

**Economic Commission for Africa
Subregional Office for North Africa**

The Intergovernmental Committee of Experts
Thirty-third session
Tunis, Tunisia, 30 October-2 November 2018

**Report of the thirty-third session of the
Intergovernmental Committee of Experts**

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I. Organization and attendance

1. The opening ceremony of the thirty-third session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE) was attended by Mr. Zied Ladhari, Minister of Development, Investment and International Cooperation, Mr. Taïeb Baccouche, Secretary-General of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Mr. Samir Majoul, President of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), and Mr. Mohamed Hazim (Morocco), outgoing Chair of the ICE Bureau.
2. Members of the diplomatic corps in Tunisia and representatives of AMU, international and regional organizations, universities, employers' organizations, cooperation agencies, financial institutions, United Nations agencies and the seven ICE member States also attended the opening ceremony.

II. Opening session (agenda item 1)

3. The opening session began with a video message from Ms. Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), who expressed gratitude to the Tunisian Government for hosting a session of the statutory legislative body of the Subregional Office for the first time and underscored the importance of the theme of the thirty-third session, namely, "Data revolution in North Africa: putting data at the service of structural transformation".
4. In his opening statement, Mr. Mohamed Hazim (Morocco), outgoing Chair of the ICE Bureau, welcomed the participants and thanked the Government of Tunisia and UTICA for convening the session in Tunis. He expressed his gratitude to the members of the Bureau and the secretariat for the work that had been accomplished since the thirty-second session.
5. Taking the floor, Ms. Lilia Hachem Naas, Director of the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa, welcomed all participants to the thirty-third session and acknowledged the senior officials present. She expressed gratitude to the Tunisian authorities for the assistance and support extended to the Subregional Office for North Africa and for organizing the thirty-third ICE session in Tunis. She also thanked the President of UTICA, the outgoing President of the ICE Bureau, the business community, and the people of Tunisia.
6. Ms. Naas noted that the thirty-third session would focus, primarily, on the data revolution in North Africa, the use of innovative data to facilitate structural transformation, and the need to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems with a view to accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. She stressed that the recommendations of the session, which would help to define the priorities and scope of activities of the Bureau, would be submitted at the next session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, a deliberative body of ECA, which would be held in Morocco in March 2019.
7. Taking the floor, Mr. Taïeb Baccouche, Secretary-General of AMU, thanked all those who had helped organize the ICE session in Tunis. He expressed his thanks to the Director of the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa and thanked all members of that Office for their dedication and support to the subregion and their efforts to promote integration and economic and social well-being.

8. The President of UTICA welcomed all those attending the thirty-third ICE session to the headquarters of his organization and to the city of Tunis. He then provided an overview of the history of UTICA and emphasized that the Union had been one of four recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015. He also recalled that UTICA had named 2015 the “Year of Africa” in order to strengthen intra-African cooperation. That step had demonstrated the strong commitment of the Tunisian private sector to pan-Africanism.

9. In his address, Mr. Zied Ladhari, Minister of Development, Investment and International Cooperation, welcomed the participants to the thirty-third ICE session, which was being held in Tunisia for the first time. He hoped that other member countries would be able to host future sessions. He also expressed his gratitude to UTICA for hosting such an important event, which clearly demonstrated that public-private partnerships could play a key role in efforts to strengthen subregional cooperation and integration in North Africa.

10. Mr. Ladhari congratulated the Subregional Office on its work and welcomed the session theme, “Data revolution in North Africa: putting data at the service of structural transformation”. He believed that the thirty-third ICE session would facilitate high-level reflection on what was a key cross-cutting issue, namely, how stakeholders should evaluate and monitor the evolution of socioeconomic indicators in the subregion.

III. Election of the Bureau (agenda item 2)

11. After consultation among the heads of delegations, the Committee elected the following Bureau by consensus:

Chair:	Tunisia
Vice-Chair:	Algeria
Rapporteur:	Egypt

IV. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work (agenda item 3)

12. Ms. Kalthoum Hamzaoui, Chair of the incoming ICE Bureau gave an introductory speech in which she welcomed all the participants and thanked the member countries for the confidence placed in her country. She commended the outgoing Bureau and the Subregional Office for North Africa for the important work carried out over the previous year.

13. Following those remarks, the Committee adopted the agenda (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/33/1) and the programme of work (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/33/1/Add.1).

