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**Statistical programme of the Economic Commission
for Africa: statutory issues****Strengthening the coherence of African trade
statistics: lessons from the African continental input-
output table****Summary**

1. The construction of the African continental input-output table has made it possible to assess the practical application of the trade statistics needed to analyse African production networks. The combined use of national supply and use tables, national accounts data, merchandise trade statistics, national trade in services data, partner-country data and the Balanced Trade in Services dataset, developed jointly by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), has revealed recurrent inconsistencies among datasets that appear coherent when considered separately. The most consequential of these inconsistencies are the failure to distinguish between goods and services in some national submissions, differences between a country's reported trade and the mirror data records of its trading partners, and discrepancies between national releases and data obtained from the United Nations International Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade) or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Data Hub. These findings are drawn from ECA compilation diagnostics and country validation records for the African continental input-output table for the 2020 reference year.

2. The discrepancies frequently reflect differences in statistical boundaries, valuation bases, partner-country rules, trade systems, revision vintages and institutional responsibilities. Customs data capture the physical movement of merchandise, while balance of payments and national accounts data follow residence and change-of-ownership principles. Services statistics are drawn from surveys and administrative sources, while data received at different times are standardized, transformed and disseminated through international repositories. For an intercountry input-output system, however, data from all those sources must be reconciled within a single accounting framework.

3. The continental response proposed in the present document includes a minimum trade data package for input-output work, the explicit separation of goods and services, routine studies of bilateral asymmetries, coordinated revisions, improved statistics on services and informal cross-border trade and transparent quality flags. It also features a phased implementation mechanism led by national authorities, with support from the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank,

* E/ECA/STATCOM/10/2026/1.



the regional economic communities, the secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area and international partners.

I. Introduction

4. Reliable trade statistics are essential to the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and the formulation of policies on industry, services, logistics and value chains. Gross trade totals show the value of goods and services crossing borders but do not reflect where that value is created, which imported inputs contributed to exports or where final demand is located. The African continental input-output table addresses those limitations by linking national production and expenditure data with bilateral trade data across countries and industries.

5. The table currently covers 28 African economies for the 2020 reference year. In producing the table with respect to goods, national supply and use tables are harmonized and converted into national input-output structures, domestic and imported use are separated, imports are allocated by trading partner, and then trade in value added indicators are generated. For services, the Balanced Trade in Services dataset is used to provide complete and balanced bilateral trade data, which are then reconciled with national balance of payments, national accounts and supply and use table totals. Trade data are therefore an integral input for the table, determining the off-diagonal links between production in one country and intermediate use and final demand in another.

6. At its fifty-seventh session,¹ held in March 2026, the Statistical Commission adopted the updated International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions² and the Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services.³ The standards set out in those two documents are particularly relevant to Africa because they place particular emphasis on institutional arrangements, modern data sources, bilateral asymmetries, partner information and the integration of trade statistics with other economic statistics.

7. The purpose of the present document is not to rank national, regional and international data sources or to replace official national figures, but rather to document the types of inconsistencies encountered during the construction of the African continental input-output table, explain their implications for continental analysis and propose practical improvements. Country-specific discrepancies are reported only where a joint validation process has been completed; the focus is on systemic issues and the statistical response required.

8. Bilateral consistency cannot be achieved by selecting a single database. It requires a coordinated reconciliation process in which national totals, detailed customs records, nationally reported services statistics, Balanced Trade in Services values, trading partner data and data from international dissemination systems are compared, discrepancies explained, different versions documented and the data incorporated according to a transparent hierarchy.

¹ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2026, Supplement No. 4* (E/2026/24-E/CN.3/2026/35), decision 57/108 (b).

² United Nations, Statistics Division, *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions 2026*, white cover version, 2 February 2026. Available at: unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/session_57/documents/BG-3h-1-International_Merchandise_Trade_Statistics_Concepts_and_Definitions-IMTS_2026-E.pdf

³ United Nations, Statistics Division, *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2026*, white cover version, 27 February 2026. Available at: unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/session_57/documents/BG-3h-2-MSITS_2026_white_cover_version-Rev-E.pdf.

