



United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa



**Fifty-seventh session of the Economic Commission  
for Africa: Conference of African Ministers of  
Finance, Planning and Economic Development**

Advancing the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area:  
proposing transformative strategic actions  
12 March, 2025 18 March, 2025  
Addis Ababa

**Assessment of progress on regional  
integration in Africa**  
*(Document Reference No. E/ECA/COE/43/5)*

Stephen Karingi  
Director, Regional Integration and Trade Division

12 March 2025



1

High poverty, inflation, debt, sluggish economic growth, ongoing conflicts, and the lingering impacts of the pandemic continue to hinder economic integration in Africa, jeopardizing the promise of the AfCFTA.

3

People are the driving force of trade, making the free movement of persons essential to the AfCFTA, while labour mobility and skills portability address skill imbalances and labour shortages.

2

Despite significant progress in implementing the AfCFTA, intra-African trade is still low at about 14.6%, making the implementation of the BIAT Action Plan essential for maximizing its benefits.

4

Integration under the AfCFTA will create private sector opportunities in health and education, helping to realign efforts toward achieving the SDGs.

# Introduction: Africa's economic outlook, implications on African integration progress



**Africa's economic outlook is improving, but there are still challenges which continue to contribute to slowing down the pace of integration on the continent**



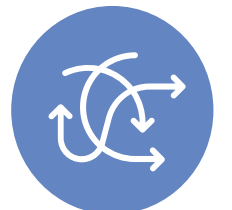
**Growth is projected to rise** from 2.6% in 2023 to 2.9% in 2024. It will further rebound to 3.9% in 2025



**Debt is still a problem**  
Africa's average interest payments reached 27% of government revenues in 2024, up from 19% in 2019



**Consumer price inflation remains high** but is projected to decline marginally from 16.1% in 2024 to 12.6% in 2025



**The effects of the pandemic and conflicts** are reversing gains achieved in the past decades



**468 million Africans are now living in extreme poverty** up from 285 million in 1990  
55% of the world's extreme poor are in Africa


# Progress in Regional Integration: Monetary and financial integration





## PRIMARY CRITERIA Inflation below 7%


In 2023, 10 countries met the five primary criteria. 39 countries complied with the criteria related to import coverage by external reserves and central bank financing.

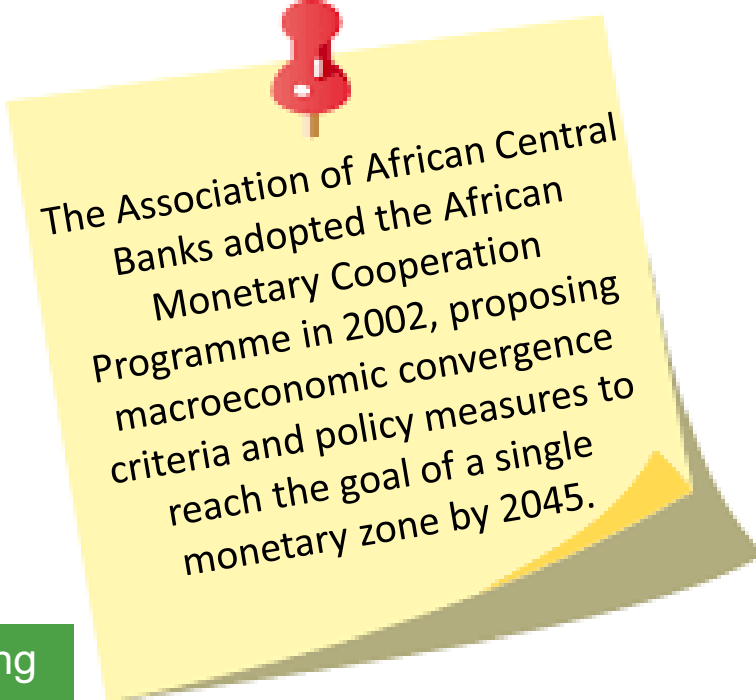
Only 28 countries met the inflation criteria, **fewer than any other criterion**

 Budget deficit under 5% of GDP

 Central bank financing of no more than 5% of tax revenue

 Foreign reserves covering at least 3 months of imports

 General government debt below 65% of GDP

 The Association of African Central Banks adopted the African Monetary Cooperation Programme in 2002, proposing macroeconomic convergence criteria and policy measures to reach the goal of a single monetary zone by 2045.

