
Subregional Office for West Africa
Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials
and Experts for West Africa
Twenty-ninth session

Freetown (hybrid), 28–30 October 2026

Concept note**I. Background**

1. As statutory deliberative bodies of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the intergovernmental committees of senior officials and experts oversee the interventions of the corresponding subregional offices of ECA, the work of which is one component of the annual programme plan that is adopted by the General Assembly.¹ Within the ECA strategic framework and mission to generate ideas and actions for a prosperous Africa, the Intergovernmental Committee for each of the five subregions holds annual meetings to discuss the results, upcoming work programme and strategic orientations of the respective subregional office as they relate to the development priorities of the countries of the subregion.

2. The Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa will hold its twenty-ninth session in Freetown and online from 28 to 30 October 2026 under the theme “Unlocking the potential of young people in West Africa: pathways to employment, economic transformation and resilience”.

3. Representatives and experts from the 15 countries that constitute the West African subregion will discuss major sustainable development issues, share good practices and devise action-oriented solutions to the challenges faced by the subregion, which will then be shared with national and local governments, members of ECA and other development entities. The outcome of the session will be presented during the 2027 session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development for review and decision.

4. The global economy continues to face heightened uncertainty amid persistent geopolitical tensions. Recent developments in the Middle East added pressure to a fragile global environment, raising concerns over energy security, global supply chains, inflationary pressures and international trade. The outlook for Africa in general and West Africa in particular looks clouded. Under a modest or short-term scenario, associated with rising prices for oil, gas and fertilizer, increased shipping costs and disruptions to global trade, global growth is projected to be 3.1 per cent in 2026 and inflation is projected to rise from 4.1 per cent in 2025 to 4.4 per cent in 2026.² If the current crisis is short-lived, the impact of inflation is expected

¹ See A/79/6 (Sect. 18).

² International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook: Global Economy in the Shadow of War* (Washington, D.C., 2006).



to be more subdued than during the sharp surge in commodity prices in 2022 following the outbreak of the current conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

5. Africa remains vulnerable to such external shocks, despite its improving macroeconomic outlook. If the conflict in the Middle East lasts more than six months, it is expected to reduce economic growth in Africa by 0.2 percentage points in 2026, with the impact varying across countries, on the basis of each country's dependence on imports from the Middle East and global market situations.³

6. Growth in gross domestic product in West Africa is estimated at 4.5 per cent for 2025,⁴ with the subregion showing relative economic resilience, owing to better macroeconomic management and recovery from successive global shocks, and managing multidimensional political, security, climate and humanitarian-related pressures.

7. West African countries are making progress towards attaining 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.⁵ The pace of progress, however, is not sufficient for West Africa to achieve the Goals by 2030.

8. The defining characteristic of the subregion remains its very young population and the associated potential demographic dividend. In 2025, across the subregion, persons under 25 years of age accounted for 61.1 per cent of the population, although this percentage varied significantly, from 42.1 per cent in Cabo Verde to 66.9 per cent in the Niger.⁶ This demographic profile presents a unique opportunity to accelerate economic growth through the demographic dividend. Realizing this potential requires sustained investment in high-quality education, healthcare, skills development and productive employment to absorb the growing labour force.

9. Overall unemployment in West Africa remains relatively low, estimated at 2.9 per cent in 2026⁷. This figure, however, masks significant structural labour-market challenges. Informal employment is the dominant source of livelihoods, accounting for approximately 91 per cent of total employment in West Africa in 2026, which is higher than the estimated 84.3 per cent for Africa and 57.9 per cent for the world in 2026.⁸ Women continue to be disproportionately represented in informal employment in all countries in the subregion.⁹ In 2025, young people aged from 15 to 24 years old face particularly acute labour market vulnerabilities, with unemployment estimated at 5 per cent, which was significantly higher than the average for the

³ African Development Bank Group and others. "The impacts of the Middle East conflict on Africa", Joint Policy Brief (2026).

⁴ International Monetary Fund, *Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa – Hard-Won Gains Under Pressure* (Washington, D.C., 2026).

⁵ Namely Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14 and 17.

⁶ ECA calculations based on United Nations, "Special Aggregates: select age groups", World Population Prospects, 2024 database. Available at <https://population.un.org/wpp/downloads?folder=Special%20Aggregates&group=Economic%20and%20trading%20groups>.

⁷ International Labour Organization, "Unemployment rate by sex and age- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2025 (%)- Annual", ILOSTAT database. Available at: https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer52/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=UNE_2EAP_SEX_AGE_RT_A&channel=ilostat (accessed on 17 July 2026).

⁸ International Labour Organization, "Informal employment rate by sex -- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2025 (%)- Annual", ILOSTAT database. Available at https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer09/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=EMP_2IFL_SEX_RT_A&channel=ilostat (accessed on 17 July 2026).

