



**Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials
and Experts for North Africa**

Thirty-fourth meeting

Aswan, Egypt

25–28 November 2019

Aide-memoire

I. Context

1. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Subregional Office for North Africa is one of five subregional offices of the Commission. Based in Rabat, Morocco, it covers seven countries: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, the Sudan and Tunisia. The main objective of the Subregional Office is to strengthen the capacity of member States in the subregion to design and implement, on the basis of credible data, suitable national policies and programmes for inclusive development and structural socioeconomic transformation in North Africa. Within the framework of the new strategic orientation of ECA, the Subregional Office has adopted an area of specialization focused on employment, skills and sustainable development.

2. As a statutory deliberative body, the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa is responsible for the strategic direction of the activities of the Subregional Office. The Committee holds a meeting annually to consider the activity report and the results achieved by the Subregional Office, its work programme and strategic orientations, in cohesion with the development priorities of the North African countries. The meeting also provides a forum for assessment and exchanges among high-level experts of national Governments, researchers and representatives of the private sector and civil society on evolving patterns in economic and social conditions across the subregion, with a view to making recommendations on ways to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 of the African Union, as well as deepening regional integration.

3. Scheduled to take place from 25 to 28 November 2019 in Aswan, Egypt, the thirty-fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa takes place in a global context characterized by slower economic growth which, according to International Monetary Fund estimates, has decelerated from 4 per cent in 2017 to 3.6 per cent¹ in 2018, and is unlikely to exceed 3.3 per cent in 2019. Forecasts for 2020 indicate a slight improvement, to 3.6 per cent. Continuing trade tensions between China and Europe, and slow growth in the euro area – approximately 1.3 per cent in 2019 – are some of the explanatory factors for that situation.

4. Among the developing economies, Africa as a whole is projected to experience growth at an accelerating pace, to 3.4 per cent in 2019 and 3.5 per cent in 2020, compared with the 3.7 per cent figure in 2018. Nonetheless, significant differences persist between the subregions. In 2019, Eastern Africa was at the top of the continent, with a gross domestic product growth rate approaching 6.4 per cent, followed by North Africa at 3.4 per cent, West Africa at 3.4 per cent, Central Africa at 2.5 per cent and Southern Africa at 1.2 per cent.

¹ World Economic Situation and Prospects 2019-The report is a joint product of UN/DESA, UNCTAD, ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA.

5. At the subregional level, three countries in North Africa face sociopolitical turmoil. The departures, in the wake of unprecedented popular upheaval, of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria and President Omar al-Bashir of the Sudan, resulted in national internal crises which, if the aftermath persists, might entail negative consequences for growth and investment in those countries. Heightened conflict in Libya has exacerbated the precarious lot of the population in a climate of insecurity. The subregion as a whole is still grappling with youth unemployment and social inequality, among other challenges.

6. The presidential election in Mauritania in 2019, for the first time since independence in 1960, culminated in a peaceful transfer of power from the incumbent, President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, to Mohamed Ould Ghazouani in the first round, with 52.01 per cent of the vote.

7. In Tunisia, too, 2019 is an election year, but the death of President Beji Caid Essebsi disrupted the established electoral calendar, necessitating early elections on 15 September, while the legislative elections are scheduled for 6 October.

8. In terms of broad-based development programmes, 2019 saw the official inauguration of the African Continental Free Trade Area, which encompasses a population of 1.2 billion, with a combined gross domestic product exceeding \$2.5 trillion.

II. Objectives of the meeting

9. The overarching theme of the thirty-fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa is “The African Continental Free Trade Area and employment: impact for North Africa of enhanced trade facilitation and regional integration”, in connection with the area of specialization of the Subregional Office – employment, competencies and sustainable development – which will also be the theme and focus of a special session of in-depth discussions to analyse the opportunities and challenges for the subregion, and identify the necessary adjustments to make the most of the African Continental Free Trade Area for the purposes of job creation. The theme of trade facilitation and its impact on employment is a crucial issue for North Africa because – whereas the subregion possesses most of the structural components of a dynamic, integrated market, such as regional proximity, availability of infrastructure and linguistic and cultural affinity – inadequate integration at the subregional level means that the economies concerned miss out on growth opportunities and limits the scope for job creation. Consideration of issues emanating from this theme will facilitate overarching and integrated approaches towards identifying ways and means of ensuring that enhanced regional integration, in the medium to long term, results in an improvement in the employment situation across the subregion. The participants will consider situations whereby regional integration can rejuvenate the economic landscape and thus promote job creation through more sustainable and more balanced growth in social and geographical terms.

10. The special meeting of experts, which will take place in tandem with the meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa on the related theme “Trade facilitation in North Africa for enhanced regional economic integration: challenges, opportunities and possible solutions”, will further underpin that topic, so that support to regional value chains and trade expansion between North African countries can act as an engine of economic growth inclusive and development.

11. Owing to current trade-related constraints, trade between the countries in the subregion has not exceeded 5 per cent of their total trade. These constraints increase transaction costs and dampen the competitiveness of firms operating in the subregion. Enhanced trade facilitation will boost transparency and efficiency, while streamlining trade flows. The experts meeting should provide a forum for identifying the necessary preconditions and leverages for enhanced trade relations and elicit specific recommendations and solutions toward strengthening economic integration in North Africa.

12. The Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa will also provide a forum whereby representatives of member States can consider several statutory reports, such as the subregional profile, which comprises a comparative analysis of economic and social conditions across the subregion; the situation report on economic activity in North Africa; the status of the implementation of the major regional and international development programmes; and the work programme and strategic orientations of the Subregional Office.

III. Expected results

13. The meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa is expected to refine and adopt the reports to be presented by the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa, draw up recommendations on policies and strategies for decision-makers towards the formulation of national development programmes, and streamline the regional integration agenda. There will be a detailed report on the meeting, summarizing the presentations, discussions and refinements to be made to the presentations, key conclusions and recommendations.

14. The report of the thirty-fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa will be submitted to the Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, a deliberative organ of ECA.

IV. Organization and operational details of the meeting

15. The thirty-fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Official and Experts for North Africa will be held in plenary sessions, during which reports drawn up by the Subregional Office and papers prepared by eminent experts will be presented and discussed. The draft version of the final report will be sent to member States within two months of the closure of the meeting.

V. Participation

16. Participation in the meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa is open particularly to high-level representatives of national ministries, administrations and institutions responsible for planning and economic and social development, finance, employment, trade and industry, agriculture, environment and social development; representatives of the general secretariat of the Arab Maghreb Union and other regional intergovernmental organizations based in North Africa; representatives of civil society and the private sector; universities and research institutions; United Nations agencies; and other development partners engaged in the subregion.

VI. Date and place of the meeting

17. The meeting will take place from 25 to 28 November 2019, in Aswan (Egypt).

VII. Working languages

18. **Arabic, English and French** will be the working languages of the meeting.

VIII. Contacts

19. For further information regarding the organization of the meeting, please contact:

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