II. Exposure of discrepancies through the African continental input-output table

9. A national trade release can be internally consistent, while remaining unsuitable for use in a multi-country input-output table. A country's exports may match its own balance of payments total but differ from the corresponding imports reported by its trading partners. Detailed merchandise trade data may match customs declarations but differ from national accounts totals following valuation and conceptual adjustments. Similarly, a combined exports total may be correct but unusable when goods and services are not reported separately.

10. The African continental input-output table requires four dimensions simultaneously: reporter total, allocation by trading partner, allocation by product or industry, and distinction between intermediate and final use. Weakness in any of those dimensions affects the origin-destination blocks. The reconciliation required for the table needs to maintain national accounting identities and to ensure consistency in bilateral and global trade data therefore makes the table a valuable instrument for assessing statistical systems.

11. The various statistical frameworks do not necessarily measure the same economic events. International merchandise trade statistics generally show goods entering or leaving the statistical territory, while balance of payments and national accounts reflect transactions between residents and non-residents. Services statistics are also based on a resident-to-non-resident framework but often lack the trading partner and product detail available from customs data. Bilateral asymmetries and their conceptual and operational causes are explicitly addressed in International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions 2026.⁴

12. Table 1 provides an overview of the principal statistical boundaries that must be reconciled before trade data can be incorporated into the African continental input-output table.

Table 1

Statistical boundaries to be reconciled for the African continental input-output table

<i>Framework or source</i>	<i>Main statistical boundary</i>	<i>Typical detail</i>	<i>Risk if used without reconciliation</i>
National accounts and supply and use tables	Residence and change of ownership; goods and services integrated; imports of goods adjusted to a free-on-board basis.	National totals by product, industry and use; usually little bilateral detail.	Provides a strong macroeconomic anchor, but partner allocation may be absent or inconsistent with detailed trade files.
Customs and merchandise trade statistics	Physical movement of goods across the statistical territory; exports valued free on board and imports valued at cost, insurance and freight.	Detailed data by commodity, trading partner, customs regime, value and quantity.	May differ from national accounts data in valuation, coverage and timing; mirror flows may not match.
Balance of payments and trade in services	Transactions between residents and non-residents; services classified by type.	Reliable global totals for many economies; bilateral and detailed services data often limited.	Services can be omitted, combined with goods or distributed using modelled trading partner shares.

⁴ See chap. 12, "Trade asymmetries".

<i>Framework or source</i>	<i>Main statistical boundary</i>	<i>Typical detail</i>	<i>Risk if used without reconciliation</i>
OECD-WTO Balanced Trade in Services dataset	Residence-based trade in services; complete bilateral matrix constructed from reported data, estimates, adjustments and mirror-flow balancing.	More than 200 reporting economies and trading partners, with data on total services and 26 Extended Balance of Payments Services Classification 2010 categories for 2005–2023.	Balanced values are analytical reconciliations rather than new national observations; the bilateral structure should be reconciled with national control totals and flagged by value status.
UN Comtrade and UNCTAD Data Hub	International dissemination of nationally reported merchandise trade data following standardization and processing.	Comparable reporter-partner-product series, subject to reporting coverage and revision vintage.	Downloaded data differ from the current national release; UNCTAD merchandise matrices draw primarily on UN Comtrade rather than on an independent transaction source.

Source: ECA synthesis based on international trade and national accounts standards, the OECD-WTO Balanced Trade in Services methodology and experience gained in compiling the African continental input-output table.

III. Main trade data issues identified

A. Lack of separation of goods and services

13. A recurrent challenge is the provision of a single total for exports or imports without a separate breakdown for goods and services. This may be seen in national accounts control files, supply and use tables, trade workbooks or validation responses. While such a total may be sufficient for a broad macroeconomic table, it is insufficient to reflect bilateral allocation based on the appropriate statistical sources and classifications.

14. Goods and services require different compilation processes. While merchandise trade data are derived mainly from customs and other administrative records and classified by commodity, trade in services data are generally derived from enterprise and household surveys, international transactions reporting systems, administrative records and estimates, and are classified by type of service. Bilateral services data are drawn heavily from resource-intensive sources, including enterprise surveys, which helps to explain their limited availability in many economies.⁵

15. When goods and services are reported as a single total, allocating that total using the partner and product distribution observed in merchandise trade causes services to be treated as though they follow the same geographical and product pattern as goods. Services may consequently be attributed to the wrong trading partners and merchandise product categories. Conversely, allocating the total based on a broad category of services can dilute the contribution of merchandise trade. Either approach distorts the contribution of services, including transport, travel, financial, telecommunications and business services, and imported services, to manufacturing and exports data.

