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Assessment of progress on regional integration in Africa**Assessment of progress on regional integration in
Africa****I. Introduction**

1. Regional integration remains a key priority for Africa, aimed at transforming and accelerating the integration of the continent's fragmented small economies so that they can reap the benefits of economies of scale in production and trade. Integration is an important channel for equitable economic growth and development, as outlined in the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (1991) and the Constitutive Act of the African Union (2000).
2. African countries have continued to make notable progress on subregional and continental integration, but challenges persist. These include inadequate financial resources; poor infrastructure networks; a lack of appropriate mechanisms for tracking progress; and limited implementation of policies and agreements. Properly tracking progress in integration is therefore critical to consolidating the hard-won gains in integration and setting a path for future achievements.
3. The signing and launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area, a single continental market for goods and services, is one of the most significant recent achievements of the continent in its journey towards trade and market integration. Signed in 2018, the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area has the support of member States of both the African Union and regional economic communities. The latter remain the pillars and building blocks for establishing the African Economic Community—just as the free trade areas created by the regional economic communities are the building blocks of the African Continental Free Trade Area.
4. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had deleterious socioeconomic effects globally. Although African economies showed great resilience in the face of global volatility, the adverse shocks generated by the health crisis undercut output growth and constituted a threat to efforts to reduce poverty on the continent.¹ Amid the current uncertainty due to the pandemic, it

* E/ECA/COE/40/1.

¹ African Development Bank, *African Economic Outlook 2021: from Debt Resolution to Growth – the Road ahead for Africa* (2021). Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/knowledge/publications/african-economic-outlook>.



is critical for countries to harness the opportunities imbedded in the regional integration agenda – including in strategic initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area – for faster post-COVID-19 economic recovery and transformation.

5. The present report outlines the progress that has been made on important aspects of integration in Africa, which have been evaluated using several monitoring frameworks and tools developed by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank.² Specifically, the report highlights progress at the continental, subregional and national levels on key dimensions of integration, namely trade integration, productive integration, infrastructure and energy, macroeconomic integration, governance, peace and security, social integration and the free movement of people. The report also highlights the efforts made by the continent and regional economic communities to liberalize trade in services, drawing from the 10th edition of the report *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa*, which was recently published jointly by the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

II. Trade integration

6. The contribution of Africa to global trade remains weak. Merchandise trade accounts for the largest share of the continent’s international trade, although trade in services has rapidly increased during recent decades. Intra-African trade contracted by 1.6 per cent in 2019, compared with growth of 18 per cent in 2018. The regional economic communities have continued to trade more with the outside world than among themselves, and, as a result, the growth of intraregional trade in Africa has remained low compared with other regions of the world.

7. The European Union takes a large share of African exports, a trend that is expected to change with the departure of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union. Between 2017 and 2019, the European Union accounted for an average of 63.4 per cent of exports from the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and 40.3 per cent of exports from the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD). All regional economic communities except the East African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) are importing more from the European Union than from within their respective communities. AMU and CEN-SAD have the largest share of imports coming from the European Union – 46.8 per cent and 35.8 per cent, respectively. The countries of EAC and IGAD are importing more from Asia than from within their respective communities. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is the only community which is making progress in increasing imports from its member States. Trade among the member States of SADC was relatively large, accounting for 19 per cent of their exports.

8. Africa continues to deploy efforts to boost intra-African trade, including through the adoption of industrialization policies and strategies at the national and regional levels. The Action Plan for Boosting Intra-African Trade and the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (the latter covering both goods and services) are recent major steps towards that end. The Agreement is expected to eliminate over 90 per cent of tariffs on goods, to progressively liberalize trade in services, and to create a single African market of more than 1 billion consumers with a total gross domestic product (GDP) of

² The findings in the present report are derived in large part from chapter 1 of the 10th edition of *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa*, and to a lesser extent from the Africa Regional Integration Index, the Africa Visa Openness Index, and the AfCFTA Country Business Index.

more than \$3 trillion. More than a traditional free trade area, the African Continental Free Trade Area also covers sectors such as investment, services trade, intellectual property rights and competition policy, and may also cover electronic commerce in the future. Other key continental initiatives, including the Single African Air Transport Market and the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment, will be critical to the successful implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area. ECA has continued to carry out research and analysis, as well as provide technical support geared towards enhancing the prospects of the successful implementation of these initiatives. In particular, ECA has provided support to member States and regional economic communities in the development and implementation of national and subregional strategies to implement the Area.

