



**Sub-Regional Office for West Africa**

**Twenty-Second Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee  
of Experts (ICE 22nd)**

**Robertsfield (Liberia)**

**8 to 10 May 2019**

ECA/WA/ICE/22/  
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**Intergovernmental Committee of Experts for West Africa  
(ICE)**

**Twenty-second session**

**Theme:**

***“Demographic dynamics for sustainable  
development in West Africa : challenges and  
policy actions”***

**Concept note**

## **I. Background**

The Intergovernmental Committee of Experts is a body established by the United Nations General Assembly. In West Africa, it meets annually to discuss economic and social performance, based on working documents prepared by the Subregional Office for West Africa of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA/SRO-WA). The Subregional Office for West Africa, based in Niamey, covers the 15 member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The Subregional Office covers the following countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Experts from these member States form the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts of West Africa.

ECA, established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, is one of five United Nations regional commissions mandated to promote the economic and social development of Africa. Its five subregional offices translate its normative and analytical work into operational activities in the subregions. These bureaux fulfill their mandate by: (a) providing technical assistance to the regional economic communities and member States on policy harmonization, and provide guidance on meeting their specific needs; (b) facilitating regional integration by serving as focal points for policy dialogue and information sharing between the Commission and stakeholders in the subregions.

The Intergovernmental Committee of Experts meets annually with high-level decision-makers from member States to discuss economic and social performance and make relevant recommendations. It is also the statutory framework reserved for member States to oversee the development and implementation of the Office's work programme and monitor its activities. The ICE provides guidance for the Office's programmes by ensuring that subregional priorities are included as much as possible. It also makes recommendations on economic and social development issues in the subregion. These recommendations may, as appropriate, be considered by the joint ECA-African Union meeting of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

The ICE is hosted every year by a member State of the subregion, which so requests. The twenty-second session of the ICE, West Africa, will be held from 8 to 10 May 2019 in Robertsville, Liberia, at the request of the Government of Liberia. The central theme of the ICE is: "Demographic dynamics for sustainable development of West Africa: challenges and policy actions". This ICE session will be preceded by an ad hoc expert group meeting from 6 to 7 May 2019, on the theme "National capacities and mechanisms in evaluating progress in the implementation of agendas 2030 and 2063:

assessment, challenges and prospects in West Africa".

## **II. Goals and theme of the twenty-second session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts**

The twenty-second ICE will meet to discuss recent developments that may impact the economic and social development of West African countries, with a view to identifying the main challenges, and proposing guidelines for accelerating sustainable development through transformation of the economies of the subregion. To this end, participants will have to consider the statutory reports prepared by the Secretariat. All member States will consider the report on the implementation of the SRO-WA 2018 work programme and prospects for 2019, the regional profile report for West Africa, and the report on progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in West Africa.

A note on "Demographic dynamics for sustainable development in West Africa: challenges and policy actions" will serve as basis for discussion on the main theme of the twenty-second ICE.

## **III. Rationale for the central theme of the twenty-second ICE**

The meeting will be held at a time when the region is undergoing major developments:

- United Nations, African Union, ECA and ECOWAS reforms enter into their decisive phases. These various reforms all aim, without exception, at greater efficiency of service and support for States so that their development actions impact the people directly and more specifically.
- States continue to take steps to enhance development, which remains slow despite a decade of economic growth in countries. Those steps also aimed at aligning national development strategies, as closely as possible, with the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. In 2018, Niger officially launched its Economic and Social Development Plan (PDES), Burkina Faso organized an international conference on the implementation of the National Economic and Social Development Plan (PNDES), and Liberia revised its Agenda for Transformation to develop the Pro-Poor Agenda (2018-2023) for Prosperity and Development. Senegal also adopted a new development plan in January 2019.

These national and regional planning efforts, however, continue to face a major constraint: demographic dynamics. West Africa accounts for 30 per cent of the continent's population and is home to Africa's most populous country, Nigeria. The subregion, which has the highest natural fertility and natural growth rates in the world, is characterized by migration

and emergency population movement, caused, in part, by insecurity.

According to World Bank data (WDI, 2018), over the past three decades, West Africa's population has more than doubled, from 165 million in 1987 to 368 million in 2017. Some 10 million children are born each year, increasing schooling and health care needs.

Relatively commendable progress is being made in the areas of education and health in West Africa.

Since 1990, adult literacy rate has recorded an upward trend, albeit marked by strong intra- and inter-country inequalities. According to World Bank data (WDI, 2018), this rate rose from 13.57 per cent in 1991 to 34.6 per cent in 2014 in Burkina Faso (the worst performing country) and from 62.8 per cent in 1990 to 86.79 per cent in 2015 in Cabo Verde (best performing country). With respect to the young population (15-24 years), this rate has increased, for the same countries and over the same periods, from 20.18 per cent to 50.1 per cent, then from 88.17 per cent to 98.11 per cent.

Very little has changed since the 1990s with regard to health standards, given the recurrence of infectious and neonatal diseases and the performance of West African countries for other health indicators. Data from the World Bank (WDI, 2018) show that the number of physicians per 1,000 people increased from an average of 0.07 in 1990, 0.11 in 2004 to 0.12 in 2010. These standards remain far from those of middle-income countries (1.28 in 2013), North African countries (1.12 in 2013), and to a lesser extent sub-Saharan Africa (0.19 in 2013). The same can be said of healthcare facilities, despite efforts being made to bring them up to standard. According to the World Bank (WDI, 2018), apart from Cabo Verde, where the number of hospital beds per 1,000 inhabitants increased from 1.58 in 1992 to 2.1 in 2010, the other ECOWAS countries have not exceeded the average of one bed since 1990. However, significant progress has been made in reducing child mortality. Child mortality rate in Liberia, for example, dropped from 114 to 54 per 1,000 people between 1986 and 2013. A similar reduction effort has been recorded for most countries, particularly Burkina Faso, where the rate fell from 105.3 in 1998 to 43 in 2015.

