
Economic Commission for Africa
Subregional Office for North Africa

Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials
and Experts for North Africa
Thirty-fifth session (virtual meeting)
17 November 2020

**Report of the thirty-fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of
Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa**

I. Opening of the session [agenda item 1]

A. Organization and attendance

1. The opening ceremony of the thirty-fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa was attended by Omar Aboueich, Assistant Minister for Regional and International Multilateral Economic Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt and outgoing Chair of the Intergovernmental Committee Bureau, Brahim Djamel Kessali, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance of Algeria, on behalf of Abderrahmane Raouya, Minister of Finance of Algeria, and Taïeb Baccouche, Secretary-General of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was represented by Vera Songwe, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Commission.

2. Representatives of the seven member States of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts, namely Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, the Sudan and Tunisia were present at the opening of the session, thereby attaining the necessary quorum. Representatives of AMU, international and regional organizations, universities, cooperation agencies, financial institutions and United Nations agencies also participated in the opening ceremony.

B. Opening statements

3. The session began with a statement by Khaled Hussein, interim Director of the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa, who drew attention to the decision of the thirty-fourth Intergovernmental Committee Bureau of 14 September 2020, in which the Bureau had invited the thirty-fifth session to consider policies and strategies to help member States accelerate their recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and called for the session to be held virtually. The Subregional Office had organized a series of webinars with a view to consulting with all relevant stakeholders with regard to the current economic and social situation in North Africa, how trade policies and the African Continental Free Trade Area could mitigate the impact of COVID-19, innovative technologies and job creation in North Africa, and progress made by North African countries towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

4. In her opening remarks, Ms. Songwe, emphasized the magnitude of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa, and said that North Africa was the second most affected African subregion after Southern Africa. Although most countries in North Africa were not categorized as low-income countries, the pandemic has increased the vulnerability of all North African economies. ECA had launched a number of initiatives to promote economic recovery on the continent and reduce African countries' debt burdens. To that end, ECA had appealed to the Group of 20, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to offer substantial relief to Africa and loans on favourable terms. To support efforts by member States to mitigate the impact of the crisis, ECA was facilitating the adoption and harmonization of regional policies on the trade in essential goods, the emergence of subregional pharmaceutical poles, including in North Africa, and the adoption of digital tools to promote the exchange of information among citizens and governments and ensure inclusive and sustainable growth.

5. Speaking on behalf of the outgoing Chair of the Intergovernmental Committee Bureau, Nada Massoud underlined the relevance of the theme chosen for the thirty-fifth session, namely

“Recovering from COVID-19: Policies and strategies for North Africa”. She thanked ECA and the Executive Secretary of the Commission for their ongoing efforts to support the African continent during the COVID-19 crisis and expressed her appreciation for the initiatives launched by ECA to mitigate the socioeconomic repercussions of the pandemic: those initiatives had been particularly beneficial to many countries in North Africa. The report of the thirty-fifth session would be submitted to the upcoming Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, to be held in March 2021. In closing, Ms. Massoud wished the participants every success in their deliberations.

6. Taking the floor, Mr. Baccouche affirmed the willingness of the Secretariat-General of AMU to support the efforts of member countries to address the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular by facilitating exchanges among Maghreb countries, sharing good practices and facilitating trade within the subregion. He commended ECA for its fruitful cooperation with AMU and wished participants every success in their work at the thirty-fifth session.

II. Election of officers [agenda item 2]

7. Following consultations among the heads of delegations, the Committee elected the following Bureau by consensus:

Chair	:	Algeria
Vice-Chair	:	Libya
Rapporteur	:	Mauritania

III. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work [agenda item 3]

8. In his introductory statement, Mr. Kessali, Chair of the incoming Intergovernmental Committee Bureau, welcomed all the participants and thanked member countries for the confidence placed in his country. He commended the outgoing Bureau and the Subregional Office for North Africa for the important work they had carried out over the previous year.

9. The proceedings of the session were subsequently chaired by Sidi Mohamed Ferhane, Director-General of Forecasting and Policies at the Ministry of Finance of Algeria.

10. The Committee then adopted the agenda for the thirty-fifth session (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/35/1), set forth in annex II to the present report, and the programme of work (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/35/1/Add.1).

IV. Evolution of economic and social conditions in North Africa: regional profile review – North Africa [agenda item 4]

11. The secretariat outlined the main findings of the report entitled: “Sub-regional profile: North Africa 2020 – North Africa facing the challenges of the Covid 19 crisis” (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/35/2). The report provided an overview of recent macroeconomic and social developments in North Africa and short- and medium-term COVID-19-related challenges facing the subregion. The secretariat also gave a presentation on the pandemic vulnerability score that had recently been developed by the Subregional Office for North Africa.