9. The services sector has substantially contributed to the continent's growth and overall development in the recent years. Yet services trade in Africa performs far below its potential, accounting for only 2 per cent of global services exports. The implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, which has a protocol on trade in services, provides a veritable platform for liberalizing and integrating services in Africa. ECA has continued to support member states of the African Union in negotiations with respect to the Agreement, including on tariff offers. The 10th edition of *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa* deliberately focused on services trade liberalization within the Area. It has also tabled a number of important findings and recommendations, which would go a long way in enhancing the prospects for implementation of the Area, and, more specifically, in improving the continent's services trade performance.

10. All regional economic communities have some form of services trade agreement, although they vary in breadth.³ In 2012, SADC adopted a protocol on trade in services, article 7 of which provides for mutual recognition of the qualifications, licenses, and other regulations issued by member States, while article 6 allows States to regulate their domestic industries, provided that such regulation is administered in a reasonable, objective, transparent and impartial manner. In 2010, EAC adopted a common market protocol that focuses on the free movement of goods, labour, services and capital; it was recently expanded to include all services sectors. ECOWAS has been working towards a subregional services policy since 2016 and has achieved regulatory harmonization in telecommunications and transport. The member States of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) have had further success in services trade liberalization in the subregion.

11. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) have cooperation agreements in some services sectors; however, there is no binding agreement on member States. Still, the right of establishment clauses in the ECCAS treaty on the free movement of persons allow for significant freedom in services trade. Meanwhile, COMESA member States have adopted regulations to liberalize trade in services, but commitment schedules remain under negotiation. Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) has undertaken greater services sector integration, in particular in air transport and telecommunication services. AMU, CEN-SAD and IGAD have made little progress towards initiatives or binding agreements on greater services sector integration in their respective communities. These variations in performance in respect of services sector and services trade integration have implications for the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area. ECA recently published the report *Governing the African Continental Free Trade Area—Regional Economic*

³ Mburu-Ndoria, Emily, "African Continental Free Trade Area: Liberalizing trade in services for trade facilitation" (Geneva, UNCTAD, 2015).

Communities Interface, in which it articulated actionable policy proposals to support a coherent, coordinated and fully responsive interface between the Area and the regional economic communities. It also suggested how to leverage the trade integration successes and lessons learned from the challenges faced in implementing the free trade agreements of the regional economic communities to improve the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area.

12. The performance of Africa as a whole on production integration⁴ remains weak, as seen in the average score of 0.2 (out of 1.0) for African countries in that regard on the Africa Regional Integration Index, with 33 countries scoring below average. The productive integration score reflects a country's involvement in regional supply and value chains. AMU and EAC are the best performing communities in that regard, with scores of 0.45 and 0.43, respectively. Whereas ECOWAS, with a score of 0.2, registered the lowest performance among the communities. At the country-level, South Africa took the lead on the continent, followed by Nigeria and Angola. The Congo, Lesotho, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Niger and South Sudan are the least integrated, with scores below 0.1.

13. Variations in the production integration scores across countries and communities suggest that production is not evenly spread across the continent and countries are not deriving benefits from their comparative advantages. To improve production integration, it is critical to build innovative regional value-chain frameworks in various sectors by using improved technology, higher-quality inputs and updated marketing techniques. Well-functioning logistics are necessary for regional supply chains and for integration into global value chains.