V. The evolution of economic and social conditions in North Africa: regional profile review — North Africa (agenda item 4)

14. The secretariat then outlined the main conclusions of the report entitled: North Africa subregional profile 2017 (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/33/2). The report provided an overview of recent macroeconomic and social developments and reviewed the challenges facing the subregion.

15. At the end of the presentation, the Committee congratulated the secretariat on having produced a high-quality and very detailed report and welcomed the theme of the session. The Committee noted, however, that few details had been provided to illustrate current trends and

levels of intraregional trade, the need to streamline efforts to promote economic growth and social progress and the need to make available more accurate data with a view to formulating more effective public policies.

16. In that regard, the delegate of Egypt underscored the importance of aligning macroeconomic indicator calculation periods with budgetary years. The Committee noted that the environmental cost of growth was not accounted for in calculations to determine rates of economic growth, which could potentially lead to inaccurate calculations. The Committee underscored that budget deficits resulting from investment should not be perceived as a problem per se, as investment could, indirectly, boost productivity. The Committee also noted that productivity analyses should adopt a sectoral approach and that increasing productivity was contingent both on investments in human capital and on research and development efforts. Aligning training initiatives with sectoral needs was also an important aspect of economic growth. The representative of the Sudan informed the Committee that economic sanctions were a major obstacle that impeded the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. He urged the international community to support efforts by his country to achieve the Goals while it was struggling to address the impact of such sanctions.

17. The secretariat took note of the comments made by the Committee so that they could be incorporated into the North Africa subregional profile on intraregional trade, regional integration and the analysis of the development trajectories of countries in the subregion.

18. At the end of the discussions, the Committee endorsed the recommendations of the secretariat, which are contained in annex I.

VI. Special session: the agreement for the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and its impact for North Africa (agenda item 5)

19. The main objective of the session was to enhance member countries' understanding of the continental integration project by providing a space for dialogue and information exchange among the participants, with input provided by relevant experts.

20. The session featured the participation of an expert from the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) and representatives from the regional integration programme and the North Africa office of the African Development Bank (AfDB).

21. The delegates of the Sudan and Mauritania commended the efforts made by ECA in support of the continental free trade area initiative. However, they identified a number of prerequisites that States must provide to ensure the success of that ambitious project, including infrastructure development, the adoption of trade facilitation measures and the provision of adequate financial resources for trade promotion. The Committee stressed that, in order to ensure that all countries benefitted equitably from continental integration, mechanisms must be established to offset losses resulting from the reduction of customs receipts. Lastly, the Committee stressed the need for updated and regular data as a prerequisite for the success of the free trade area. That need was reflected in the theme chosen for the thirty-third ICE session.

VII. Adhoc expert group meeting: "Data revolution in North Africa: putting data at the service of structural transformation" (agenda item 6)

22. The meeting was opened by Ms. Lilia Hachem Naas, Director of the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa and moderated by Ms. Kalthoum Hamzaoui, Director General for Multilateral Cooperation, Ministry of Development, Investment and International Cooperation, Tunisia.

23. The expert group meeting conducted a comprehensive review of the data ecosystem in the light of the current data revolution, which is now generating and using high-quality economic, social and environmental statistics. Such statistics are key prerequisites for economic transformation and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in North Africa.

24. At the end of the discussions, the Committee endorsed the recommendations proposed by the secretariat and made additional recommendations. The recommendations are contained in annex II of the present report.

VIII. Regional and international agendas and other special initiatives in North Africa (agenda item 7)

25. The secretariat recalled the purpose of the report on the implementation of regional and international agendas and other special initiatives in North Africa (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/33/3), which 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.

26. The discussions highlighted the need for North African countries to devote greater attention to issues related to climate change, migration, regional integration and South-South cooperation. Institutional coordination and the participation of all stakeholders was a fundamental prerequisite for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the relevant experiences of countries could be shared through South-South cooperation initiatives.

IX. Report on the Bureau's 2017-2018 activities and 2019 programme of work: statutory matters (agenda item 8)

27. The secretariat presented the revised ECA strategic plan for the 2018-2019 biennium and highlighted the fact that ECA had undertaken a strategic review of its programmes in order to realign its activities with the reforms implemented by the United Nations and to respond more effectively to the needs and priorities of member States.