⁹ International Labour Organization, "Informal employment rate by sex (%) -- Annual", ILOSTAT database. Available at https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer01/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=EMP_NIFL_SEX_RT_A&channel=ilostat (accessed on 17 July 2026).

general population.¹⁰ In addition, some 18.7 per cent of young people in West Africa are not in employment, education or training in 2026¹¹, highlighting persistent barriers to productive labour-market participation and skills acquisition.

10. Despite recent economic growth, structural transformation across West Africa remains limited. Most economies rely heavily on exports of primary commodities, with 9 of the 15 West African countries exhibiting commodity dependence levels exceeding 90 per cent. Limited economic diversification, low industrialization, weak productivity growth and value addition continue to constrain the creation of high-quality jobs and economic resilience to external shocks. It is therefore all the more necessary to accelerate structural transformation through industrial development, regional value chains, digitalization, innovation and the effective implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area in order to make the subregion more resilient.

11. Growing insecurity, climate change and humanitarian crises have hindered the economic transformation of the subregion. Violent conflict, forced displacement, food insecurity and environmental degradation continue to undermine livelihoods, in particular for young people in the Sahel. Some 24 million people in selected West and Central African countries¹² were targeted by humanitarian organizations in 2026 as persons in greatest need.¹³ The number of internally displaced persons in the Sahel Plus countries¹⁴ is expected to increase by 16 per cent.¹⁵ These interconnected crises disproportionately affect young people by limiting their access to education, employment and economic opportunities and increasing their vulnerability to irregular migration, social exclusion and recruitment by armed groups.

12. In view of the above, during the twenty-ninth session, the Intergovernmental Committee will examine the structural constraints limiting economic transformation and job creation and explore practical policy options to harness the demographic advantage of the subregion as a driver of inclusive growth, resilience and sustainable development. The session will serve as a platform for members to exchange experiences, share innovative practices and formulate evidence-based policy recommendations to strengthen youth employment, economic diversification, human capital development and resilience to external shocks.

¹⁰ International Labour Organization, “Unemployment rate by sex and age- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2025 (%) - Annual”, ILOSTAT database. Available at: https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer52/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=UNE_2EAP_SEX_AGE_RT_A&channel=ilostat.

¹¹ International Labour Organization. NEET Rate: Share of Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training by Sex- ILO Modelled Estimates Nov. 2025. Available at: https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer22/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=EIP_2EET_SEX_RT_A&channel=ilostat.

¹² Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Niger and Nigeria.

¹³ See United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Global Humanitarian Overview 2026: West and Central Africa”, Humanitarian Action, 8 December 2025.

¹⁴ Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Togo.

¹⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Sahel emergency”. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/sahel-emergency> (accessed on 16 July 2026).

II. Objectives, expected results and other details

A. Objectives

13. As a subregional platform to discuss the development priorities of member, the twenty-ninth session is aimed at providing a high-level platform for member countries and major stakeholders to examine the opportunities and challenges associated with unlocking the potential of young people in the subregion as a catalyst for economic transformation, productive employment and resilience. Given that the Intergovernmental Committee is a statutory deliberative body, its members will also consider the activity reports, the results achieved and the future work programme of the Subregional Office for West Africa. The session will also serve as a platform for sharing experiences and lessons learned at the country level.

B. Expected results

14. By the end of the session, it is expected that the participants will accomplish the following:

(a) Review statutory reports and major recommendations, and define solutions to accelerate economic transformation and sustainable development in West Africa;

(b) Undertake in-depth analysis of the challenges faced by countries in transforming their economies, creating employment and building resilience, and share country success stories with a view to mutual learning;

(c) Define specific measures and solutions to leverage the huge potential of young people in the subregion with a view to accelerating inclusive economic growth and transformative development;

(d) Adopt a draft report of the Intergovernmental Committee on its twenty-ninth session to be submitted for consideration by the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development at the 2027 session of the Economic Commission for Africa.

C. Operational details

1. Participation

15. Participation in the meeting is open to the following:

(a) As delegates, senior officials from ministries, national administrations and institutions responsible for finance, planning, economic and social development, trade and industry, and labour and employment;

(b) As observers, representatives of the commissions of the Economic Community of West African States and the West African Economic and Monetary Union, other intergovernmental and international institutions, as well as development partners, United Nations agencies, private sector and civil society entities, universities and research institutions.

2. Dates and location

16. The session will be held in Freetown and online from 28 to 30 October 2026.

3. Working languages

17. English and French will be the working languages.

4. Administrative and logistical arrangements

18. A note on the logistical and administrative arrangements for the session will be sent to confirmed participants in due course.

5. Contact information

19. For further information, you may contact the following focal points:

(a) Representative of Sierra Leone

To be confirmed

(b) Representatives of ECA

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