14. As the continent works towards post-COVID-19 economic recovery and transformation, it is necessary to ensure that the latter is underpinned by more inclusive and sustainable types of production and investment that are facilitated by well-coordinated innovation policies, such as those proposed in the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. By increasing regional trade, lowering trade costs and streamlining border procedures, the successful implementation of the Agreement and associated policy reforms would greatly enhance the resilience of African countries and their ability to withstand future economic shocks and maintain long-term growth.

15. In support of efforts to promote productive investment and integration on the continent, ECA recently released the research report *Towards a Common Investment Area in the African Continental Free Trade Area: Levelling the Playing Field for Intra-African Investment*. It presents a number of important policy recommendations that would go a long way in improving and harmonizing the continent's investment landscape, and, by so doing, enhance productivity and competitiveness on the continent and capitalize on the bigger markets space created by the Area. ECA also continued to support member States in the development and deployment of electronic investment guides and in the production of policy briefs on developing regional value chains, including in the pharmaceutical sector within the framework of the pharmaceutical initiative that is anchored in the Area.

⁴ Productive integration is the extent to which a country has productive capacities that complement those of other countries in its region so that it can specialize in the production stages in which it has a comparative advantage, thereby benefitting from economies of scale (African Development Bank, African Union Commission and Economic Commission for Africa *Africa Regional Integration Index (ARII) 2019* (Addis Ababa, 2019). Available at <https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/43768>).

III. Macroeconomic integration

16. Macroeconomic integration and convergence are essential to accelerating intra-regional trade, enhancing regional macroeconomic stability and promoting greater public accountability. The performance on the macroeconomic dimension of the continent's integration varies across regional economic communities. In 2019, ECCAS and EAC were the top performers in that regard. Those communities were followed in order of performance by AMU, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC and COMESA. At present, five of the communities (COMESA, EAC, ECCAS ECOWAS and SADC) have primary macroeconomic convergence criteria, mainly consisting of inflation targets along with ceilings for fiscal deficits, public debt and current account deficits. Some communities also have secondary criteria on promoting greater fiscal accountability and foreign exchange stability. Each community encounters peculiar challenges in achieving its criteria.

17. SADC outlined its macroeconomic convergence goals in its protocol on finance and investment of 2006, which mandates cooperation on economic policy to promote stability in the subregion. Overall SADC made progress in respect of its primary criteria, as more countries improved their performance on inflation, budget deficits and fiscal deficits in 2019 compared with 2018. In 2014 EAC member States adopted a protocol on establishing a monetary union, with the goal of establishing a common currency. EAC States met inflation, budget deficit and public debt ratio criteria in 2018 and 2019.

18. COMESA set up a convergence council, which created a road map towards a monetary union. In 2019, it commissioned a revision of the primary convergence criteria to better coordinate macroeconomic policies across member States. The revised criteria have yet to be finalized. COMESA has nine secondary criteria to promote stability in the subregion, which include targets in respect of its action plan to harmonize bank supervision and in respect of adherence to the core principles of systemically important payment systems.⁵ Both the inflation and budget deficit criteria of COMESA were missed in 2018 and 2019.

19. ECCAS made limited progress towards macroeconomic convergence. CEMAC, which uses the Central African CFA franc, has made progress in achieving macroeconomic convergence. While the primary criteria for CEMAC are largely in line with those of other regional economic communities, modifications have been made to exclude the impact of commodity prices; thus, its secondary criteria include maintaining a primary fiscal balance using non-oil GDP.⁶ ECOWAS adopted primary and secondary convergence criteria that are more closely adhered to by the member States of WAEMU.⁷ ECOWAS has plans to expand WAEMU to cover the larger regional economic community, but convergence issues remain. Only the public debt criterion of ECOWAS was met in 2018.

⁵ COMESA, *Facilitating Multilateral Fiscal Surveillance in Monetary Union Context with Focus on COMESA Region* (Lusaka, 2017).

⁶ International Monetary Fund, "Central African Economic and Monetary Union (CEMAC): Selected issues – IMF country report No. 17/393" (Washington, DC, 2017).

⁷ The member States of WAEMU collectively use the West African CFA franc.