Macroeconomic convergence is the **cornerstone for paving the way to a unified African currency**

# Progress in regional integration: Trade

- 48 countries ratified the AfCFTA
- Intra-African trade is still low at about 14.6%
- Implementing BIAT is essential for effective trade liberalization within the AfCFTA. Conversely, trade liberalization under the AfCFTA serves as a pathway to boost intra-African trade.
- Intra-African services exports reached US\$26.8 billion in 2023, with long-distance international travel, transport and related services playing a big role
- The COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Agreement entered into force in July 2024
- By October 2024, 37 countries had developed AfCFTA National Implementation Strategies and 8 countries are in the process of doing so with ECA and partners' support



# Progress in regional integration: infrastructure

Quality infrastructure is the backbone of intra-African trade and the key to unlocking the full potential of the AfCFTA

**38 countries joined SAATM** which has the potential to create 267,530 jobs

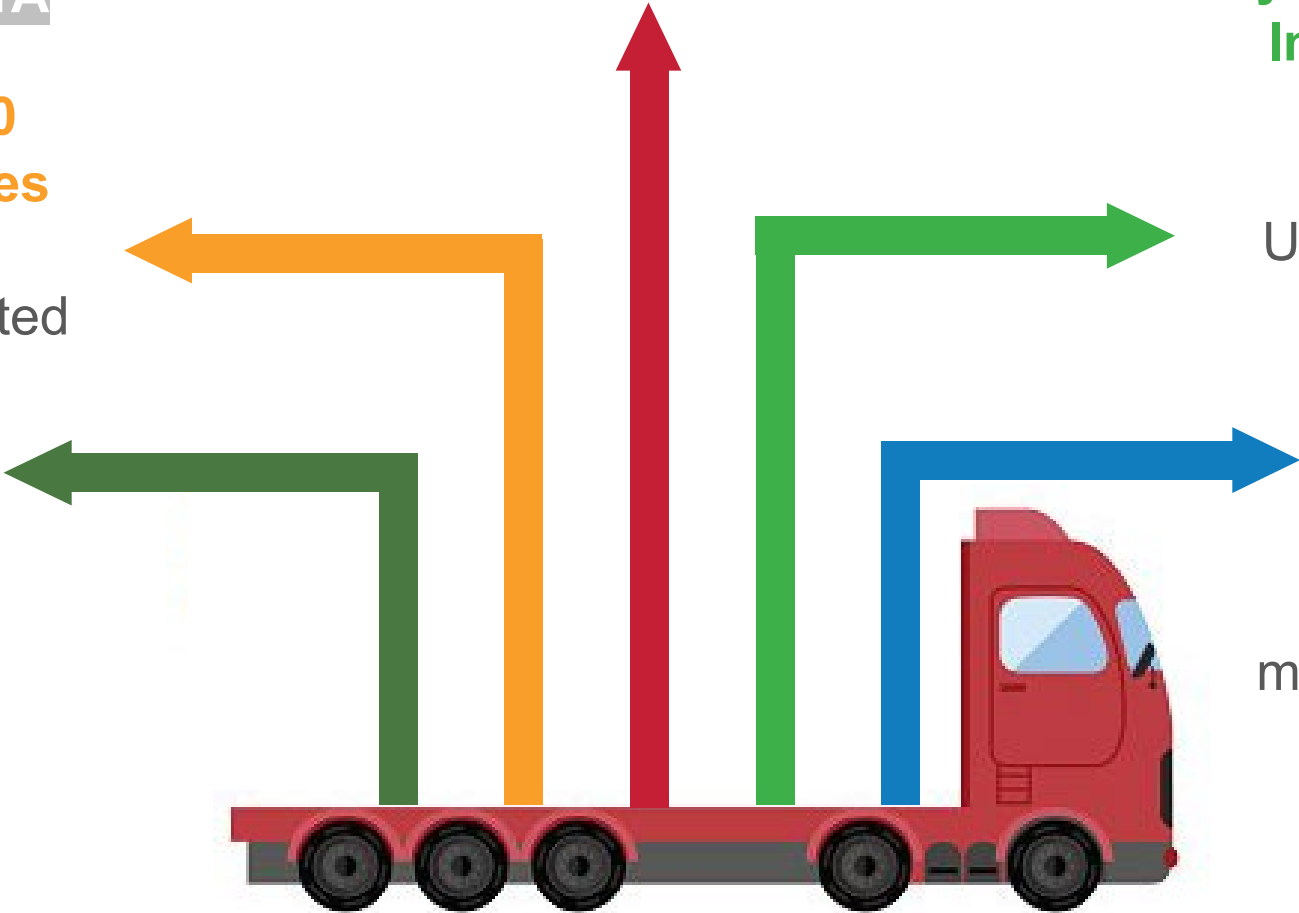
**Only 37.1% of Africans had Internet access in 2023**