⁵ For further information, see United Nations, Statistics Division, Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2026, chap. 3, sect. J.

16. The problem is compounded when national supply and use tables include services within broad trade or transport categories, while external trade data provide commodity detail only. Without an explicit link between balance-of-payments and services classifications and the product classification used in the national accounts, the compiler must estimate the breakdown between goods and services. Such estimates may allow the accounts to be balanced but cannot be substitutes for a nationally validated statistical distinction between goods and services.

17. The minimum requirement should therefore be to separate annual totals for goods and services, for both exports and imports, aligned with the reference year and reconciled with the balance of payments and supply and use tables. For services, submissions should at least include a distinction between the main service categories and an indication as to whether bilateral values are nationally reported or drawn from the reported, adjusted and/or imputed or balanced series in the Balanced Trade in Services dataset.

B. Discrepancies between reporter and mirror data

18. For bilateral trade flows, exports reported by country A to country B rarely equal the corresponding imports reported by country B from country A. Such discrepancies were encountered in the construction of the African continental input-output table across combinations of reporting countries, trading partners and products, including for trade within Africa. Mirror discrepancies may be small for some trade flows and substantial for others, particularly where detailed data for one reporter are missing and where trade passes through transit hubs or re-exports are significant.

19. Differences in valuation are one source of bilateral asymmetry. Exports are generally valued free on board, while customs imports are commonly valued at cost, insurance and freight. The value of imports therefore includes international freight and insurance costs between the customs frontiers of the exporting and importing countries. National accounts and balance of payments require imports of goods to be valued on a free-on-board basis. A customs import total therefore cannot be compared directly with either the corresponding exports reported by the trading partner or national accounts imports, without an adjustment from a cost, insurance and freight basis to a free-on-board basis.⁶

20. Partner attribution is another source of bilateral asymmetry. Imports may be recorded by country of origin, while exports may be recorded by country of last known destination. Re-exports, trans-shipments, the use of bonded warehouses and changes in destination after dispatch may therefore result in the same transaction being attributed to different trading partners. For value-chain analysis, country of production, country of consignment and country of final use represent different aspects of trade flow and should not be treated as interchangeable.

21. Other causes of bilateral asymmetry include differences in trade systems, recording thresholds, customs regimes, confidentiality practices, currency conversion methods, timing of recording, classification versions and the treatment of particular transactions, including those involving returned goods, goods for processing or repair, goods acquired by carriers, and electricity. Informal and unrecorded cross-border trade may create an additional

⁶ International Monetary Fund, Valuation of imports and exports of goods in the international standards (CIF to FOB adjustment), Guidance Note G.1. Available at: www.imf.org/-/media/files/data/statistics/bpm6/approved-guidance-notes/g1-valuation-of-imports-and-exports-of-goods-in-the-international-standards-cif-to-fob-adjustment.pdf.

asymmetry when one country makes an adjustment that is not reflected in the trading partner's customs data.

22. Mirror data can therefore be used to identify discrepancies and fill gaps but should not automatically replace reporter data. The reconciliation process involves identifying the cause of a discrepancy and then determining whether the reporter value, partner value, a weighted combination of the two or an adjusted estimate is appropriate. The choice is made separately for totals and trading partner shares and documented in an audit trail.

23. For services, the problem is more acute because bilateral detail is limited and data sources differ across countries and service categories. For the African continental input-output table, the Balanced Trade in Services dataset is therefore used to complete the bilateral services matrix and to reconcile asymmetries between reported exports and imports. The dataset reflects a comparison of combined officially reported data with estimates and adjustments and a balancing of mirror flows. The resulting bilateral totals are reconciled with totals in national balance of payments, national accounts and supply and use tables. Reported, adjusted and/or imputed and balanced values must remain distinguishable so that values resulting from analytical reconciliation are not presented as new national observations.⁷

C. Gaps between national releases and international databases

24. Discrepancies can also arise between figures obtained directly from national institutions and those obtained from international databases for the same country, year and trade flow. Such discrepancies can undermine confidence in the data when users expect all official sources to report identical figures.