28. To that end, the new strategic plan made it possible to reposition ECA and align its programmes according to the new strategic directions for the Economic Commission for Africa: putting ideas into action for an empowered and transformed Africa. In 2018-2019, the core functions, overall objectives and strategic direction of ECA had been redesigned.

29. The revised strategic plan had also facilitated the reorganization of the subregional offices in order to increase their relevance and effectiveness. That was being achieved by strengthening areas of specialization so that the offices could provide advanced research and

analytical services, policy advice and capacity-building support to member States and regional economic communities, both within the subregion and throughout Africa.

30. In that connection, the Subregional Office for North Africa, in collaboration with member States, had formulated and validated a new specialization strategy on the theme: "Employment, skills and equitable development" for the 2018-2019 biennium. The objective of the strategy was to assist the seven member States in developing and implementing policies and programmes that promoted job creation and balanced growth, with a view to promoting structural transformation in line with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The Committee encouraged the Subregional Office, which was a source of knowledge in its area of expertise, to become more involved in action in the field, both in terms of technical assistance and financial support.

31. The secretariat then presented the report on the activities of the Subregional Office for North Africa from October 2017 to September 2018 (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/33/4).

32. The secretariat then presented the programme of work of the Subregional Office for 2019, which was focused on two main areas: statutory or thematic meetings and publications.

33. Finally, the secretariat presented the new strategic directions of the Subregional Office for 2019-2020, namely: (a) youth employment in the countries of the subregion and a roadmap for specialization in the areas of employment, skills and equitable development; and (b) activities in the Maghreb to monitor progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

34. The Subregional Office then presented new areas that it would address in the future, namely: (a) the blue economy in the countries of the subregion and a roadmap for its development; and (b) a comparative analysis of how migration is addressed in national development policies and a roadmap for the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration.

35. 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 in the implementation of the North Africa regional integration project.

36. The participants commended the efforts made by the Subregional Office in implementing the recommendations made at previous ICE sessions, particularly those relating to the need to balance interventions by ECA and the provision of technical support to countries in the subregion, as well as those relating to data coverage in all countries.

37. However, the Committee requested the Subregional Office to further analyse the impact on employment of national strategies to facilitate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

38. The Director of the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa invited the Committee to suggest topics that ECA should focus on, and consensus was reached on a range of topics of critical importance for the subregion. The proposed topics are noted in the list of recommendations contained in annex I of the present report.

39. At the end of the discussions, the Committee endorsed the amended recommendations of the secretariat as reproduced in annex I of the current report.

X. Launch of the first report on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Maghreb (agenda item 9)

40. The launch of the report took place in the presence of Mr. Belgacem Ayed, representative of the Ministry of Development, Investment and International Cooperation of Tunisia and Ms. Aida Robbana, representative of the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office, Tunisia, both of whom made brief statements.

41. The Subregional Office for North Africa reviewed the context and objectives of the report before summarizing its main conclusions and recommendations and reviewing challenges to be addressed.

XI. Review and approval of the recommendations of the adhoc expert group meeting (agenda item 10)

42. The recommendations of the adhoc expert group meeting: "Data revolution in North Africa: putting data at the service of structural transformation" were reviewed by the Committee, which amended and adopted them as reproduced in annex II of the present report.

XII. Review and adoption of the report and recommendations of the thirty-third session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (agenda item 11)

43. The Committee reviewed and adopted the recommendations of its thirty-third session, as reproduced in annex II of the current report. In addition, the Committee encouraged participants from countries of the subregion to send their amendments to the Subregional Office for North Africa within two weeks in order to enable the secretariat to include them in the final report of the session.

44. On the basis of these observations, the Committee adopted the present report and requested the secretariat to relay the recommendations of ICE to the next Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

XIII. Date and venue of the thirty-fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (agenda item 12)

45. During discussions regarding the choice of date and venue for the next ICE meeting, the representative of Egypt expressed her country's wish to host the thirty-fourth ICE session in 2019. She said that her country would contact the Subregional Office for North Africa as soon as possible to agree on the dates and organizational arrangements of the meeting.

46. Taking the floor, the representative from Algeria pointed out that, since his country had been elected Vice-Chair of the thirty-third ICE session, he would, in fact, preside at the next ICE session, in accordance with established procedures. He therefore proposed that the next session, which would take place in 2019, should be held in his country.