Internet economy is expected to contribute US\$712 billion to Africa's economy by 2050

**PIDA plans 30,200 km of new rail lines** but only 4,000 km have been completed in Phase 1.

**Africa's road density is still low** with an average road density of only 2.3km per 100km<sup>2</sup> in Africa excluding North Africa

**43% of Africans lacked access to electricity in 2021** making affordable clean energy a priority





# Progress in Social dimensions of regional integration



Health systems in Africa will come under pressure as a result of demographic, urban and epidemiological changes

PHARMACEUTICAL IMPORTS TOOK \$15.9 BILLION IN 2022, COMPARED WITH EXPORTS OF ONLY \$1.4 BILLION



This situation offers an opportunity for private sector investment, which could boost pharmaceutical production and continental health security leveraging on the AfCFTA

Education was AU's central theme for 2024, emphasizing the urgency of putting Africa on track to meet SDG4 targets



1 IN 5 CHILDREN ARE OUT OF SCHOOL



30.1% AFRICANS WERE ILLITERATE



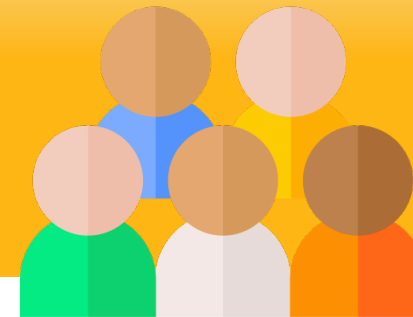
3.7% GDP ALLOCATION TO EDUCATION

Investing in education and skills development is key to empowering young Africans to drive and benefit from the socioeconomic growth enabled by the AfCFTA

- **Joint AU-ECA Project: “International migration in Africa: shaping a positive narrative and removing barriers to mobility”**
- **Studies on enhancing the free movement of people and pathways for labour mobility and skills portability in Ghana, Kenya and Zambia were conducted**
- **In December 2024, Ghana declared that it would grant visa-free entry to all African citizens starting in 2025**
- **Kenya removed the eTA requirement for most Africans**

## AU FMP PROTOCOL

Only 4 countries ratified it: Mali, Niger, Rwanda and São Tomé e Príncipe





# Conclusion and key policy recommendations



## Member States should



**ACCELERATE** implementation of AfCFTA and BIAT Action Plan while working towards deeper integration



**COLLABORATE** to address regional security challenges that threaten regional integration, development and the prosperity of citizens



**STRIVE** to meet the macroeconomic convergence criteria



**RATIFY** and implement the AfCFTA Protocols on Investment, Intellectual Property Rights, Digital Trade, and Women and Youth in Trade and the AU FMP Protocol

## ECA and Development Partners should



**SUPPORT** the effective implementation of national and regional AfCFTA strategies



**SUPPORT** the promotion of public-private partnerships, enhance management tools and strengthen countries' capacity to develop bankable infrastructure projects



## Fifty-seventh session of the Economic Commission for Africa: Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development

Advancing the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area:  
proposing transformative strategic actions  
12 March, 2025 18 March, 2025  
Addis Ababa

# THANK YOU!

Follow the conversation: #COM2025

More: <https://www.uneca.org/eca-events/cfm2025>

Ideas  
+ Action