25. Apparent discrepancies among sources should be interpreted carefully. UN Comtrade is a global dissemination platform for detailed merchandise trade data reported by national authorities and standardized by the Statistics Division. The UNCTAD Data Hub is a platform that features a merchandise trade matrix with bilateral trade data drawn principally from UN Comtrade. The two sources are therefore not wholly independent and differences between them may reflect discrepancies in processing and dissemination methods rather than differences in the underlying nationally reported data.⁸

26. A discrepancy between national and international data may arise for a number of reasons: the national institution has revised its series since the previous submission to the international database; the international database has applied standard processing relating to countries, trading partners, commodities or currencies; different trade systems or valuation methods have been used; confidential values have been aggregated; and extraction dates or classification versions differ. International databases may also include estimates or analytical adjustments that are not part of the national release.

27. The African continental input-output table requires a clearly identified and reproducible data vintage. For each data extract, the source institution, dataset, access date, release or revision date, reference year, trade system, valuation method, currency, unit, classification version and treatment of estimates should therefore be recorded. A hierarchy of sources should be set out to specify which national aggregates are used as control totals and which

⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and World Trade Organization, *The OECD-WTO Balanced Trade in Services Database (BaTIS)* (2025). Available at: www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/daily_update_e/oecd-wto_batis_methodology_bpm6.pdf.

⁸ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, "Merchandise trade matrix, annual (analytical)", Data Hub. Available at: unctadstat.unctad.org/datacentre/reportInfo/US.TradeMatrix (accessed on 7 August 2026).

detailed international data are used to determine trading partner or product shares. For services, the hierarchy should be established to specify the edition of the Balanced Trade in Services dataset, service category, value status and any adjustment made when the bilateral totals are reconciled with national totals. Where national and international values differ, both values, the absolute and percentage differences, any explanation provided by the country and the value ultimately used in the African continental input-output table should be documented in the reconciliation process.

D. Insufficient detail, classification mappings and metadata

28. For the African continental input-output table, merchandise trade data should be recorded at a sufficiently disaggregated level of the Harmonized System and services data should be sufficiently detailed that they can be mapped, using the Extended Balance of Payments Services Classification, against the product and industry classification used in the table. Some source files provide only aggregate data, incomplete trading partner coverage or national classifications for which no correspondence with the classifications used in the table is documented. For one or more mappings, assumptions may need to be made for the allocation of trade values among categories, which can materially affect results by industry.

29. The distinction among zero, missing, confidential and not applicable values is also essential. When a missing value for a trading partner and product is treated as a true zero, the residual trade value is allocated to other trading partners. When a confidential value is omitted, published totals and detailed data no longer match. Metadata should therefore include status flags and indicate the level of aggregation at which suppressed information is included.

30. Differences in revision practices can create further discrepancies. The release schedules and revision cycles for customs, balance of payments, national accounts and supply and use table data may differ, since a table for 2020, for example, could contain data obtained from a revised national accounts series, a provisional services series or an earlier merchandise trade submission. Without a common register of data vintages, it may be difficult to reproduce the results later.

31. Exchange-rate conversion and differences in units of measurement can cause avoidable compilation errors. Thousands or millions of source files may express values in local currency and in units, without providing machine-readable metadata; calendar and fiscal years may differ; and negative entries may represent returns, corrections or accounting adjustments. Those characteristics should therefore be verified using automated checks rather than being treated merely as descriptive information.

E. Coverage of informal and other forms of trade requiring special treatment

32. At many African borders, customs declarations do not capture all small-scale or informal cross-border trade. National institutions may estimate those flows through border surveys, but international merchandise trade databases generally reflect only official data submitted by national authorities. While such estimates may improve the coverage of national totals, they may not be disaggregated by trading partner and product.

33. Trade flows involving special economic zones, bonded warehouses, free zones, electricity, pipelines, digital products, merchanting and goods for processing all require specific statistical treatment, as they could be captured under merchandise trade, services, balance of payments or national accounts data. The concepts, definitions and recommendations set out in International

Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions 2026 and the Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2026 provide a basis for national implementation, but for the purposes of the African continental input-output table, country metadata are needed to indicate how these flows are treated in national statistics.

34. Improved measurement of those flows is important because the underestimation or misallocation of intra-African trade can affect assessments of regional market integration, corridor performance, food and energy dependence, the participation of small enterprises in the economy and the distributional effects of trade under the terms of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area.