IV. Developments in infrastructure and energy

20. Investment in infrastructure (including road, rail and air transport, water and energy provision, and information and communications technology (ICT)) played a key role in the continent's growth performance over the past decade.⁸ Infrastructure development on the continent is essential to supporting other dimensions of integration at the subregional and continental levels and is critical for the effective implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area. However, the continent is constrained by huge infrastructure gaps that impede its progress on socioeconomic development. The estimated annual financing requirement for adequate infrastructure development on the continent is \$130–170 billion, with an annual financing gap of \$68–108 billion. Deficits in energy and transportation infrastructure in particular constitute major hurdles. The COVID-19 crisis and its impact on the budgetary balance sheets of Governments, along with disruptions in production globally, have delayed infrastructure projects and threaten to further widen the gap.

A. Road infrastructure

21. Road density in Africa excluding North Africa is approximately a third of that in South Asia. Only a quarter of all roads are paved, so travel times are two-to-three times longer than in comparable corridors in Asia.⁹ African leaders continue to support continental initiatives, including the transcontinental projects within the Trans-African Highway programme, which is aimed at promoting trade through highway infrastructure development and the management of road-based trade corridors. The Trans-Africa Highway network comprises nine highways totalling 56,683 kilometres (km) in length. The network is 60 per cent complete, with the remaining 40 per cent consisting of missing links. Recently, the African Development Bank released approximately \$13 million to complete feasibility studies for projects that are in the planning and formulation stages, such as the Abidjan–Lagos road corridor. The World Bank approved a grant of \$130.8 million from the International Development Association in September 2020 to ease the movement of goods and people and improve access to social services and job opportunities in the refugee-hosting districts in the West Nile subregion of Uganda.

B. Rail transport

22. To date, the entire African railway network is estimated at about 75,000 km on a surface of 30.2 million km², translating to a density of about 2.5 km per 1,000 km², far below the world average of 23 km per 1,000 km². At the continental level, the African Integrated High-Speed Railway Network, one of the flagship programmes in the framework of Agenda 2063, was approved for implementation under the medium-term development plan for the Network, covering the period 2025–2045. The programme aims to develop pan-African continental high-speed rail that will connect African capitals and commercial centres, reduce transport costs and relieve congestion in existing infrastructure systems.

⁸ African Development Bank, "Africa Infrastructure Development Index (AIDI), 2020" (Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, July 2020). Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/economic-brief-africa-infrastructure-development-index-aidi-2020-july-2020>.

⁹ Emmanuel Amoah-Darkwah and Ricardo Reborado, "The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on infrastructure development in Africa." *The China Africa Project*, 2 July 2020. Available at <https://chinaafricaproject.com/analysis/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-infrastructure-development-in-africa/>.

C. Air transport

23. Launched in 2019, the Single African Air Transport Market, a flagship project in the framework of Agenda 2063, presents a great opportunity for deeper integration and free movement of goods and people on the continent. The airline industry in Africa employs more than 6.2 million people. Domestic flights represent 28 per cent of the market; regional and international flights account for 17 per cent and 55 per cent, respectively. The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the African air transport sector, and pandemic-related restrictions led to a decline in air connectivity on the continent.

D. Information and communication

24. Access to ICT has improved notably in Africa over the past decade and constitutes an important driver of the African Infrastructure Development Index.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the digital divide persists, and the high prices of ICT services have long prevented the acceleration of the continent's digital transformation. In 2019, nearly 21 per cent of the African population used the Internet, versus 80 per cent in Europe. The cost of data is highest in Southern African countries. Zimbabwe pays the highest price per gigabyte in the world (\$75.20), followed by Equatorial Guinea (\$65.83) and Djibouti (\$37.92). Conversely, Sudan (\$0.68) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (\$0.88) both pay less than \$1 per gigabyte.