12. The Committee called on the secretariat to strengthen its links with the national statistical offices of the member countries and to use, as far as possible, comparable indicators from different countries. The Committee also invited the secretariat to organize a workshop to strengthen the capacity of relevant stakeholders to calculate vulnerability scores.

13. The secretariat took note of the comments made by the Committee so that they could be incorporated into the 2021 edition of the subregional profile.

V. Review of the implementation of regional and international development agendas and special initiatives [agenda item 5]

14. The secretariat presented the main findings of the report entitled: “Achievement of the United Nations 2030 Agenda (SDG) and the African Union Agenda 2063 in North Africa: Synthesis” (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/35/3). The purpose of the report was to assist States in monitoring their compliance with their regional and international commitments and to ensure that the priorities of the subregion were addressed in negotiations at both the regional and international levels. The report focused on the progress made by North African countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and set out general recommendations for countries to help them consolidate their achievements in that regard.

15. The Committee noted with satisfaction the progress made by North Africa in implementing the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and called on member countries to strengthen their national mechanisms to improve the living standards of their populations. The Committee also invited the secretariat to draw data primarily from national sources for the preparation of future editions of the report.

16. The secretariat took note of the comments and recommendations made by the Committee and underscored that it would continue to work closely with relevant national departments in North African countries in order to monitor their progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

VI. Statutory matters: Report on the activities of the Economic Commission for Africa Subregional Office for North Africa (October 2019–September 2020) and work programme for 2021 [agenda item 6]

17. The secretariat presented the work programme for 2021 of the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/35/4) and the report on the activities conducted by the Subregional Office between October 2019 and September 2020 (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/35/5). The Subregional Office had carried out surveys to assess the impact of COVID-19 in the subregion and had provided support to North African countries to help them implement appropriate policies to mitigate its effects. The Subregional Office would endeavor to implement the work programme for 2021 in as flexible a manner as possible so that it could respond effectively to anticipated requests from member countries.

18. In reviewing the activities of the Subregional Office and its programme of work for the coming year, the Committee noted with interest the scope of the efforts being made and welcomed the sustained commitment of the Subregional Office to support member States within the context of the 2021 work programme. In that regard, the Committee encouraged the Subregional Office to establish a platform through which countries could share best practices. The Committee also underscored the importance of taking human capital into account in the future work of ECA, including in the context of COVID-19 crisis, and urged ECA to continue

its work in the area of trade, particularly in connection with the African Continental Free Trade Area.

19. The secretariat took note of the comments and recommendations made by the Committee and underscored that, in the previous two years, the Subregional Office had responded positively to all requests for technical assistance that it had received from member countries. The secretariat was completing its analysis of successful experiences in the field of employment in North African countries and there were plans to expand the scope of that analysis to cover the best 25 practices in job creation in Africa.

VII. Consideration and adoption of recommendations and the report of the thirty-fifth session of Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts [agenda item 7]

20. Pursuant to a decision of the Bureau of 14 September 2020, and in order to facilitate the deliberations of the Committee, a set of recommendations had been formulated on the basis of the outcomes of a series of webinars held in September and October 2020. Those recommendations had been shared with the focal points of the seven member countries. The Committee reviewed and adopted the recommendations of its thirty-fifth session, as reproduced in annex I of the present report. In addition, the Committee encouraged participants from countries in the subregion to send their amendments to the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa within two weeks, in order to enable the secretariat to include them in the final report of the session.

21. On the basis of those observations, the Committee adopted the report and requested the secretariat to relay the recommendations of the thirty-fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa to the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development for consideration at its next session.

VIII. Date and venue of the next session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts [agenda item 8]

22. The Committee unanimously agreed that the thirty-sixth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa would be held at the headquarters of the ECA Subregional Office in Rabat in November 2021.

IX. Other matters [agenda item 9]

23. The representative of Libya expressed thanks to the secretariat and the representatives of the other member countries for the efforts they had exerted to ensure the success of the session. He suggested that Arabic, an official language in all countries in the North Africa subregion, should be made the working language of future sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa.

24. Responding to the representative of Libya, the secretariat said that the United Nations had six official languages, including Arabic, and that simultaneous interpretation into Arabic was provided at all sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee.

X. Closing of the session [agenda item 10]

25. In his closing remarks, Mr. Hussein, interim Director of the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa, expressed his satisfaction with the success of the work of the thirty-fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee.

26. Mr. Kessali, Chair of the incoming Intergovernmental Committee Bureau, in turn, congratulated the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa and member countries on the success of the Intergovernmental Committee's thirty-fifth session.