IV. Impact of trade data limitations on compilation and policy analysis

35. The trade data gaps identified above can make it difficult to maintain national totals while ensuring bilateral consistency. In compiling the African continental input-output table, each country's total imports and exports are reconciled with totals in national accounts and supply and use tables. Trading partner shares are then used to allocate those totals across origin–destination blocks. If bilateral data are incomplete or asymmetric, the national totals can remain consistent while their geographic distribution remains uncertain.

36. Limitations in trade data can also distort estimated linkages among industries. A misclassified service import can affect the estimated foreign content of a manufactured product, while an error in trading partner attribution can affect the country to which the imported value is attributed. Similar errors can affect estimates of domestic value added embodied in trading partner exports, participation in regional value chains and exposure to external final demand.

37. A further consequence of such limitations is an unstable rest-of-the-world residual. After trade with identified African and non-African trading partners has been allocated, any unassigned trade is allocated to the rest-of-the-world block. Incomplete trading partner coverage can therefore result in a large residual that reflects data limitations rather than actual trade with the rest of the world. Changes in data vintage may also shift trade flows between identified trading partners and the residual even when national totals remain unchanged.

38. Differences in the availability and quality of trade data can reduce comparability across countries and lead to the misinterpretation of policy-relevant trends. Economies with detailed, current and reconciled trade data have better-supported bilateral estimates than those for which aggregate data and international estimates must be used. Publishing results without quality flags can therefore give a false impression of equal precision between the results. An apparent increase in intra-African sourcing may, for example, reflect a revised allocation among trading partners rather than an actual change in production networks. Conversely, the use of mirror data can reveal unreported trade but may also attribute re-exports to the wrong producing economy. Analytical releases should therefore be issued to ensure that changes in underlying economic activities are distinguished from those resulting from statistical revisions.

39. These trade data limitations do not invalidate the African continental input-output table. The compilation of multi-country input-output tables requires the reconciliation of national accounts and bilateral trade data. The need to align national accounts and trade data, including the treatment of imports and exports, valuation and bilateral trade, within a coherent framework is recognized in the Handbook on Supply and Use Tables and Input-Output

Tables with Extensions and Applications,⁹ issued by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations. The African continental input-output table can also help to identify areas in which improvements in trade statistics would strengthen the evidence available for analysis at the continental level.

V. Current compilation approach and its limitations

40. A clear hierarchy of data sources is used in compiling the African continental input-output table. Balanced national supply and use tables, national accounts and balance of payments data determine national import and export totals. Merchandise trade and Balanced Trade in Services data are then used to determine trading partner shares and product or service patterns, without changing those national totals. That approach preserves national ownership of the accounting data by retaining nationally compiled import and export totals while facilitating the construction of complete bilateral blocks.

41. Goods and services are processed through separate classification and mapping procedures before being merged. Merchandise data are mapped from commodity classifications to the African continental input-output table classification, while services data are mapped using the Extended Balance of Payments Services Classification. The Balanced Trade in Services dataset provides the bilateral partner distribution for services. For each service category, the distribution is reconciled with the corresponding national control total. Any residual allocation or adjustment, together with the status of the underlying Balanced Trade in Services value are recorded for diagnostic purposes.

42. Trading partner totals in import-use tables are added up and mapped against import-use matrix totals. The values for identified partners are allocated first, with the remaining amount being assigned to the rest-of-the-world block. The resulting continental system is then balanced and checked against national data on output, value added, taxes and trade for consistency.

43. That approach resolves the accounting problem but does not eliminate all discrepancies among data sources. Proportional scaling can make totals consistent while retaining an incorrect distribution among trading partners. The Balanced Trade in Services dataset greatly improves data completeness and bilateral consistency, but its estimated and balanced values cannot be substitutes for nationally compiled trading partner statistics, nor can they explain the causes of every asymmetry. Similarly, assigning unallocated trade to the rest-of-the-world residual can balance the global matrix while masking incomplete bilateral reporting.

44. One of the aims of the African continental input-output table is therefore to ensure that data quality information is disseminated alongside the indicators. Accordingly, at a minimum, the data for each country and reference year should include quality flags showing the age of the benchmark supply and use table, the separation of goods and services, the coverage of bilateral services data, the edition and value status of the Balanced Trade in Services dataset used, the size of the adjustment between the Balanced Trade in Services value and the corresponding national total, the use of merchandise mirror data, the size of the rest-of-the-world residual, mapping quality, valuation adjustments and the magnitude of the reconciliation between national and international data sources.