E. Energy

25. Access to modern, reliable and sustainable energy is essential for socioeconomic development in Africa and critical in the continent's fight against COVID-19. Electricity consumption on the continent remains low compared with other regions, with an average per capita consumption of about 200 kilowatt-hours per year. While per capita consumption is below 100 kilowatt-hours per year in Benin, Ethiopia and South Sudan, it is over 1,500 kilowatt-hours per year in Botswana, Egypt, Libya, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa. Nearly 600 million people lack access to electricity and around 900 million rely on biomass and traditional fuel for cooking.¹¹ The continent's electricity generation capacity, which is about half that of Southeast Asia, will have to increase substantially to meet growing demand.

26. Amid the current crisis, a reliable electricity supply is critical to support the health sector, businesses, and citizens as lifestyles change owing to remote work and distance education, etc. Companies providing off-grid electricity connections and clean cooking energy are facing major disruptions due to the pandemic. This situation adversely affects access to energy, and, if not addressed, would create barriers to the market entry of private-sector operators and for regional integration, while increasing national vulnerability to macroeconomic shocks.

F. Infrastructure financing

27. In 2018, a total commitment of \$100.8 billion was made for infrastructure development, an increase of 33 per cent over the 2015–17 average, representing a record high for the continent. This mobilization of

¹⁰ African Development Bank, "The Africa Infrastructure Development Index 2018" (July 2018). Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/document/the-africa-infrastructure-development-index-july-2018-103158>.

¹¹ International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook 2019* (November 2019). Available at <https://www.iea.org/reports/world-energy-outlook-2019>.

resources was achieved through public-private partnerships and cooperation at the continental and international levels. Yet a financing gap of \$53–93 billion a year remains. Of the total commitment, West Africa accounted for \$25.7 billion (26 per cent). That subregion is followed by North Africa (20 per cent), South Africa (18 per cent) and East Africa (14 per cent). Nearly \$13.7 billion (14 per cent) was allocated to Southern Africa, excluding South Africa, and Central Africa accounted for \$7 billion (7 per cent). The energy sector received nearly 44 per cent of all funding, while 32 per cent went to transport, 13 per cent went to water, 7 per cent went to ICT, and 4 per cent went to multi-sector investments.¹²

G. Infrastructure for African landlocked countries

28. Africa accounts for half of the world's landlocked developing countries, most of which are low-income countries. Infrastructure deficits in the form of inefficient transit and transport system at the national, regional and continental levels constrain their integration into existing value chains and lead to high costs of exports and imports, with negative consequences for competitiveness, growth and overall welfare. The Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024 seeks to respond more coherently to the specific needs and problems of landlocked developing countries. The pandemic-related measures taken at the onset of the unprecedented health crisis, such as border closures and lockdowns, have disproportionately affected trade and investment in landlocked developing countries. This situation is due to their heavy dependence on cross-border trade.

29. ECA continued to support the African Union, regional economic communities and member States in their efforts to address the multiple and diverse infrastructure challenges they face. ECA continued its support for the implementation of the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa, including by, among other things, serving as the secretariat for the development of projects under the Programme's Priority Action Plan II; working on the digitalization of infrastructure as a pandemic recovery response; carrying out a regulatory review of the electricity market to facilitate effective private-sector investment; and conducting research to determine the implications of the African Continental Free Trade Area for demand for transport infrastructure and services.

V. Social integration

30. The COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened coordination and integration in response to international health crises. Health-care integration is being implemented at the continental, subregional and national levels, as evidenced by the establishment of many subregional cooperative health initiatives that are essential for the continent's recovery and for achieving aspiration 1 and goal 1 of Agenda 2063. The African Union Commission, through the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, provided commendable leadership to support the fight against the pandemic. Key continental COVID-19 initiatives led by the Centres and jointly pursued with various stakeholders and partners, including ECA, included regional coordination and synergy-building; health, governance, political and socioeconomic impact assessments; capacity-building and knowledge-sharing, including in surveillance and boosting testing capabilities; risk communication strategies, awareness-raising campaigns and social engagement; and supply chain management.