47. The representatives of Morocco and Tunisia thanked Egypt and Algeria for their suggestions and invited ECA to consider the establishment of a mechanism that would provide for ICE sessions to rotate among the countries of the subregion and Morocco, which hosted the headquarters of the Subregional Office for North Africa.

48. The Director of the Subregional Office for North Africa thanked Egypt and Algeria for their willingness to host and organize the next ICE session. She said that she would consult ECA headquarters on that matter and member States to determine the next host country, either through a rotation system similar to the one used for the Conference of Ministers, or by adopting a different means of alternating the meeting among various countries of the subregion.

XIV. Other business (agenda item 13)

49. The participants suggested to the secretariat that, in the interest of efficiency, the recommendations of the adhoc expert group meeting should be presented for adoption by the experts themselves and before the end of their work. That would avoid the need to submit those recommendations to the Committee for adoption while the ICE session's final report was also being adopted.

50. At the end of the thirty-third ICE session, the representative of Morocco, on behalf of the member countries, the participants and on his own behalf, expressed thanks to Mr. Zied Ladhari, Minister of Development, Investment and International Cooperation, Mr. Samir Majoul, President of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), and the Government and people of Tunisia.

XV. Closure of the session (agenda item 14)

51. In her closing remarks, the Director of the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa, Ms. Lilia Hachem Naas, expressed her satisfaction with the success of the work of the thirty-third ICE session. That year the session had been held in Tunis. It was the first time that the session had been held outside Morocco, which hosted the headquarters of the Subregional Office for North Africa.

52. On behalf of ECA, she thanked and congratulated member States and the Tunisian authorities. She expressed particular thanks to Mr. Zied Ladhari, Minister of Development, Investment and International Cooperation, UTICA, which had hosted the session, and the officials and staff of the two institutions for having organized the session so effectively.

53. Ms. Naas also expressed her gratitude to the team of the Subregional Office for North Africa, the staff of UTICA and the Ministry of Development, Investment and International Cooperation, for providing logistical support. She also thanked the conference staff and interpreters for their patience throughout the session.

54. Ms. Kalthoum Hamzaoui, Chair of the incoming ICE Bureau, acknowledged the member States and participants and thanked Mr. Zied Ladhari, Minister of Development, Investment and International Cooperation, Mr. Samir Majoul, President of UTICA, and the Government and people of Tunisia.

55. She then declared the proceedings of the thirty-third session of ICE closed.

Annex I

Recommendations of the thirty-third session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts

Following the discussions, the Committee made the following recommendations and requested the Subregional Office to relay them to the Conference of Ministers.

Recommendations regarding the subregional profile

To member States:

- Provide ECA with the necessary data to create the subregional profile.

To ECA:

- (i) Include a section on intraregional trade analysis and regional integration in the subregional profile;
- (ii) Develop an analysis of the development trajectories of member States, that focuses, in particular, on changes in the sectoral structure of economies and provides comparative analyses of States in the subregion;
- (iii) Integrate environmental costs into economic growth assessments for States in the subregion.

Recommendations regarding the African Continental Free Trade Area

To member States:

- (i) Accelerate the ratification of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area with a view to supporting subregional integration;
- (ii) Strengthen national statistical data systems with a view to monitoring progress towards continental integration and its impact on African economies.

To ECA:

- Strengthen awareness-raising and advocacy initiatives in member States to accelerate ratification of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Recommendations regarding regional and international development programmes

To ECA:

- (i) Organize a subregional meeting to share experiences and best practices with regard to the preparation of voluntary national reports and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals;

- (ii) Develop a North Africa profile on the Goals that includes case studies from all States in the subregion.

Recommendations regarding the ECA strategic framework

To ECA:

- (i) Explore the possibility of strengthening technical assistance and expanding its reach to more States in the subregion, particularly in connection with efforts to develop and refine indicators relevant to regional disparities, poverty, employment and regional integration;
- (ii) Work more closely with all development partners to pool efforts, enhance outcomes and avoid duplications;
- (iii) Schedule a special forum on successful national initiatives for job creation, which would allow for the exchange of experiences and best practices and the identification of potential partnerships among the countries in the subregion;
- (iv) Take into account, insofar as is possible, areas of development considered relevant and crucial to the subregion, namely:
 - North African countries' performance in terms of public spending;
 - South-South cooperation and industrial integration in North Africa;
 - South-South cooperation on transport and on services facilitating the transport of goods;
 - Trade facilitation;
 - South-South cooperation: best practices in the subregion and future outlooks;
 - Water issues and their importance for the subregion;
 - The impact of the informal sector and smuggling on national economies.