⁹ Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 74, Rev.1 (United Nations publication, 2018).

VI. Priority actions for strengthening African trade statistics

45. To address the trade data gaps and compilation challenges identified above, priority should be given to the following actions:

(a) Members of ECA should establish a minimum trade data and metadata package for use in compiling continental input-output tables. The package should include separate totals for goods and services; detailed merchandise trade data by reporter, by trading partner and by commodity; services trade data by major category and, where possible, trading partner; information needed to compare national services data with Balanced Trade in Services data; metadata on valuation and trade systems; information needed for reconciliation with national accounts; revision status; and correspondence tables linking trade classifications to the product and industry classifications used in national accounts;

(b) National statistics offices, customs administrations and central banks should maintain a joint annual reconciliation table depicting merchandise trade data from customs, balance of payments data on goods and services, national accounts data on imports and exports, supply and use table data and the values transmitted to international organizations. For each reconciliation item, the responsible institution, method, revision date and dissemination status should be recorded;

(c) Bilateral trade asymmetry studies should be conducted regularly at the regional level. Priority trade corridors and trading partners could be selected based on trade value, importance of the products traded and size or persistence of discrepancies in mirror data. The reconciliation process should entail an examination of the differences in valuation, origin, consignment, destination, re-exports, timing and classifications, as well as the treatment of confidential items and informal trade adjustments, before any mechanical balancing;

(d) A sustained regional programme should be established to improve statistics on bilateral trade in services. Countries should expand enterprise surveys and the use of administrative data, improve trading partner coding and link services trade statistics to business registers. Balanced Trade in Services data should continue to be used as an operational source for the African continental input-output table and as a benchmark for assessing gaps in national data. Countries should compare their national data with Balanced Trade in Services data and validate material differences, while keeping reported, adjusted and/or imputed and balanced values separately identifiable;

(e) For national programmes, informal cross-border trade and special trade regimes should be incorporated into official reconciliation processes. Where statistically feasible, survey estimates should be disaggregated by trading partner, product, border crossing, cross-border transaction frequency and trader characteristics. The methods used to produce those estimates and information on their uncertainty should be published, and any adjustments incorporated into national totals should be reflected consistently in data reported at the continental and international levels;

(f) International dissemination should facilitate the tracking of different versions of national data. National authorities should receive automated reports comparing the latest national release values with the corresponding values in UN Comtrade and the UNCTAD Data Hub. Any corrected or revised national series should be resubmitted with appropriate documentation and should be traceable in the next update of the African continental input-output table;

(g) Balancing should be transparent and reproducible. In its work on balanced merchandise trade, OECD uses a modular approach to identifying and reconciling asymmetries in detailed trade data. For any balancing model applied to Africa, it should be possible to preserve national totals, disclose adjustment factors, distinguish observations from estimates and allow national institutions to validate unusual trade flows;¹⁰

(h) Trade data quality should be assessed across multiple dimensions rather than on a pass-fail basis. Those dimensions should include completeness, timeliness, internal coherence, mirror asymmetry, the proportion of trade in services for which the trading partner is identified, the shares of bilateral services values that are reported, adjusted and/or imputed or balanced in the Balanced Trade in Services dataset, alignment of revisions, classification quality, consistency of valuation, coverage of informal trade and reproducibility. The resulting quality profile should accompany country results and should be used to inform capacity development.

VII. Proposed implementation pathway and responsibilities

46. The priority actions set out above should be implemented in phases so that early improvements in data reconciliation support, rather than delay, the expansion of the African continental input-output table. Table 2 sets out a proposed three-phase implementation pathway. Countries should adapt the sequence to their statistical maturity, but each phase should produce a verifiable dataset or institutional arrangement rather than only training activities.