¹² Infrastructure Consortium for Africa, *Infrastructure Financing Trends in Africa: 2018* (African Development Bank, Abidjan, 2018). Available at https://www.icafrica.org/fileadmin/documents/IFT_2018/ICA_Infrastructure_Financing_Trends_in_Africa_-_2018_Final_En.pdf.

31. The African Medical Supplies Platform, launched in 2020 by the Chairperson of the African Union and the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, is a key pooled procurement initiative to overcome the continent's acute medicine supply shortages. The Platform is a part of a pharmaceutical initiative led by ECA and anchored in the African Continental Free Trade Area that is built on the principles of pooled procurement, local production of medical equipment and supplies, and harmonized regulatory and quality standards to help buyers gain access to high-quality products, to help suppliers access a larger market, to reduce the cost of medicines for African consumers, and to enhance transparency and efficiency. Although the Platform is in place, the continent continues to face challenges relating to the quality of medicines and medical supplies. It is therefore urgent that the member States of the African Union ratify and operationalize the African Medicines Agency to regulate and harmonize medical products and to reduce the circulation of substandard medicines and so preserve lives. ECA, within the framework of the pharmaceutical initiative, has continued to work with partner institutions, including the African Union Commission, to ensure that more States ratify the Treaty for the Establishment of the African Medicines Agency and to ensure its effective implementation.

32. At the subregional level, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention established five coordination centres that are linked directly to national health systems. The coordination centre in West Africa is embedded in the pre-existing ECOWAS West African Health Organization Regional Centre for Surveillance and Disease Control. The other four centres are not embedded in the African-Union-recognized regional economic communities. The extent of engagement among the regional economic communities, the regional coordination centres and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has varied over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. The centres appear to have played a major role in the pandemic responses of both EAC and SADC. Collaborative action using subregional and continental frameworks and instruments of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the African Medicines Agency and regional economic communities holds promise for greater effectiveness in cross-border efforts to fight pandemics. However, subregional and continental instruments need to be strengthened, properly resourced, and given legitimacy through ratification and localization in order to fulfil their roles.

VI. Governance, peace and security

33. The number and intensity of armed conflicts have fallen in Africa over the past decade, but threats from armed non-State actors persist. New hot spots of poor governance and conflict have emerged in some parts of the continent. Terrorism is beginning to spread in Africa, making it one of the primary threats to governance, peace and security institutions, and also to integration and development. In recent years, mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution have been put in place through the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders, including the United Nations, the African Union and the regional economic communities. In 2019, the African Union adopted as its annual theme "Silencing the guns in Africa by the year 2020". The aim was to facilitate the realization of a conflict-free, integrated and prosperous Africa, as envisioned in Agenda 2063. However, the results of those efforts have been mixed. Many countries and subregions have made progress, while others have seen stagnation or retreat, as seen in a resurgence of unconstitutional changes in Government, which has constrained the regional integration process.

34. The joint efforts of ECCAS, the African Union, the United Nations and other partners have been critical in addressing various governance-related conflicts in Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic and the

Democratic Republic of the Congo. For instance, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the overall peace and security situation has continued to improve after the first peaceful transfer of power since 1960, occurred in January 2019. Cooperation between the African Union and the regional economic communities (i.e. COMESA, EAC and IGAD), alongside the United Nations, the League of Arab States and other stakeholders, remained focused on governance, peace and security developments in the Comoros, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan. Somalia, for example, has made progress towards political reconciliation, security and economic recovery, although it remains fragile and vulnerable to security threats, partly because state authority has not yet reached some parts of the country.

35. In North Africa, the complex and evolving Libyan crisis has been the main governance, peace and security challenge. The multiple actors in the Libyan conflict have diminished the role of AMU, the main regional economic community in the subregion, which should have played a pivotal role in resolving the crisis despite its numerous internal challenges. The conflict has stalled regional integration by weakening AMU and CEN-SAD, forcing the headquarters of the latter to temporarily relocate from Tripoli to N'Djamena.