Recommendations regarding research on the blue economy

To member States:

- (i) Consider how best to integrate the blue economy into national development strategies;
- (ii) Strengthen data collection and analysis in order to improve the quality of indicators relevant to the blue economy.

To ECA:

- (i) Support member States in their efforts to integrate the blue economy into national development strategies;

- (ii) Expand research on the blue economy by working with member States to identify and collect the most relevant data in that regard.

Recommendations regarding migration**To member States:**

- (i) Ensure that migration and its impact on development issues are addressed in national development policies;
- (ii) Ensure the availability of reliable migration data;
- (iii) Strengthen regional cooperation on migration issues;
- (iv) Ensure that negotiations with development partners address the economic aspects of migration.

To ECA:

- (i) Facilitate efforts by member States to integrate migration and development issues into national development policies;
- (ii) Assist member States in the generation of reliable migration data.

Annex II

Recommendations of the adhoc expert group meeting: "Data revolution in North Africa: putting data at the service of structural transformation"

Recommendations regarding the adaptation of laws and regulations

To member States:

- (i) If required, strengthen the professional autonomy and independence of national statistical institutes in accordance with an appropriate legislative and regulatory framework;
- (ii) Strengthen the leadership of national statistical institutes in order to align relevant legal texts, adopt legislation that stipulates the responsibilities of the national statistical system and ensure access to data;
- (iii) Strengthen the capacity of national statistical councils to coordinate national statistical systems with a view to updating laws and legal texts and adopting legislation that stipulates procedures for preparing, monitoring and following up on statistical programmes.

To ECA:

- Provide technical assistance to North African countries to strengthen their legal and regulatory frameworks and inter-institutional relations, in order to facilitate efforts by national statistical systems to respond to emerging needs and opportunities arising from the data revolution.

Recommendations regarding human and technical capacity-building

To member States:

- (i) Invest in human resource development and enhance the conditions in which national statistical institutes and sectoral structures operate;
- (ii) Strengthen the human resource capacities of the statistical services of ministries and public institutions;
- (iii) Encourage ongoing training within national statistical institutes so that they can keep abreast with technological advances and address complex data needs.

To ECA:

- Provide technical support in the area of basic statistics, including through the provision of the technical skills and tools needed in the preparation of censuses, surveys and administrative records.

Recommendations regarding data financing

To member States:

- (i) Ensure that dedicated funds are earmarked to sectoral statistical offices within ministries;
- (ii) Participate in the Statistics for Results Facility Catalytic Fund to address the funding challenges impeding efforts to strengthen the capacities of national statistical systems.

To ECA:

- Strengthen the provision of technical and financial support to member States to support their efforts to update their statistical models and reduce the costs of producing statistical data, while ensuring data quality and reliability.

Recommendations regarding the establishment of data quality control mechanisms

To member States:

- Implement a strategy for the creation and strengthening of quality control mechanisms;

To ECA:

- Provide technical support to enhance the capacity of statistical data control systems.

Recommendations regarding the use of non-conventional data sources

To member States:

- (i) Optimize the use of all new data sources made available by the data revolution, including big data, in the production of official statistics and develop appropriate analytical methodologies;
- (ii) Make use of mobile technologies in all surveys, including those relevant to consumer price indexes, censuses, and employment;
- (iii) Encourage national statistical institutes to take part in the digital transition and develop proprietary strategies.

To ECA:

- (i) Support the modernization of national statistics systems by encouraging the adoption of innovative technologies in statistical processes;
- (ii) Encourage the adoption by institutions of best practices, for example, by establishing an ECA-led platform to leverage expertise.

Recommendations for strengthening basic statistical data programmes

To member States:

- Strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems by implementing effectively the African Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems.

To ECA:

- (i) Provide technical assistance to facilitate implementation of the African Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems;
- (ii) Establish effective legal and regulatory frameworks and organizational mechanisms to enhance access to data, including microdata, prescribe the responsibilities of all relevant stakeholders and guarantee the anonymization of data files and databases.