; prosperity, people and planet perspectives; gender-smart investing; and lessons learned from the issuance of green bonds in emerging markets and developing countries.

## **II. Objectives of the joint session**

13. The current energy and food crises have both short- and medium-term implications. Governments need to move quickly and decisively on the short-term issues in ways that are consistent with their longer-term objectives. In parallel, they need to work to address their long-term objectives directly. The session will allow participants to discuss and suggest short- and medium-term responses to food-security and energy-security issues in North and West Africa that take the changing regional and global contexts into account.

14. Participants will also discuss the activity reports and results achieved by the two Subregional Offices, review their future work programmes and refine their strategic directions, as they relate to the development priorities of the North and West African countries.

## **III. Expected results**

15. Participants are expected to refine and adopt the respective reports that will be presented by the two Subregional Offices and to draw up recommendations on policies and strategies for decision makers for the formulation of national and subregional development programmes. They are also expected to build upon the regional integration agenda.

16. The Subregional Office for North Africa and the Subregional Office for West Africa will each prepare a separate report on the joint session in which they will summarize the presentations, discussions and key conclusions and recommendations. These reports will be submitted to the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, the principal deliberative organ of the Economic Commission for Africa.

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<sup>10</sup> World Bank, “Renewable energy consumption (% of total final energy consumption)”, Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) database. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.FEC.RNEW.ZS> (accessed on #Day# #Month# 202X) (accessed 7 July 2022).

#### **IV. Organization and operational details of the joint session**

17. The thirty-seventh session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa and the twenty-fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa will be held in a plenary format during which reports and papers drawn up by the two Subregional Offices will be presented and discussed. Draft versions of the final reports written by the Subregional Offices will be sent to relevant member States within one month of the closure of the session.

#### **V. Participation**

18. Participation at the joint session is open in particular to high-level representatives of national ministries, administrations and institutions responsible for planning, economic and social development, finance, employment, trade and industry, agriculture and the environment. Representatives of the general secretariat of the Arab Maghreb Union, the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States, the West African Economic and Monetary Union, other subregional intergovernmental organizations based in North and West Africa, civil society, the private sector, universities, research institutions, United Nations agencies and other development partners may participate as observers.

#### **VI. Date and place of the joint session**

19. The joint session will be held from 1 to 3 November 2022 in Marrakech, Morocco.

#### **VII. Working languages**

20. Arabic, English and French will be the working languages of the session.

#### **VIII. Contacts**

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