36. In Southern Africa, most countries enjoy relative peace and security and are considered to be fairly well governed. Peace and security in the subregion received a further boost with the milestone peace agreement between the Government of Mozambique and the opposing Mozambique National Resistance in August 2019, followed by successful and peaceful elections in October 2019. However, terrorism has emerged as a major threat in the north of Mozambique, taking numerous lives, displacing many people and disrupting the oil and gas industry. SADC is formulating a subregional approach to that menace. Similarly, after the outbreak of xenophobic violence in South Africa in 2019, the African Union and SADC worked closely with the Government of South Africa to prevent escalation, examine the root causes, and find a collective subregional and continental approach.

37. In West Africa, the African Union, the United Nations, ECOWAS and other key players continued to contend with politically fluid situations in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Mali, Niger and the broader Sahel, including growing terrorism and drug trafficking. Mali and the greater Sahel presented some of the continent's most pressing security concerns during much of the period 2019–20, despite commendable reconciliation and mediation initiatives. Mali has been plagued by conflict since 2012, which has spilled over into neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger.

VII. Migration and the free movement of people

38. African leaders have recognized the importance of the free movement of people as a key driver of subregional and continental integration. This aspiration is embodied in the adoption in January 2018 of the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment. Despite the shared desire and the actions taken to achieve that goal, progress has been mixed and challenges persist. The Protocol needs 15 ratifications to enter into force and to be implemented. To date, it received only 4 ratifications (by Mali, Rwanda, Niger and Sao Tome and Principe) and 33 signatures.¹³ The effective implementation of the Protocol would foster growth through increased private-sector development, tourism, education and competitiveness, and improve welfare in African countries. The African Union Commission has taken the lead

¹³ Specialized Technical Committee on Migration, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, "Progress report on the free movement of persons in Africa" (African Union Commission, 2019).

in developing guidelines for the design, production and issuance of an African Union passport, which would be accessible to citizens of member States.

39. Africans currently enjoy visa-free entry to only 25 per cent of other African countries; they must secure visas on arrival in 24 per cent; and they must have visas to travel to 51 per cent¹⁴ In 2020, electronic visas were available in 24 countries (46 per cent of African countries). Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, 50 countries maintained or improved their scores on the Visa Openness Index, with 20 of them moving upward in the ranking. AMU, EAC, ECOWAS and SADC are performing particularly well in respect of open reciprocity. Furthermore, based on the 2019 Africa Regional Integration Index, EAC and ECOWAS were the best performers among the regional economic communities in terms of the free movement of people, while COMESA had the weakest performance.

VIII. Conclusion and recommendations

40. The regional economic communities and the member States of the African Union have made commendable progress in implementing their respective integration agendas. However, a number of challenges persist. These include inadequate financial resources, poor infrastructure networks, a lack of appropriate mechanisms to track progress, and limited implementation of integration policies. Collective efforts are therefore required from all regional economic communities, key partners and stakeholders in the integration project, in particular in the area of health integration.

41. The launch of African Continental Free Trade Area, as part of subregional and continental integration frameworks, has the potential to accelerate the recovery of the continent from the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis. By providing access to a vast market, increasing regional trade, lowering trade costs and streamlining border procedures, the Area presents a range of opportunities for African countries, including affording them the prospect of diversifying their exports, accelerating growth, and attracting more productive domestic and foreign direct investment. In the medium and long term, the Area is expected to strengthen the resilience of African countries to withstand future economic shocks and maintain sustainable growth in the post-COVID-19 era.

42. ECA will continue to prioritize providing support to member States, regional economic communities, the African Union Commission, and the secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area with a view to the full implementation of the Area, including through the preparation and implementation of national and subregional strategies, as well as by implementing the findings and recommendations from the following three reports: *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa*; *Towards a Common Investment Area in the African Continental Free Trade Area: Levelling the Playing Field for Intra-African Investment*; and *Governing the African Continental Free Trade Area–Regional Economic Communities Interface*.

¹⁴ African Development Bank and African Union, “Africa visa openness report 2021” (31 December 2021). Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-visa-openness-report-2021>.