Given the magnitude of these challenges, it is imperative for West Africa to promote quality education and health services to unlock the full potential of its young population and better achieve the SDGs. Education systems should be reformed to increase the correlation between access rates and completion rates and better integrate the principles of efficiency, equity and inclusiveness. In addition, the reforms should be geared towards redesigning specializations, with a special focus on vocational and technical courses at the secondary level, followed by higher engineering degrees.

Also, to get out of the vicious circle of hunger and disease and avoid the poverty trap, West African countries must take concrete measures in line with their demographic dynamics. In addition to setting up concerted strategies to facilitate access to basic

healthcare, measures could be taken to support the demographic transition process through fertility control.

Considering that West Africa is largely made up of Sahelian countries, the issue of access to water in the face of strong demographic pressure is a major concern. While the proportion of the population with access to drinking water increased, over the period 2000-2015, more than half of the population still lack this basic amenity. According to the World Bank (WDI, 2018), this proportion has increased from 36.41 per cent to 45.8 per cent in Côte d'Ivoire, from 15.81 per cent to 26.86 per cent in Ghana and from 16.77 per cent to 19.40 per cent in Nigeria. Although relatively better than the average for sub-Saharan Africa (24.16% in 2015), differences with North African and Middle East (76.55% in 2015) countries, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean (65.39% in 2015) remain significant.

The problem of access to food seems to be structurally under control, despite the persistence of cyclical episodes of food crises in some countries. The average prevalence rate of undernourishment is steadily declining in the ECOWAS region (23.36% in 2000, 20.07% in 2005, 16.44% in 2010 and 16.29% in 2015), but remains a concern in some countries. Over the period 2000-2016, Liberia (38.42%), Sierra Leone (31.72%) and Guinea Bissau (24.15%) recorded the highest rates of undernourishment. Nigeria (7.56%), Ghana (8.29%) and Mali (9.15%) performed relatively better. In terms of food deficit, Nigeria, Mali, the Gambia and Côte d'Ivoire are the best performers among ECOWAS member States, with a deficit of 60, 70, 82 and 93 kilocalories per person per day, but these performances remain insufficient compared to regions such as North Africa (53.35% on average).

The issue of decent jobs remains a concern in West Africa. According to ILO data (ILOSTAT, 2018), some 300,000 young people (15-24 years) arrive on the labour market every year on average. Low unemployment rates contrast with the extent of poverty and living conditions of the population. Jobs created are mostly informal and vulnerable. Over the period 1991-2018, the proportion of vulnerable jobs in the sub-region remains above 70 per cent, with disparities from one country to the other (90.84% in Guinea and 47.22% in Senegal). The agricultural sector, which employs the majority of the population, is mainly informal, hindering the creation of decent employment.

High population growth poses a serious problem to development, undermining all efforts and policies that do not take it into account.

In spite of the concerns raised about their implications for the development of West African countries, these dynamics can and should also be seen as a window of opportunity to make the most of the demographic dividend.

#### **IV. Participation**

The twenty-second session of the ICE will be attended by delegates from the 15 West African States, as well as senior representatives and experts from ECOWAS, UEMOA, the Mano River Union and other intergovernmental organizations of the subregion. The African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and the World Bank will also be represented. In addition to ECA, other United Nations agencies will contribute to the success of the meeting, as will other development partners and non-governmental organizations. Development and research institutions dealing with population issues in Africa will also be invited to contribute to the discussions

#### **V. ICE documentation**

The following reports will be presented at the ICE session, for discussion:

- Report on the implementation of the SRO-WA work programme for 2018 and outlook for 2019
- Report on the economic profile of West Africa
- Report on progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in West Africa
- Roundtable introductory note on: “Demographic dynamics for sustainable development in West Africa: challenges and policy actions”

#### **VI. Expected outcomes of the twenty-second ICE**

It is expected that the ICE meeting will enrich and adopt the draft reports to be presented by ECA-WA, and formulate policy recommendations and strategies for decision-makers, for developing national development programmes and accelerating the regional integration process. A detailed report of the meeting will outline the presentations, debates and enhancements to be made to the documents presented, the main conclusions and the recommendations.

#### **VII. Meeting organization and format**

The twenty-second session of the ICE will be held in plenary sessions. There will also be a round table meeting, during which reports prepared by the SRO and papers by eminent experts will be presented and discussed. These reports will be published on the ECA-WA

web site <http://www.uneca.org/sro-wa/>.

## **VII. Working languages**

The working languages of the meeting are French and English.

## **VIII. Date and venue**

The twenty-second session of the ICE will be held from 8 to 10 May 2019 in Robertsville, Liberia. It will be preceded by an ad hoc expert group meeting, also to be held in Robertsville on 6-7 May 2019 on the theme: "National capacities and mechanisms for evaluating progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development agenda and agenda 2063: State of play, challenges and prospects in West Africa".

## **IX. Administrative arrangements**

ECA/SRO-WA and the Government of Liberia will handle all local logistics, including hotel reservations, airport reception, shuttle (transport service) to and from hotels. Further details on other administrative arrangements will be provided in the information note, which will be sent to participants who have confirmed their participation.

## **X. Contacts**

At ECA/SRO-WA

Please send confirmation of participation and requests for further information about the meeting to:

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Scanned copies of all correspondence should be sent to:



## **In Niger**

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