27. He then declared the proceedings of the thirty-fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa closed.

Annex I

Recommendations of the thirty-fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa

Following its deliberations, the Committee made the following recommendations and requested the Subregional Office to forward them to the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development:

For member States:

1. Creation of new job opportunities through:

- 1.1. Encouraging investment in vocational and technical training and in improving vocational guidance when choosing courses for students by providing sufficient information on professional opportunities at the end of the academic career and on the professional skills required to match the skills of successful candidates with the pool of available jobs;
- 1.2. The adoption of policy changes through the development of planning, coordination, monitoring and evaluation programmes for job creation programmes with clear performance measurement indicators. The introduction of legal frameworks for streamlining work programmes, serving as regulatory bodies to preserve the continuity of programmes and interventions. The design of the programmes must take into account the rural-urban issue and the gender dimension and offer incentives to companies participating in job creation programmes;
- 1.3. Promotion of public-private partnerships and improvement of the business environment, competition and access to the labour market;
- 1.4. Strengthening the links between banks and small (credit-seeking) businesses and enhancing the capacity of banking systems to provide credit facilities to start-ups and investors, through reforms of State-owned banks, allowing greater access for private businesses to gain credit.

2. Promoting innovation and the adoption of new technologies through:

- 2.1. Promoting the adoption and adaptation of digital technologies through the rapid establishment of e-government, investment in digital infrastructure and the development of the digital economy;
- 2.2. Improving Internet access, especially in rural areas and among disadvantaged populations;
- 2.3. Contribution to the creation of an ecosystem favorable to innovation, in particular by the creation of a legal and regulatory framework intended to ensure the protection of sensitive data, patent rights and /or patented inventions;
- 2.4. The increase in research and development spending at the same level as that of similar countries. Facilitate the transfer of innovation from the research sphere to the business world by setting up public and private mechanisms designed for this purpose.

3. Support of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and trade policies

- 3.1. Include threats related to COVID-19 and other health threats in the AfCFTA agreement and protocols, especially with regard to trade, investment and intellectual property. Countries can also, in this regard, include pharmaceutical and parapharmaceutical products on the immediate exemption lists;
- 3.2. Facilitate trade between the countries of North Africa by improving the quality of infrastructure, the generalization of integrated and neighbouring customs offices, and the simplification of formalities and procedures. Promote the use of regional corridors to improve trade relations and reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers;
- 3.3. Keep the issue of costs and revenue equalization instruments to the centre of AfCFTA implementation. Advance e-commerce negotiations from phase three, as originally planned, to phase two of negotiations.

4. Support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- 4.1. Explore new sources of finance to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and encourage member States to create green finance funds and provide incentives to the private sector to increase investments and benefit from the excess liquidity in the banking sector;
- 4.2. Creation of a platform for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the SDGs, which can take the form of “open data” accessible to the public.

5. Improvement of the macroeconomic environment by:

- 5.1. Improving the quality of public regulations to create a more competitive environment and promote entrepreneurship and the development of a digital society;
- 5.2. Strengthening the financial capacity of the State (rationalization, integrity, compliance, etc.), and accelerating the process of digitizing the mobilization and management of tax revenues;
- 5.3. The establishment of a culture of evaluation of public policies and transparency of the State budget.

For ECA

1. Set up a platform for the exchange of best practices, including in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, to make the work more accessible and beneficial to all member countries.
2. Take into account human capital in the forthcoming work of ECA, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.
3. Provide technical assistance to the Sudan, particularly in the negotiation with the International Financial Institutions such as the IMF.
4. Evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on North African labour markets, thus helping policy makers to formulate short-, medium- and long-term recovery policies;
5. Assist member States to identify best practices in job creation that can lead to the adoption and implementation of the best possible policies.

6. Establish a capacity-building programme for member States to support them in trade negotiations and the adaptation of the provisions of the AfCFTA, in particular with regard to issues related to the second phase (competition policy, investments and intellectual property rights);
7. Continue the ongoing work to help North African countries adopt and implement the Integrated Planning and Reporting Tool (IPRT) to measure country performance on the path to achieving the SDGs and alignment of Agenda 2063 with the SDGs;
8. Review the progress made by the North African subregion in the implementation of the United Nations Agenda 2030 (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Annex II

Agenda

1. Opening of the session.
 2. Election of officers.
 3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
 4. Evolution of economic and social conditions in North Africa: regional profile review – North Africa.
 5. Review of the implementation of regional and international development agendas and special initiatives.
 6. Statutory matters: Report on the activities of the Economic Commission for Africa Subregional Office for North Africa (October 2019–September 2020) and work programme for 2021.
 7. Consideration and adoption of the recommendations and the report of the thirty-fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts.
 8. Date and venue of the next session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts.
 9. Other matters.
 10. Closing of the session.
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