Table 2

Proposed implementation pathway

<i>Phase</i>	<i>National action</i>	<i>Continental support and output</i>
1. Establish	Designate institutions responsible for each data source; separate goods and services data; establish the revision register and reconciliation table; document national data sources and the edition of the Balanced Trade in Services dataset used.	Common data template, metadata standard, diagnostic dashboard and baseline data quality profile for participating countries
2. Reconcile and test	Conduct mirror data studies for priority trade corridors; compare national services data with Balanced Trade in Services data; validate material adjustments; incorporate informal trade adjustments and unusual trade flows.	Regional peer reviews, Balanced Trade in Services reconciliation diagnostics, technical assistance, documented country cases and tested balancing rules.
3. Integrate	Integrate annual reconciliation into work programmes and release calendars; transmit revisions; maintain auditable country files for each update of the African continental input-output table.	Annual continental trade-data quality report, routine provision of data for the African continental input-output table and reporting on progress to the Statistical Commission for Africa.

Source: ECA synthesis based on the compilation and validation cycle of the African continental input-output table.

47. At the national level, the national statistics office should continue to perform its lead coordination and stewardship role, with the customs

¹⁰ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *The OECD Balanced International Merchandise Trade Dataset (BIMTS)* (2025). Available at: www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-oecd-balanced-international-merchandise-trade-dataset-bimts_07518168-en.html.

administration and central bank as its permanent technical partners. That institutional arrangement should be aligned with the national strategy for the development of statistics, annual work programmes and official release calendars. It should also include a controlled process for sharing confidential data and resolving discrepancies before publication.

48. At the continental level, ECA should maintain a common data template, diagnostic rules, version register and technical processes for the African continental input-output table, including a reproducible process for incorporating each edition of the Balanced Trade in Services dataset. The African Union Commission, the African Development Bank, the regional economic communities and the secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area should coordinate policy requirements, regional trade programmes and capacity development activities. The Statistics Division, UNCTAD, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), OECD, WTO and other partners can provide support on statistical standards, international comparisons and reconciliation methods.

49. Progress should be assessed at each update of the African continental input-output table using the following indicators: proportion of country files in which goods and services are separately identified and validated; completeness of trading partner and product data; reductions in unexplained discrepancies in mirror data; alignment between national and international data vintages; coverage of nationally reported bilateral services data; proportions of bilateral services values that are reported, adjusted and/or imputed or balanced in the Balanced Trade in Services dataset; magnitude of adjustments between Balanced Trade in Services values and the corresponding national totals; documented adjustments for informal trade; and proportion of reconciliation decisions validated by national institutions.

50. The proposed implementation arrangements support the application of the trade statistics standards set out in International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions and Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services, both adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2026, while strengthening coordination among compilers of merchandise trade, services trade, balance of payments and national accounts statistics. The arrangements also enable successive updates of the African continental input-output table to contribute to continuous improvements in trade statistics.

VIII. Issues for consideration and decision by the Statistical Commission for Africa

51. The Statistical Commission for Africa is invited:

(a) To take note of the trade data coherence issues identified in the compilation of the African continental input-output table, in particular the lack of separate data on goods and services, bilateral asymmetries between reporting countries and their trading partners and differences between national releases and international databases;

(b) To affirm that national statistical offices should coordinate the reconciliation of merchandise trade data from customs, trade in services statistics, balance of payments data, national accounts data and supply and use table data, with clearly defined institutional responsibilities and revision procedures;

(c) To endorse the development of a minimum trade data and metadata package for future updates of the African continental input-output table, including documentation of the edition of the Balanced Trade in Services dataset used and quality flags distinguishing reported, adjusted and/or imputed and balanced values;

(d) To invite members of ECA and regional economic communities to conduct bilateral trade asymmetry studies on a regular basis, initially focusing on priority intra-African trade corridors and on strategic products and service categories;

(e) To encourage members of ECA to strengthen statistics on bilateral trade in services, compare national data with Balanced Trade in Services data and validate material differences, improve the measurement of informal cross-border trade and trading partner attribution and enhance the treatment of special trade regimes;

(f) To request ECA, in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank, the regional economic communities and the secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area, to develop a continental programme for implementing the proposed pathway and a common diagnostic framework;

(g) To invite the Statistics Division, UNCTAD, IMF, OECD, WTO and development partners to align their support for capacity development, the application of international standards and data reconciliation with country-led efforts, including the review by national authorities of Balanced Trade in Services estimates and balanced values; and

(h) To request ECA to report to the next session of the Statistical Commission for Africa on progress in improving the coherence, comparability and reproducibility of the trade data used in the African continental input-output table.
